

## FROM THE EXPERIENCE INSIDE MILITARY MULTINATIONAL COALITION FROM AFGHANISTAN TO A CULTURAL EDUCATIONAL MODEL PROPOSAL

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**Abstract:** *Cultural differences in military multinational coalitions are generating frictions of certain degrees among their members that are affecting the efficiency of the collaboration. The topic of cultural differences is not new, the understanding of the importance of knowledge and cultural harmonization has generated the creation of certain cultural training programs. The focus is on the pre-mission training, including that of the leaders and less the systematic inclusion of this type of training at pre-university, university and post-university levels. Even they are existing they are not adjusted to the requirements of the Theatre of Operations, to the Peace Support Operations, or to Peace Operations. The knowledge, understanding and cultural harmonization are processes that are allowing the perception of the certain events through 'cultural lenses' and are facilitating an adequate interpretation of behaviors, actions and decisions of the Coalition Partners. Those three steps are 'built' in time, over years of study, based on general and specific military knowledge.*

**Keywords:** *cultural differences; multinational coalition; Power Distance; military educational system*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is aiming at presenting briefly the results of an experience of being seven years inside the Theatre of Operations in Afghanistan, the period in which I had analyzed the topic of cultural differences and their generated effects and is suggesting, in the same time, a simplified model of cultural training for the entire military educational system. Even the globalization and scientific progress, especially the cybernetic one, are bringing us the idea to the necessity of inter-relate with others only through the technology, I consider that that stage is too far in order to work efficient inside coalitions. The transformation of European Armies or multinational military alliances will need decades of training, linguistic and cultural harmonization in order to facilitate interoperability.

The elements that can determine cultural differences are interacting and are producing effects of a variable intensity in close connection with the level of knowledge and cultural competence, stress level, the leader's ability to manage those elements and to integrate them efficiently into multicultural military collaboration.

The aim of this paper is to move from the stage of the identification of causes and effects of cultural differences from multinational coalitions

to the proposal of an integrated harmonized cultural knowledge educational model.

For researchers such as: Edward T. Hall (1966, 1976), Geert Hofstede (1980, 1983, 1991, 2001, 2005), S. H. Schwartz and Peter B. Smith (1992, 1994, 2002), Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars (1993, 1997), the cultural theme has presented a great interest especially from the perspective of cultural standards and values. The results and the conclusions of the research performed by them, on which we add those of the studies elaborated by Moelker René, Soeters Joseph, Von Hagen Ulrich in Peacetime and Wartime, have been landmarks and starting points in the scientific attempt to determine the impact of different cultural variables over the interoperability, a research that I performed inside the Theatre of Operations from Afghanistan from October 2012 to May 2017.

World Armies are having different pre-mission training programs, but only few of them have integrated fluently in their pre-university, university and post university educational curricula the operational culture. This kind of training is performed very often in a form of short courses that are not enough for the reality of the multiculturalism of the theatre of operations. Therefore, starting with the pre-university level the

introduction of a discipline related to cultural elements there would be a need.

In Romanian military Educational System, there are disciplines such as culture, interculturality, but elements that are presented does not reflect the specific needs of the theatre of operations and are not correlated in a logical flow with aspects that are influencing interoperability (language, standardization, NATO procedures, personnel policies, etc).

## 2. THE EFFECTS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES OVER MILITARY MISSIONS IN THEATRE OF OPERATIONS AFGHANISTAN

What is new in this scientific attempt performed in the Theatre of Operations from Afghanistan is represented by the fact that is offering a document for a wide cultural knowledge of the contributing nations to the Coalition, is presenting the elements that based on their differences are generating cultural effects and are influencing interoperability and is proposing a 'Linear model for cultural knowledge and harmonization' useful in the training process of our national troops that are to be deployed and is presenting the results of two studies elaborated in the Theatre of Operations from Afghanistan.

The fundamental thesis of the research was: *In military multinational operations, the efficiency of the mission is growing proportional with the level of linguistic knowledge, of the level of professional and cultural knowledge, of the harmonization of the cultural differences and of the strengthening of the common cultural aspects of the military sub-cultures.* All these elements mentioned above have been analyzed in detail and have been supported by the results of the case studies. *The initial questions* of the research have been the following:

– Which are the elements of national cultures and the factors of the organizational culture that are having the potential to influence the efficiency of the collaboration inside multinational military coalitions?

– Is the subject 'cultural differences' a priority one for the leaders of the mission or become a subject of interest only when major frictions are appearing among the coalition members?

– Can we consider that cultural differences are representing the essential factor that is acting over the efficiency of the military operations?

After we asked the questions we established the *initial objectives* of the research:

1. A comprehensive knowledge of what does it means culture, multiculturality, dimensions,

values, the status of the research concerning multicultural interaction in military life in peacetime and wartime, the identification of cultural theories, providing a theoretical framework and of the results of previous research and finally the provision of some explanations for the "cultural differences" phenomenon.

All of these have been detailed in the first part of the research conducted in the Theatre of Operations from Afghanistan. Resuming the benefits of a comprehensive research, they are representing the framework in which it has been carried out. Of course, the limits in between they are interacting in multinational missions are very vague. Some of them belong to general culture, the others to national cultures or organizational cultures, military sub-culture, cultural psychology, sociology, anthropology etc. Clear limits are not existing and the dispute on the subject it will never be finalized. What we can say is that the same issue is very often presented differently, but it is important that the analysis process to be conducted only by comparing the same items;

2. Identification and observation of the variables of the national and organizational cultures that are generating cultural differences and frictions that are affecting the efficiency of the mission.

Being a subject so broad, the research has been conducted on multiple levels: taking into consideration cultural group of the countries (GLOBE Study), from the perspective of some cultural dimensions (Gert Hofstede's cultural dimensions), from the perspective of organizational factors, of command and control, of the teams' composition that are executing missions in the field, of the cultural and psychological tendencies, of communication, technology and from the perspective of social factors and cultural norms.

The economic, political, technological, legal, ethnic and religious frameworks are decisive factors of a culture of a society. To those elements are added language, customs, personal values, ethics, attitudes, expectations and other elements of the organizational culture are determining the organizational behavior. Then, countries have the tendency to group themselves based on geographical proximity, of the common language, or to the group language or religion. The similarities of the countries that are closer from the geographical point of view have as a result '*the spread*' of some cultural values over their entire geopolitical evolution along the history. The language comprises meanings and values that are

influencing the working process, the behavior at the working place and the leadership style. Some countries have a common religion, like for example Latin countries that are predominantly Catholics. Common religious beliefs are associated with common values and norms in the Society and at work. All listed elements are interrelated and interact in interrelationship processes of multinational in multinational coalitions generating effects.

3. The accomplishment of the two case studies through the participative and non-participative observation method, whose conclusions were reproduced through narrative method. The case studies have pursued:

a. personnel's interaction of the two Romanian contingents with the civilian and military personnel of Resolute Support Mission HQs - a study conducted over a ten months period

b. the interaction in a multinational structure from Resolute Support Mission HQs - a study conducted over 24 month's period.

4. Issuing recommendations based on the conclusion of the research and lessons learnt. Lessons learnt over the period of research are focused on the role of cultural knowledge in planning and conduct of operations and we can mention the following:

- these are offering a better image of the way the fighting actions are affecting local population and insurgents;

- these are offering a better prediction over the behavior of the population;

- these are highlighting ways to make communication more efficient and can prevent useless tensions in between the personnel of the mission, civilian organizations and local population;

- these are helping the training of the protection force;

- is constituting the data base of the minor cultural mistakes during military operations and are presenting the way in which they can escalate into major issues or incidents.

Starting from the objectives I formulated the following hypothesis that I checked during the research and in the analysis of the case studies:

- The membership to the same cultural group is reducing but not canceling frictions inside Coalition. Soldiers' long term multinational interaction, during peacetime is not generating problems, in comparison with the ad-hoc formations, without common knowledge and cultural training, where cultural differences are amplified and are generating frictions of different

degrees and inefficiency in operations, things identified in the two narrative case studies during peacetime and wartime performed by Moelker *et al.* (2003). Frictions can appear even among soldiers of the same nation, but belonging to different branches, for example in between infantrymen and those from Special Forces.

- Knowing the cultural groups and of the different cultural variables are facilitating the efficiency of the communication in between the leaders and multinational organization they are leading. In each multinational military coalition is simultaneously acting a wide range of variables that we grouped in three large categories: the factors of the organizational culture, of the National Culture and of the individual psychology, etc.

In studying of the documents, I have identified the following dimensions, norms, characteristics, cultural values that, each individual through corroboration are determining effects over collaboration inside coalition.

*Socio-cultural dimensions:* Power Distance, avoiding Uncertainty, Masculinity vs. Feminism, Short Term Orientation, Individualism vs. collectivism, Long Term Orientation, Orientation towards Performance, Collectivism as a Group, Institutional Collectivism, Assertively, Hierarchy and loyal implication in the activity of the organization, Equality and Utility Participation, Equality, Equal Engagement, Conservationism.

*Attitudes and values associated to work:* the importance granted to the accomplishment of the established aim, the need to accomplish the objectives, the satisfaction offered by work, the management style, the organizational climate, the role inside the working process and the interpersonal orientation.

*Dimensions, mechanisms and the factors of change of the organizational structures:* the internal factors are represented by the values of the organization, the leadership style, the structure of the organization, in general terms, everything that is related to the personality of the individuals, policies, procedures and practices, the hierarchy and the decision process. The external organizational factors: those related to legality, economy, society and technology.

Four big groups with significant cultural differences have to be especially mentioned: the Western - European countries group, the Eastern - European one, that of the Muslim countries and that of the English native speaker ones (USA, Australia, Canada, and Great Britain). The communication in between the soldiers of those

groups is difficult from the linguistic and cultural perspective.

- 'The linguistic level' Variable is determined in the communication and interrelationship processes inside the mission.

- 'The Power Distance' and 'Avoiding Uncertainty' Variables have a significant impact in the operational processes inside the Coalition.

- Dividing the Area of Responsibility into contingents, or at least on the contingents belonging to the same cultural group, is a viable solution to avoid frictions in stress conditions, in theatre of operations, besides the uniformity of the technologies used are eliminating the communication deficiencies. The clear example is performed in KAIA, where unique technology and common and well-known procedures are facilitating a better and efficient collaboration.

- Identification of the cultural variables is helping pre-mission cultural training. Multinational interaction of the soldiers, even the long-term one, is not generating problems. In war conditions, inside the ad-hoc established formations, without cultural awareness and pre-mission cultural training, under the influence of extended stress conditions, cultural differences are generating frictions of different degrees and inefficiency of the mission;

- Long-term common training, is generating cultural knowledge, is strengthening the trust in between the soldiers, and together with a 'professional' level of language proficiency, is generating automatically an interrelationship without frictions.

The essential elements of the military culture: ceremonials, labels, discipline, professional ethos, cohesion and esprit de corps, have been identified as existing in all armies of the Coalition. Parts of those elements have been identified as manifesting themselves in different forms of military organizations of the Afghan fighters. Very often, major cultural differences are making extremely difficult collaboration in between the groups, but establishing common procedures are making possible a professional military collaboration.

Besides knowing the cultural competencies, for a multinational military organization to be efficient we consider that the minimal following conditions have to be fulfilled:

- SOPs for the transition period have to be clear and respected by all the nations;

- Creation and development of a knowledge and cooperation system of relationships (meetings organized outside the formal environment, the

creation of opportunities in order the individuals to be able to have informal discussions);

- Understanding by the leaders that their presence inside the Coalition is useful only for the benefit of the mission, not for the interest of their nation he/she is representing;

- The informatics systems and NATO organizations and not doubled by the 'ghost' ones;

- Creation by their leaders of a constructive environment, based on mutual trust among their members, in order to be able to express freely their opinions.

The research has confirmed assumption 1-6. *The assumption no. 7 (Long-term common training is generating cultural knowledge and is strengthening the trust amongst the soldiers. Together with an expert level of training, these are generating automatically an interrelationship without frictions) has been invalidated.*

At the end of the research I concluded that the following factors are effecting to a certain degree, the efficiency of the collaboration in multinational military coalitions: the level of linguistic knowledge, the level of training and military international expertise, cultural identity and the differences in values, the accommodation and feeding facilities, the codes of conduct, the differences in between the leadership systems and the forms to exercise discipline, the differences related to political believes, salaries, and other benefits, the nature of relationship in between officers, NCOs and soldiers, the way in which women are seen in different cultures, the values of the dimensions of the National Cultures, etc.

The conclusions of the research conducted in Theatre of Operations from Afghanistan in between 2012-2017:

- There are both similarities and differences in between Armed Forces participating into Coalition, on which is added the elements of a supra-national military culture. This is a collectivistic one, based on hierarchy and less motivated by the materialism in comparison with civilian cultures.

- The high ranking and orientation towards obeying the rules and military regulations, (a feature of the Latin Group), elitism and special respect paid to the position (a feature of the Anglo-Saxon Group) and excessive orientation towards the accomplishment of the objectives on which is added avoidance of uncertainty and the enhancement of rules (a feature of the Americans) are only few aspects of the military culture that are generating the harmonization and also frictions inside the operational process.

– Different cultural believes related to military conflict resolution methods (fight or humanitarian approach), force protection, payment and accommodation conditions, personnel policies and communications can generate frictions inside coalition. These are representing learning opportunities, that is meaning multiculturalism in military environment and are offering the possibility to study the link in between cultural differences and interoperability efficiency. A clear example is represented by the efficiency they accomplished the objectives using different Provincial Reconstruction Teams, where, despite NATO mandate provided general recommendations, applying different execution styles in accomplishing the objectives, the way they are seeing the share of work in different cultures, had generated different efficiency degrees in finalizing the projects.

– Strategies to achieve an acceptable level of cooperation in Coalition, known in sociology as separation and integration are functioning in Afghanistan. Despite the fact that the separation model is the most common that is not specific to the Headquarters of the Mission. The limited space inside, the way the operations are coordinated and the structure of the organization are generating an integrated model. In this approach none of the nations are superior or is having a dominant operational style, combining more styles of work in order to create a supranational one that is more efficient. Inside this integration strategy framework, the adaptability factor is essential, having the commander on the top, acting for a common mission and to activate the ‘excellent level’ attitudes of each nation, creating norms and common experiences and making well known cultural differences and similarities.

– Military organizations that are functioning over extended periods of time are developing together an isomorphism resulted from common experiences (experiential isomorphism), through the standardization of policies, doctrines, resources and training programs, all these generating an increase in military interoperability.

– Leadership is supposing a thorough knowledge and cultural expertise. Starting with the increase of cultural knowledge, the option used in the Past – part-time cultural advice - cannot satisfy the need of continuous advice necessary in stability and security operations. Command of each level is assuming the existence of complex structures, with specialized positions in providing cultural recommendations, part of the integrated planning, decision-making and execution processes. The

ideal personnel for a position of cultural advisers one of a high degree specialization, with anthropology, psychology and sociology studies, having a long term experience gained through direct participative observation.

– The face of the modern war has changed, being transformed into a diplomatic and media war, in which any mistake related to cultural knowledge is sanctioned by international public opinion. Muslim clerics are stigmatizing any mistake of the Coalition (wrong reconstruction projects, accidental killing of innocent persons, burning the Koran, entering of the soldiers shoehorn into the mosque, corporal check and entering into areas specially designated for women, etc.) and are finding answers inside the Islamic-extremist population that are caring rebellion acts against Coalition Forces. All of these only because ignoring cultural differences.

### **3. OPERATIONALIZATION FORMS OF LESSONS LEARNT AND MULTICULTURAL TRAINING**

**3.1 In the Theatre of Operations.** The realities of the Theatre of Operations have generated the establishment of different organizational initiatives aiming the adaptation of the needs to interact with local population.

a. Human Terrain Teams - HTT, comprising 5-6 members, attached to the brigades and consisting of experienced sociologists, whose role is to provide constant information about socio/cultural and ethnographic base of the area of responsibility of the brigade.

b. Semi-formal meetings with important local leaders (Key Leaders Engagement Teams-KLE), have the role to cultivate relationship with important persons from the tribes, government, state apparatus, so that those to support NATO mission.

c. Female Engagement Teams – FET, comprising women, military personnel and civilians that are supporting patrols in their interaction with Afghan women.

Also, depending of the job specific requirement, the soldiers and the civilians that are operating in the theatre can attend the following courses: Counterinsurgency Course, Combat Lifesaver Course and Guardian Angel Course. In all these we can find important cultural elements that can influence both the interaction inside Coalition and that with the local population.

**3.2 Outside Theatre of Operations.** The leadership of Romanian Ministry of Defense understood the need for advanced cultural and linguistic training of the personnel participating into international missions. In order to achieve the interoperability objectives that are linked to different levels of training, Romanian Army has started in 1994 to develop specific training programs. First they established linguistic training centers, followed by the establishment of Distance Learning Department. These are offering some important advantages, in comparison with the classical model of education: they are appreciated by the new generation of military personnel that is having abilities and competencies in using information technology, the costs are reduced and the courses are widely accessible. The third step in the training effort is represented by the establishment of the Simulation Training Centre, with a major role in standardized NATO training.

World's Armies are having different pre-mission training programs, based on short courses. To highlight, US Army is using different operational and cultural training, the most one being VCAT (Virtual Cultural Awareness Trainer), an interactive platform for cultural and linguistic practice. This is supported by scenarios in which are presented and exercised reactions in different situations that are closely to reality. The well known is the American pre-mission training called JRTC Operations Group (Joint Readiness Training Centre). These American training models comprise a series of instruments to determine cultural competencies: the inventory for intercultural development, the Scale of Cultural Intelligence and Multicultural Personality Questionnaire. All of these are offering an initial image of training and competencies each soldier is having and on which are applied the communication and intercultural training programs, role playing etc. In general, the programs are generating four levels of cultural competencies, the orientation towards objectives and also are offering information about niche domains in which the soldier can efficiently use those competencies.

NATO - ACT has created an interactive platform - NATO Innovation Hub for learning, presenting scientific researches in different domains and for intercultural communication and development - Extended Hand. This is useful in training but not very often used because there is a need for closer coordination in between the groups that are to make an exchange in military expertise/experience, in audio format at distance.

For European armies but also for NATO ones, joint training based on short courses is organized in NATO School in Oberammergau (Germany) and Joint Training Centre Stavanger (Norway). All are supported by conferences, working groups and international exercises, but the achieved cultural exchanges are not enough as for the realities are faced in a theatre of operations.

#### **4. THE PROPOSAL OF AN EDUCATIONAL MODEL**

In order to a proper functioning of a Coalition to have positive effects over interoperability I consider necessary an increased educational space to be allocated to the current cultural knowledge and harmonization. The specific training should be extended and integrated with the other disciplines (linguistic knowledge, communication, general and specific disciplines, psychology), in educational curricula, starting at the pre-university level and continuing with the university and post-university ones, pre-mission training and at the end the special advice into the theatre of operations.

The extension of the study programs at the mentioned levels related to cultural competence and leadership in multinational environments should become a priority. Only after the establishment of the foundation of cultural knowledge it will be the need to import the cross-cultural knowledge model of the advanced states concerning this domain (for example USA, Great Britain) or they can create exercising models using their own concepts. At pre-university level they should cultivate and develop not only the cultural elements and values, but also those multinational. They should know the organizational values, the differences amongst the cultures and sub-cultures and in between the armies. At university level there should be done the connections in between different cultural variables and also exercised cultural harmonization. The students should actively participate in interactive cultural training programs. Pre-mission courses should represent only a stage in developing the skills and for refreshing the basic existent training.

I consider that is necessary the establishment of a cultural supporting structure, for the theatre of operations based on the model of psychological advisers.

#### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Understanding the cultural context became almost of a same importance as understanding the

military profession, operational art or military strategy. Looking into the Past to the most successful campaigns or operations from military history, their success was the result of the best military strategy and of the efficient use of resources to put into practice this strategy. In time, misunderstanding of the cultural context has become a barrier, but not that dangerous as having insufficient resources in military profession. The evolution of the Society, the increased influence of mass-media, the increased speed of information and of the sensibility of public opinion of the World have generated a need to analyze again the way in which cultural knowledge and inter-relationship in coalitions with the local population through the effects insufficient cultural knowledge is generating.

Even there are great differences related to National Interests, military resources, the way the violence is used, personnel policies and also cultural aspects that are generating frictions, there is a great dose of optimism that Coalition will work, may be not as wide as it is, but may be will work in an multinational and professional European Army. Those elements should accelerate the preoccupation of the lead of the Europeans armies for the complex cultural side of the problem. The current and future conflicts will be conducted at another level. The armies will face major changes: the number of soldiers will be reduced; there will be an increased role of sophisticated technologies, of the influence of mass-media and of the role of the coalitions. The linguistic knowledge and cultural adaptability are only few of the tools for an increased efficiency of interoperability in multinational military coalitions.

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