### **5** Humanitarian-Military Collaboration: Social and Cultural Aspects of Interoperability

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Abstract: This chapter explores how cultural factors affect the ability of military and humanitarian actors to work together to achieve common goals and how cultural factors affect work with local populations. It elaborates the distinction between horizontal interoperability and vertical interoperability, the former focused on the organizational cultural factors affecting humanitarian and military groups, the latter focusing on their relations with local communities. It goes on to explore the usefulness of cultural model analysis for understanding both horizontal and vertical interoperability and discusses the ways in which power affects these relationships. The chapter argues that cultural awareness must be based on understandings of culture that are generative rather than trait-based and static.

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57

#### 58 Robert A. Rubinstein

This chapter draws on more than 30 years of anthropological and ethnographic research on multilateral peacekeeping and international interventions in conflict and "post-conflict" settings to draw some lessons about the way culture affects cooperation and collaboration between military and humanitarian organizations. This research began in the mid-1980s, with support from the Ploughshares Fund, for anthropological fieldwork with United Nations Peacekeeping missions, which was concerned with understanding better how culture affected the interaction of peacekeepers, who came to their missions with diverse national and service branch backgrounds. That work also examined how culture affected the ways these military personnel worked with civilian staff within those missions, and how culture affects the interaction of these actors with local populations.' Later, with support from the United States Institute of Peace, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, this work was extended to incorporate multi-sited ethnographic research with military and humanitarian personnel who had participated in a variety of missions and for which I could not do extended local fieldwork. This included both ethnographic interviewing and short-term site visits to several of those missions which also allowed data collection from local populations about how they understood and related to the intervention missions.

Historically, international interventions, especially multilateral interventions conducted under the auspices of the United Nations, passed through several distinct phases during the time that these studies were carried out. From 1948 – when they began – to the early 1990s, peacekeeping interventions in conflicts mainly served the purpose of providing face saving methods for the de-escalation of violence between warring states.<sup>2</sup> I refer to this as "traditional peacekeeping." In the early 1990s and for the next decades, peacekeeping focused heavily on intervening in conflicts taking place among parties within states, rather than those between states. This form of intervention can be referred to as "wider peacekeeping." Currently, there are missions of both kinds, and missions that move between the different kinds of tasks that these missions require. The long-term research, from which lessons about military-humanitarian cooperation and collaboration are drawn in this chapter, comes from research with all of these kinds of missions.<sup>4</sup>

The initial focus of that research was with traditional peacekeeping, as conducted by the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and the Observer Groups it ran in various sites throughout the Middle East. The original ethnography was done with UNTSO's Observer Group Egypt,<sup>5</sup> with comparative materials collected from the other UNTSO observer groups and from the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan. Materials on wider peacekeeping missions were collected principally for the United Nations missions in Somalia (UNOSOM I and UNOSOM II), the United Nations-sanctioned, US-led mission (UNITAF), in East Timor (UNTAET), United Nations mission in the former Yugoslavia, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNPROFOR, UNMIBH), with less systematic data collected on other interventions.

This research is not just of theoretical or academic interest. I have worked to translate the theoretical findings of this research into policies and procedures that can be acted upon and improved. It has involved work with a number of agencies and organizations to develop practical approaches to using cultural understanding to improve peacekeeping missions. These agencies have included the UN department of peacekeeping operations, the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, and the US Army Peacekeeping Institute, among others. The results of this research have also been integrated into pre-deployment trainings at Fort Drum for troops being deployed to the Balkans and to Afghanistan and Iraq.

# Culture and collaboration: horizontal and vertical interoperability

When considering the ways that culture factors into attempts at collaboration among military and humanitarian organizations, and implications for future humanitarian actions, two questions are usually raised. The first: "How can understanding culture be used to improve the way various component organizations collaborate in an Area of Operation?" is asked in an effort enhance the ability of the agencies, organizations, and people who are part of a mission to work together in an efficient and effective manner. The question asks about what is needed for these actors to work together across their different structural locations in a mission. This raises a concern for what I call Horizontal Interoperability.

The second question is: "How can understanding the culture of the people who are receiving humanitarian aid improve the delivery of that aid?" People asking this question are interested in enhancing the way

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that the organizations, agencies and people – both military and civilian – work with local populations. I call this Vertical Interoperability.<sup>6</sup>

The missions in Somalia took place in the context of what the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee defined as a complex humanitarian emergency. A complex emergency is,

a humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing United Nations country program.<sup>7</sup>

In this and other missions, military and humanitarian organizations sought to work together to reinforce the value of their efforts. To do this they formed civil-military coordinating centers, which met regularly to create a working environment in which there collaboration could lead to successful action. This structural development has also been used in the context of other complex emergencies intended to improve the way these organizations work in concert – to improve horizontal interoperability.<sup>8</sup>

At one point during the missions in Somalia, both military and humanitarian organizations became concerned about a deteriorating security situation. They discussed this in their coordination center and agreed to act to improve their security situations. The result was that the military units *increased* the distance and barriers between themselves and the local population, while some of the humanitarian organizations *decreased* the distance between themselves and the local population. These actions resulted in part from their having very different organizational cultures, which defined security in opposing manners, and amounted to a breakdown in Horizontal Interoperability.

Vertical interoperability is the way in which mission elements work with the local population. In humanitarian emergencies mission elements seek to meet the needs of the local populations. It is not always possible for mission members to achieve this interoperability, again in part for reasons of cultural difference. Providing security to local populations is high on the list of things that missions must accomplish. Yet, what security means to mission planners can be very different from what it means to local populations. The former may focus on creating institutional structures in which force and the administration of justice can be vested. In contrast, local populations may view increased security as creating spaces free of gender-based domestic violence or where children can be educated.<sup>9</sup>

Both Horizontal and Vertical Interoperability are important for a mission to succeed. In fact, my research shows that not only is each type of interoperability important, but that they affect one another as well.

Speaking from an anthropological perspective, which treats culture as a meaning system through which people interact with the world, culture has at least three important characteristics that help people adapt to their life circumstances and promotes their survival.<sup>10</sup> It structures the ways people think about and categorize what is real and important in the world, how they should act toward people and things in the world, and their affective response to the physical and social worlds in which they live. That is, culture has "representational, directive, and affective functions, capable of creating cultural entities and particular senses of reality."<sup>n</sup> All actions are grounded in culture. Cultures are dynamic and distributed, in that not everyone in a society shares exactly the same cultural knowledge or information.

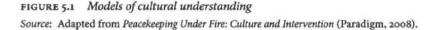
As our understanding of culture has developed, anthropologists and others have created models for looking at and learning about cultures. Such models are simplified accounts of the real world that emphasize particular aspects of the world essential for the accomplishment of some purpose.<sup>12</sup> As anthropological models of culture have been developed, they reflect increasing levels of complexity and deeper understanding. Different models thus would provide different kinds of advice. I identify five increasingly complex models for analyzing culture.<sup>13</sup>

The five models of culture, the characteristics of which are found in Figure 5.1, are: 1) Travelers advice; 2) stereotyping; 3) cultural styles analysis; 4) cultural models; and 5) deep culture. Importantly, the affective dimensions of culture only become part of more complex models.

The question often arises of what kind of analysis is useful for military action, for military cooperation with humanitarian agencies, and for effectively working with local populations. This question is often asked in a context that supposes that relatively limited time (and resources) can be devoted to such training.

Given the constraints on training time and resources, the usual response is that not every participant needs to develop the most sophisticated understanding of culture. Rather, the advice is that people should receive training appropriate to their roles in the mission. That is, they need to receive *just enough* cultural training.

	Increasingly Complex Models of Cultural Understanding
1. Tra	avelers Advice
Cu	lture as artifact
Cu	lture is stable and unchanging
Cu	lture is completely shared
2. Ste	reotyping
Cu	lture as patterns and values
Cu	lture is stable and unchanging
Cu	llture is completely shared
<u>3. Cu</u>	ltural Styles Analysis
Cu	lture as process and pattern
	ilture is stable
Cu	ilture may be heterogeneously shared
4. Cu	ltural Models
Cu	Ilture as meaning producing
Cu	ilture is dynamic
	lture may be heterogeneously shared
<u>5. De</u>	ep Culture
Cu	llture shaping meaning and emotions
Cu	lture is contingent and dynamic
Cu	llture may be heterogeneously shared
	llture shared through practice and experience

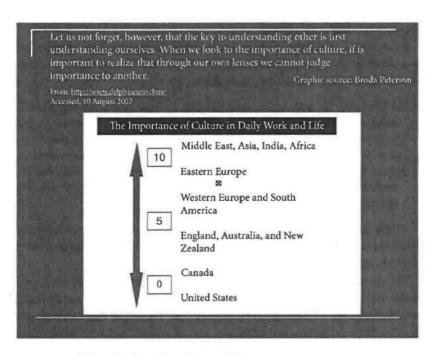


In that view, training in models like those I describe as Travelers Advice would be seen as appropriate for enlisted personnel or "low-level" operatives. Such models are aimed at helping people avoid awkward situations when they encounter a new culture. They give basic information about things like etiquette, counting, signage, and interpersonal relations. At the same time, a more sophisticated understanding of the culture of the community to which aid is being given, and of the different organizational cultures of institutions involved in the mission, would be seen as appropriate for training higher-level managers and officers. The most popular form of this training is to familiarize people with the Cultural Styles model of analysis.

In my research, I have found that this advice is problematic, both for preparing military personnel for collaboration with humanitarian organizations, and for preparing them for their encounters with local communities, for at least three reasons.

The first is that it can lead people to think that it is only Other People who have culture. And this can lead to dangerous notions, like that expressed in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 is taken from the website of a consulting group that was advertising its expertise and services for cultural training for the US military. You will note that it shows that culture is totally unimportant in the United Sates for work and daily life. In contrast, in the Middle East, Asia, India and Africa, culture is all. This is obviously a silly idea. It is also a misrepresentation, and misunderstanding of the model of culture in the source being cited. Rather than illustrating something about how some peoples have culture and others do not, the point being made by Peterson was that some cultures are more different from our own than are others.<sup>14</sup> The idea that some peoples' actions are based in culture while others (usually those of one's own group) are not has long



#### FIGURE 5.2 "Expertise" masking ethnocentrism

Source: Delphi Research US, www.delphiresearchus, accessed 10 August 2007.

been recognized as ideological and ethnocentric.<sup>15</sup> Yet, it was proudly displayed on the website of a provider of cultural expertise to the US military.

Secondly, the "just enough" approach to cultural training undercuts military and humanitarian organizations' efforts at cooperation. In my fieldwork I have seen how the "just enough" approach leaves practitioners unaware of (or simply mystified by) the different cognitive and affective understandings of critical concepts like partnership, security and coordination that the other communities hold, as the earlier discussion of security in Somalia illustrates.

The Somalia example is just a particular case of a general difference in the affective and motivational aspects of the organizational cultures upon which humanitarian action and military action is grounded.<sup>16</sup> Humanitarian action is based on core principles of neutrality and impartiality of action, and is premised on the needs, desires and interests of local populations. This flows from what Michael Apter describes as a motivational state of Sympathy, which leads to the expression of care and concern for others, and the experience of people *qua* people.

In contrast military engagements with humanitarian actions are grounded in the trope of the need to "Win Hearts and Minds." Army Field Manual 3-24 describes this task thusly:

A-26. Once the unit settles into the AO, its next task is to build trusted networks. This is the true meaning of the phrase "hearts and minds," which comprises two separate components. 'Hearts' means persuading people that *their best interests* are served by COIN success. 'Minds' means convincing them that the force can protect them and that *resisting it is pointless*. Note that neither concerns whether people like Soldiers and Marines. *Calculated self-interest, not emotion,* is what counts.'<sup>7</sup>

Winning hearts and minds is clearly based on the motivational state that Apter identifies as Mastery, which is oriented toward competitive control and the objectification of people.<sup>18</sup>

The third way that the "just enough" training approach to culture is problematic is more serious. Where cultural questions are concerned, I have found that the distinctions among the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of action are anything but clear cut. In identifying where and when they may be willing to collaborate with military organizations, humanitarians may express a willingness to collaborate at the Strategic

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Level (where the general direction, objectives, and broad guidance for a mission are worked out), be less willing to collaborate at the Operational Level (where the conditions and actions that may be taken to achieve strategic objectives are determined), and positively eschew collaboration at the Tactical Level – where implementing the strategic and operational goals take place.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, actions at the tactical level very quickly affect strategic perceptions, and vice versa. I call this the strategic scaffold, in which information and actions move in both directions among the levels. From a cultural perspective, this means that it is important that strategic and tactical levels be consistent.

Humanitarian action is premised on the delivery of aid to those in need in an impartial and neutral manner. Humanitarian action meets the needs, desires, and interests of the local population. Questions of culture and the military are raised most often in the context of the idea that knowing culture can help us "Win Hearts and Minds." Often interest in culture is in the context of counterinsurgency operations. Winning hearts and minds is an appealing sentiment. And, it makes a convenient slogan. We try to do this by offering various types of shorter term assistance.

There are two difficulties with this. Looking critically at the doctrinal conception of "Winning Hearts and Minds," one sees that the idea underlying it is a kind of economic rationality which discounts emotion. Yet, from a cultural perspective the affective domains of life are critical. People are not automatons who make judgments solely based on rational calculation.

Second, doctrinally, wining hearts and minds is not actually oriented to the humanitarian needs of the community being helped. Many of the activities of winning hearts and minds campaigns look like humanitarian action. However, when the strategic intention of those campaigns is to facilitate bringing the community into the strategic orbit of the United States, we have a recipe for trouble. When indigenous ideas of what is best for their community contrast with the interveners' intentions, people come to recognize this, and to resent and resist that intervention. In that case, what is actually happening is the recreation of the practice of imperial policing. In that event, the offered aid is seen as a lever to instrumentally achieve our own goals. The provision of this aid undercuts the humanitarian agenda. Aid is accepted pragmatically; but hearts and minds are not won. Culture is an important category for planning in the relationships among military and humanitarian agents and the people they serve. But, that planning must treat culture in a broad and complex way.

## Beyond culture in military-humanitarian interoperability

The concept of interoperability derives from the priority of standardization in technology so that components of a system can work seamlessly together to accomplish a task. For instance, the development of a standard for the kinds of plugs that computer components use and can accept created the possibility for "plug and play" technology, in which components from different brands can work interchangeably.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, because mobile phone manufacturers use their own proprietary designs for the plugs that are used to charge the devices, there is no interoperability of chargers between brands.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly standardization of equipment and procedures contributes to the interoperability of coalition forces. Standardized technological requirements, such as which frequencies to use for what purposes, enable units from different countries to interoperate on a single communications network, and make it possible for diverse elements of a coalition to work together to achieve a common goal. Moreover, policy and doctrine writers recognize the need for harmonizing understandings across the strategic, operational and tactical levels of a coalition's operations. Citing the lack of common understanding among elements of the operations in Somalia, Hura et al. (2002) have this to say,

A good example is Somalia, in which a lack of unity of purpose compromised unity of effort and command and led to a chain of command that proved incapable of preventing or mitigating the consequences of downed helicopters. By contrast, had there been consensus at the higher (e.g., strategic and operational) levels, these lower-level interoperability problems would have been less likely and more manageable.<sup>22</sup>

Achieving interoperability among military and humanitarian organizations also requires a common understanding across broadly defined levels of operations, in addition to technological standardizations that will allow them to work together (for example, being sure relief supplies prepared by one organization will fit into the transport capabilities of the other). Within the military and humanitarian communities, there have been ongoing efforts to create such conditions for interoperability.

These efforts have focused heavily on describing the cultural differences among these groups. Table 5.1 summarizes some of the cultural differences widely discussed. Importantly, these cultural descriptions mimic the Travelers Advice as described earlier. At best it provides a kind of stereotyped understanding, supposing that what is being described are stable patterns which characterize these organizations in different times and places. Inventorying these supposed cultural differences in this way, commits the "fallacy of detached cultural descriptions," characterizing cultural materials as generalizable and static.<sup>33</sup>

The difficulty with such an approach is that what is needed for the effective collaboration to create interoperability among humanitarian and military organizations is not a one-time static fix. That is, creating interoperability among human groups is unlike interoperability in a home entertainment or other technological system. It is not just a matter of being sure that the right plug and receptacle are in place. Rather than being static, the collaboration that is necessary for military-humanitarian

Military	IGOs/NGOs	
* Closely controlled	* Independent or semi-independent	
* Hierarchical	* Decentralized	
* Well resourced	* Minimally staffed, under resourced	
* Extensive doctrine/standard operating	* Few standard practices	
procedures	* Long term	
* Short term	<ul> <li>* Culturally aware</li> </ul>	
<ul> <li>Culturally insensitive</li> </ul>	* Creative, unpredictable	
* Precise, predictable	* Little accountability	
<ul> <li>* Highly accountable</li> </ul>	* May already be in the area of operation	
* Expeditionary, quick	<ul> <li>Multiple constituencies</li> </ul>	
* One constituency	* Idealistic change agents	
* Comfortable with status quo	<ul> <li>* Thrive on ambiguity</li> </ul>	
* Appreciate precise tasks	<ul> <li>IGOs usually have official status; NGOs usually have no official status</li> </ul>	
* "Carries the flag" – well-defined official status and national identity		

 TABLE 5.1
 Generalizations about military and civilian organizational cultural differences

Source: Rubinstein 2008: 107. Compiled from material presented in the video Civil Military Relations: Working with NGOs. Washington, DC: InterAction, 2002.

interoperability is a generative process involving increasing mutual understanding and learning.

Yet, the kind of understanding offered by the trait lists used to prepare humanitarian and military personnel for collaboration do not provide a situated awareness of how the other parties construct meaning. For instance, during a coalition operation which included military units from Spain, El Salvador, and Honduras, one of my informants observed that interactions among these groups were strained because the Honduran and Salvadoran units felt their former colonial status most keenly. As a result, interactions between them and the Spanish contingent were not as effective and efficient as would have been hoped, but not because of any misunderstanding about contemporary cultural questions. Similarly, humanitarian organizations are conscious of a long history of interactions with military organizations, some of which have been detrimental to their humanitarian mission. As result they enter into collaborations with military organizations not with a cultural misunderstanding but with a historically situated concern about their independence, reputation, and ability to set the terms of the collaboration.

In other words, in addition to understanding the superficial cultural traits of the cooperating organizations, it is important to recognize that the cooperation is hedged around by a deeper set of situational and historical understandings. Among the situational variables that must be taken into account are the dynamics of power. Often, in collaborations involving humanitarian and military personnel, the question of power is ignored and disagreements among the organizations are written off as a lack of cultural understanding.

I've reported elsewhere observations of attempts at humanitarian – military collaboration which take on a rather scripted form.<sup>24</sup> I described these observations as follows: both the military and humanitarian organizations recognize that there is an advantage to their working together as smoothly as possible. In their initial engagements with one another they profess a mutual appreciation and agree on the need for coordinating mechanisms which will allow them to act as partners. This is translated into principles that set out the terms of military-civilian relations. My own observations, and those included in reports I have collected from both military and humanitarians, suggest that sooner or later the majority of these interactions break down when the military, frustrated with what it sees as needless process, asserts its power and insists that it take the lead in the face of danger or crisis, acting as it would have in the absence of a collaboration with humanitarian organizations.

Such breakdowns in relations between the organizations results from the exercise of power by the military. Here the power involves a number of dimensions. For example, they may control who is at the table for coordination activities. The military sets the terms of how and when it will transport, accompany, or protect humanitarians in complex emergencies. When this exercise of power combines with a static view of the ways in which humanitarian organizations understand their role in a crisis, the chances to develop effective and efficient interoperability among the organizations are greatly decreased.

Fostering humanitarian-military interoperability requires more than a "just enough" understanding of culture. It requires a deeper understanding of organizational culture, which can provide a dynamic and generative appreciation of the actions and understandings of the different organizations. That understanding will provide parties to the interaction with a starting point from which to collaborate. In addition, they will need a historical and situational appreciation of the social contexts within which other parties are working. They will also need an understanding of how the situation is affected by differences in power, and an appreciation of the ways in which those differences can frustrate collaboration. Finally, to achieve effective and efficient interoperability, they will need to combine these three understandings with a realistic plan for managing their social, cultural, and power differences.

### Notes

- 1 See Rubinstein 1989 for a general introduction to these issues.
- 2 This is a very brief and telegraphic description of the way that peacekeeping developed from 1948 to the present. For a fuller description of this situation see, Rubinstein 2008, chapter 2.
- 3 This period of peacekeeping has been identified by various terms each of which derives from different theoretical views of the development of peacekeeping. Traditional peacekeeping is the most neutral label. See, for example, discussions in Bellamy, Williams, and Griffin 2010.
- 4 See, Rubinstein 2005.
- 5 See, Rubinstein 1993.
- 6 For more on this distinction, see, Rubinstein, Keller, and Scherger 2008.
- 7 IASC 1994, page 9. On the situation in Somalia, see, Sahnoun 1994.

### 70 Robert A. Rubinstein

- 8 Harris and Dombrowsi 2002.
- 9 This example is from my ethnographic research. See also, Pouligny 2006.
- 10 See for instance, d'Andrade 1984 and Rubinstein, Laughlin Jr., and McManus 1984.
- 11 d'Andrade 1984, p. 89.
- 12 For more on models see, Lave and March 1975 and Rubinstein, Laughlin Jr., and McManus 1984, pp. 23–29.
- 13 Fuller descriptions of these models can be found in Rubinstein 2008.
- 14 Peterson 2004, pp. 63-85.
- 15 For example, see Rosaldo 1988.
- 16 For a fuller discussion of the motivational differences involved see, Rubinstein 2006.
- 17 Department of the Army 2006, page A-5.
- 18 For a general discussion of this mismatch see, Slim 1996.
- 19 For a discussion of these levels, see, Department of the Army 2008.
- 20 The capability to "plug-and-play" is a metaphor widely used to promote an intuitive understanding of interoperability. See, for example, Hura et al. 2002, p. 18.
- For a discussion of this kind of technological interoperability see section
   "2.21 Interoperability in a home entertainment system" in Rothenberg, Botterman, and van 2008.
- 22 Hura et al. 2002, p. 19. See also, Bowden 1999.
- 23 This fallacy is described in Rubinstein 1992.
- 24 For a fuller discussion of this dynamic see Rubinstein 2008, pp. 127-136.

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