Cultural Texture: Urban Warfare & Global Strategic Communication

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Overview

- Task
- Approach
- Cultural disparities
- Looking Ahead
  - Strategic global communication
  - The next war
NDU TASK → Cultural Context

- American → Arab
- US Military → Iraqi civilians
Analysis – Working Premises

1. Cross-cultural disparities central

2. Negatives ≥ positives

3. Messages → storylines → master narratives
Communication Context

Shared frame of reference $\rightarrow$ Understanding
Cross-cultural – Combat Context

Unshared cultural frames → Tensions

Cultural imperatives

Cultural imperatives
Media & Messages

Network-centric warfare
Daily Arabic Media Report
Iraqi press
Al-Jazeera
Iraqi bloggers
winning & keeping public goodwill
Civic Engagement
whole village
Human-centric warfare

Urban warfare
Night Vision goggles
fighting the bad guys
US / Islamic world
Insurgency / US troops
Washington / Monterey
Baghdad

Zaharna / NPS / Dec 2005
Cultural Disparities – Recurring themes

- Daily Arabic Media Report
- Shot, killed, wounded
- Military scorecard
- Who’s winning
- Abstract, impersonal

- Arab media / bloggers
- People-event specific
- Human drama
- Human toll
- High impact / people identify
Iraqi Civilians → Cultural Imperatives

- Honor, dignity, respect
- Family, sanctity of home
- Collective punishment
- Authority → responsibility
Cultural Disparity: Why Problem of Hearts & Minds?

- US
  - Information problem
    - Message, messenger
    - Not hearing positives
    - Opponents [Al-Jazeera]
- Iraqi civilians
  - Relationship problem
    - Personal/family honor
    - Tactics
    - Security
American Cultural Assumptions

- Communication = Information transfer
- Focus ➔ message
- Currency ➔ ideas
- Problem ➔ absent or incorrect information
- Solution ➔ more or better information
- Agency ➔ persuasion strategy, mass media, advanced technology

[complaint: information overload]
Arab Cultural Assumptions

- Communication = Social process
- Focus → relationships
- Currency → connections
- Problem → strained or broken relations
- Solution → mend relations
- Agency → mediator, negotiator

[Complaint: relationship overload]
Core Cultural Disparity

US = information focused

Iraqi = relationship focused
Cultural Disparity: How Solve Problem?

Iraqi → Relationship problem
- US troops & tactics

US → Information solution
- Message
- Messenger
US → Is it the *message* or the *messenger*?

- **America**
  - Low-context
  - Meaning is in the message
  - *Can* separate message & messenger

- **Arab**
  - High-context
  - Meaning is in the context
  - *Cannot* separate message & messenger

Iraqi → US troops = message & messenger
Disparity: Culture Valuables

- **US Military**
  - Doing oriented
  - “Get the job done”
  - Task focused
  - Expediency
  - Security

- **Iraqi Civilians**
  - Being oriented
  - Public face: Dignity, honor, respect
  - Relations: family, tribe, home
Scorecard: Negative ≥ Positives

* Personal humiliation
  = Loss of face, dignity, social respect

Negatives ➔ High personal, social cost

* Civic affairs
  * Information /PR campaign
  * Reconstruction projects

Positives ➔ Impersonal
Creating Master Narrative

- US troop + local public $\rightarrow$ Create storyline
- Global publics identify with local public
  $\rightarrow$ Storyline gains traction
- Master narrative $\rightarrow$ anti-Americanism
Where are the people?

US troops

Iraqi civilians

Insurgency
Insurgency trying to keep one step ahead of US
Urban Warfare – Cultural Component

- Night vision goggles → Eyes of village
- Secure the ground → Retain public goodwill
- Command & control → Consult & coordinate
- Tactics, weapons, equipment → Cultural savvy
Next War: Strategic Global Communication
Challenge of Cultural Landmines

- US troops / tactics → Trigger cultural landmines
- Alienate local public → Storyline
- Alienate global publics → Master narrative
- Anti-Americanism / US credibility
Next War: Challenges

- How can US integrate cultural knowledge into troop training and tactics?

- How can US fight the bad guys without becoming the “bad guys” – villain in the story?
Looking Ahead: Strategic *Global* Communication

- WWII → propaganda
- GWOT → relationship-based strategies
  - Global cultures
  - Global networks
Thank you.

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