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Strategic Implications of Cultures in Conflict

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More than ever, a sense of vision is required for senior leaders and policymakers to estimate the intangible forces at work in the environment within which the United States will have to function into the 21st century. When archetypal energies such as warrior and shaman explode into reality in a chaotic world, leaders and policymakers have the responsibility to analyze and evaluate their meaning and recommend appropriate courses of action for the country to follow, thereby offsetting the onslaught of these forces. John Ruskin, 19th-century poet, provides a suitable epigram for leaders when he talks about "seeing":

Hundreds of people can talk
For One who can think
But thousands can think
For One who can see.

To see clearly
Is poetry,
Prophecy,
And Religion,
All in One.[1]

This article seeks to provide insights into a complex environment for those charged with the nation's safekeeping. Sometimes called low-intensity conflict, now often grouped with less violent peace operations, activities in that environment are best approached through an appreciation of the vital roles that human culture and the concept of time play in examining, for example, the decline of the nation-state.

The Decline of the Nation-State

The question of the decline of the Western nation-state is moving to the forefront of national strategic consciousness. As the repository of social and political values, the nation-state represents symbolically the evolution of Western political philosophy and civilization from 5th-century Greece. The idea of the decay of the nation-state as an organizing principle challenges the values around which government is formed, and within which the Department of Defense must operate. However, the categories of thought belonging to the nation-state's politics, economics, and military structures are no longer sufficient to address the myriad possibilities of conflict described as "complex" in current National Intelligence Estimates. New language is needed to give meaning to cultural factors which have been hitherto overlooked, but which contain the key to American success in the low-intensity conflict environment.

New language is already appearing in attempts to give meaning to conflict. For example, the increasing use of "warrior," which more adequately describes the "fighter" at the primal level, is pre-military and, as such, belongs to the archaic world. Warrior is therefore an appropriate description of group or clan members whose end is combat in support of their leader. Terms such as "tribal" and "primitive" also are used in an attempt to describe warfare in places like Somalia. While problematic, this language attempts to define and clarify that intangible quality of conflict embedded in the culture itself, where fluidity reigns and where there is no order of battle in the conventional Western sense.

The United States will have to function in increasingly complex emergencies into the 21st century. For example, internal conflict may combine simultaneously with drought and natural or technological disasters to produce displaced persons or refugees. Such challenges stress not only military force structure and command and control, but also the vision of American leaders. Each emergency or conflict is likely to be different, providing little opportunity for developing standard approaches to either.

The question of the decline of the nation-state, therefore, provokes a requirement for new thinking among leaders about the history of civilizations. The Western nation-state, for example, with its emphasis on logic and the rational, contrasts with Asian states where the seemingly irrational often dominates, and where standards of law and religion are different. In the West the individual dominates as master of ceremonies in affairs, but in the East the individual is more often a junior partner. Senior American leaders must use existing scholarship to peer into the nature of conflict within non-Western states.

To understand Bosnia-Herzegovina and Chechnya, leaders and followers alike will have to appreciate the subtle presence of the major civilizations. Countries will become more meaningfully grouped according to their culture and civilization, says Samuel Huntington, and not their political or economic development. No longer is there a First, Second, or Third World presided over by elites from Oxford and the Sorbonne, but a fragmentation of states guided, in part, by their own nationalism and sense of cultural identity.[2] In all of this, human culture is the neglected factor.

Culture: The Neglected Factor

Firepower may achieve temporary battlefield superiority in low-intensity conflict, but it will not necessarily contribute significantly to conflict resolution. Current planning for such conflict continues to emphasize military factors, but it omits the problem of culture. Arguments over Pearl Harbor and the Smithsonian controversy over the *Enola Gay* at the time of the 50th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki still color discussions in service schools. However, the problem of human culture is seldom approached from a scholarly perspective in these classrooms, and world religions are often not taught at all, except in the context of area studies.

Understanding culture may help to answer important military and civil questions such as the will of the enemy to fight, the determination of resistance groups to persevere, or the willingness of the populace to support insurgents or warlords. Culture, comprised of all that is vague and intangible, is not generally integrated into strategic planning except at the most superficial level. It appears increasingly in scholarly work, however, on problems associated with emerging nations.

One useful model for discussing human culture is philosopher Ernst Cassirer's "Circle of Humanity," as described in his *Essay on Man*. [3] Cassirer's "circle" has six categories: science, language, history, religion, art, and myth. These categories are briefly analyzed below in the context of this article. Their symbolic importance--the subject for a different paper--is not discussed here.

Science

When US leaders assess the Third World, their frame of reference is frequently not the Third World itself but the United States, with its vastly superior industrial and military might. Such a view ignores the level of science available to the largest number of people in a country such as Somalia, where a broader level of simple, even primitive, technology may be used by indigenous forces in place of sophisticated weaponry. It takes little talent or training to sharpen a stick and place it in the ground as a booby-trap. When assessing the category of science in the LIC environment, the degree to which levels of development match ability should not be overlooked.

A recent advertisement by a leading US company dealing in military technology depicts a high-tech American soldier standing at the summit of a mountain, symbolically the pinnacle of scientific achievement. Below him in the spirit and style of Josef Brandt's painting *Ein Gefecht*, a medieval battle scene flourishes with knights in armor clashing with saber and lance. These contrasting images show what awaits America's best into the 21st century, where the primitive reality of low-intensity wars will be contrasted with the achievements of technology. In wars of attrition such as Vietnam, willpower and dedication may offset high science, brutally reminding the modern soldier that mythology lies at the root of scientific achievement.

Language

Most people consider language chiefly in practical terms, as the ability to communicate with one's counterpart. Other factors however, may also be present. Cultures with highly developed languages are capable of expressing themselves in the complex terms necessary for social development. In primitive societies language requires "an other," a face-to-face communication with some other human being, in order for the transmission of ideas to occur. Oral tradition binds the group to a certain level of development beyond which it cannot go without the written word.

Language is also necessary for consciousness. The more conscious a people, the more the symbols embodied in their language can be expressed and transmitted. Therefore, ideas such as God, healer, and warrior-king remain subliminal to primitive peoples, and are encased in ritual and secrecy. Their release requires the movement to consciousness which comes when the oral umbilicus is cut. Thus, when primitives reveal their secret feelings to outsiders, they sometimes do so with the fear that any demeaning of that particular feeling or symbol will result in its disappearance, and the tribe or clan will be damaged permanently.

History

Leaders and policymakers do not always realize that history is not written everywhere as it is in the West. The rational Western quest for the accurate transmission of passing events has not always been the sole motivation of historians everywhere, as will be seen later in the case of China. One must be aware of differing cultural approaches to the place of man in relation to the cosmos--and to the Emperor. Without such an appreciation, accurate intelligence evaluations of source reporting are impossible. This, in turn, may lead to faulty findings being presented to policymakers based on a skewed interpretation of events.

Rational theories of political history come from the Greeks, who pioneered logical thought and a view of history based on new insights and facts. Today, government leaders face a world where all the different ways of thinking are expressed in varied languages and customs which are culturally represented in the nation's capital itself. There is a "history without walls," just as Andre Malraux suggests there is a "museum without walls," where the art of all cultures is made available in a way never before imagined. The exposure of modern man to an overwhelming presentation of world symbols requires a discriminating study of human culture so as to understand the meaning of history.

Religion

Religion has its force in the essential mystery of the religious experience in all cultures. Islam, identified by some as being on a collision course with the West, combines government and religion, where the US secularist tradition separates church and state. US leaders, for example, may be surprised that Muslims worldwide express solidarity with Islam, even if this trend is gradual or almost imperceptible. To miss this point is to underestimate the diverse power of this faith in all its dimensions. Simply estimating the Order of Battle of Islamic militants, or understanding the modus operandi of Muslim-oriented terrorist groups, are surface factors alongside the diverse power of the religion itself.

It is no accident that the political geometry of Indian thought is rooted in the religious mandala. Heinrich Zimmer explains in his *Philosophies of India* how the principal Hindu formula of alliances and coalitions is expressed in a series of concentric circles of natural friends and enemies.[4] When asked what the closest circle to the king represents, US military students frequently respond with "friends." To the Western mind, one surrounds oneself with friends as a line of first warning against impending danger. Not so in Zimmer's analysis. In the Hindu scheme, the first circle is always composed of enemies who are his immediate neighbors ready to pounce and assume power.

Art

"Study art, history, and philosophy," says the fictional character Jean-Luc Picard to the young ensign sweating his Star Fleet exams, "then all of this will mean something to you." [5] In the world of intelligence collection and analysis, art as a category of culture is often dismissed, seen only in the context of the decorative arts. In the story of mankind, however, art reveals the unfolding of the symbol in graphic form, often indicating the values of a people. In creating a work of culture, the artist becomes an instrument of a transcendent power.[6]

For the policymaker studying Northern Ireland, an inquiry into the history of the murals and slogans on Belfast's walls may reveal much about the story of struggle there. In Latin America, too, are painted the feelings of the group in conflict with authorities. Here, the god figure is often portrayed as an Indian or a peasant, symbolic of the inner struggle felt by the group. Similarly, the image of the "Shining Path" (*Sendero Luminoso*) symbolizes that which shows the way. In Tiananmen Square, the Liberty figure created by students has a Western outward appearance, except to the trained art historian who is able to discern its Chinese qualities.

Myth

Myth is expressed in the age-old stories of the hero, the mother, and the wise old man. The archetypes are psychological constellations which carry great power; they contain supernatural and fanciful beings and are therefore non-theoretical, defying standard Western categories of thought. Mythical thinking is in opposition to theoretical thinking, the product of the rational and more advanced civilizations.

Myth expresses itself in sentiment, meaning that primitive peoples "feel" things rather than "think" them. Weather, magic, or the words of a tribal leader may make the individual feel the energy of those mythical great stories in his own particular tribal culture. This brings great force and direction to the individual and may account for tremendous prowess on the battlefield, even in the face of superior firepower or numerical odds. People often fight according to the strength of the myth active in them.

Summary

Paradigms such as Ernst Cassirer's "Circle of Humanity" hold insights for leaders and policymakers concerned with the low-intensity conflict environment, where classical models of Western warfare and rational parallels with the ideal of democracy may not exist. The other prerequisite for understanding low-intensity conflict is an appreciation of the problem of time in relation to human culture.

A Matter of Time[7]

Battlefield assessments include the question, "When will the enemy attack?" At a deeper level, however, lies a more profound problem of time which affects the successful operation of US foreign policy from Iran to the Philippines: the ways in which concepts of time in other cultures affect the approach to all life, including military conflict. The problem of time is nowhere more appropriate for discussion than in Asia, where the United States suffered its most traumatic decades in recent history, facing an enemy which appeared militarily inferior in almost every way. While American soldiers in Vietnam spoke of the enemy's apparent patience and willingness to sacrifice today's battle for tomorrow's victory, the factor of time was considered only superficially at the strategic level, to address the question of when the conflict could be brought to a close under conditions favorable to the United States.

In the West, time is quantitative; it is measured in units that reflect the march of progress in Western culture, providing durations within which humankind can work and develop in the outer world. F. S. C. Northrop, in *The Meeting of East and West*, sees the West as proceeding along a theoretic continuum and the East along an aesthetic continuum.[8] For Northrop, East and West could mutually benefit each other in an exchange where West would go East to participate in the intuitive and contemplative dimension of life, and East would go West to acquire science and technology and politics, which are more theoretically grounded.

This aesthetic expresses itself as quality rather than quantity in the East, where time is not measured in hours and minutes, but has a feeling of unlimited continuity, an unraveling. In such an atmosphere birth and death, for example, are not an absolute beginning and end. This qualitative characteristic has its roots in cosmic time, where the place of the individual is different than in Western "ego-time." In the East the individual plays junior partner in cosmic events; in the West, he assumes the role of master of ceremonies.

In this regard, consider the culture of India. In general, Indian philosophy has seen time as moving endlessly through various cycles,[9] with each cycle being created by Brahman, the impersonal god and highest reality of the Upanishads. In his *Philosophies of India*, Heinrich Zimmer describes time as follows:

Past, present, and future belong to transitory beings. Time is a becoming and vanishing, the background and element of the transient, the very frame and content of the floating processes of the psyche and its changing perishable objects of experience.[10]

Time, then, is a primordial archetype and is seen as cyclical, an idea which has dominated Indian thought. In her *Time, Rhythm, and Repose*, Marie-Louise von Franz summarizes the Indian cyclic notion of time:

The primary unit of time is the yuga, or age (1,080,000 years). . . . A complete cycle, or mahayuga, consists of four such yugas. . . . One mahayuga or great year consists of 12,000 "divine" years, each comprising 360 ordinary years. Thousands of such mahayugas constitute a kalpa ("form").[11]

The kalpa is also known as an Aeon and is the duration of time which elapses between the origin and destruction of a world system. Again, a feeling of timelessness prevails, and reflects Northrop's aesthetic continuum. Edward Conze, in his *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, described an Aeon in this way:

Suppose there is a mountain, of very hard rock, much bigger than the Himalayas; and suppose that a man, with a piece of the very finest cloth of Benares, once every century should touch that mountain every so slightly--then the time it would take him to wear away the entire mountain would be about the time of an Aeon.[12]

These descriptions exemplify the archaic basis and enduring quality of Indian time, and its sharp contrast to modern Western time.

In terms of low-intensity conflict, people from cultures permeated by cosmic time may behave differently than those from Western culture. For example, the individual's readiness to sacrifice himself in action or, conversely, to go to extreme lengths not to participate in the taking of life may appear odd to the Westerner. The United States must be prepared to encounter such paradoxes in cultures where cosmic time prevails. Mission success cannot be achieved if differing concepts of time are ignored.

In China, the other great contributor to the larger culture of Asia, time is also expressed in a manner inseparable from ritual, divination, and everyday life. The Chinese have historically maintained a strong sense of continuity expressed in a close parallel between the life of the individual and the cosmos, where order and balance prevail in a constant search for harmony. Early divination developed partially as a need to maintain the proper relationship between man and nature, and the *I-Ching (Book of Changes)* extends its influence into modern times, as seen in graduation speeches by the leadership of the Whampoa military academy in 1946, where students were reminded that they should live according to the oracle.

In another example, Deng Xiaoping, reflecting China's fluid sense of time, addressed US sanctions toward China by saying: "If you want China to beg, it cannot be arranged. Even if extended 100 years the Chinese people will not beg for the lifting of sanctions." [13] Deng's 100 years would not be a unit of time commonly used by a Western leader, where the emphasis would be on achievement in one's own lifetime. Deng reflects Chinese classical tradition as seen in, for example, Mencius, who saw China as proceeding in cycles of 500 years. Even this duration is small when compared with cosmic time.

Historical time is also treated differently in China than in the West. The Western historian seeks to record events accurately and objectively so that in posterity lessons may be derived from his efforts. In traditional China, however, the recounting of past events may be altered without hesitation when the need arises. The Chinese also have historically regarded the writing of their predecessors as having unquestionable authority. Confucius tell us, "I do not invent, but merely transmit. . . . I believe in and love antiquity." [14] The timeless quality in Chinese thought is exemplified most profoundly in Lao Tzu's, *Tao Teh Ch'ing* (6 B.C.), where the Tao ("Way") is nameless, external, immutable, and infinite, a fundamental unity present in the universe which operates outside of space and time.

India and China have in common a view of time as unraveling like a ball of twine rolled across a table top. In the Arab world a similar feeling exists, but there the table top is the desert of the Arabian Peninsula--birthplace of Islam.

T. E. Lawrence, in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, credited the desert as an insulating factor in preserving Arab morals and politics, and remarked on its influence on religion and time. The Bedouin, for example, in his collective mentality, could not conceive of anything not being God, not involved with the manna of God. "Being," said Lawrence, was simply "the egg of all activity, with nature and matter just a glass reflecting him." [15] In terms of time, there is a constant "everydayness" because the Arab would not conceive of anything which was or was not God. [16] God was "their eating and their fighting and their lusting, the commonest of their thoughts, their familiar resource and companion." [17] In this way God was time, as nothing was outside of the notion of God. Time, as Einstein has pointed out, is not absolute, but relative to one's conceptions. For the Arab, the vast and shifting nature of the desert symbolizes oneness with God and a rhythm opposite that of the West and its conception of time.

Time in Arab music is expressed in the individuality of the performer, who demonstrates a higher originality than his Western counterpart, according to Jacques Berque in *The Arab: Their History and Future*. He describes how the Arab may:

step aside from the orchestra and improvise for an hour or even two. It was thus, they say, that the future star, Abd al-Wahhab first shone. . . . He began to improvise, to modulate in that manner which disconcerts the Western listener, but which brought the singer his force. [18]

To perform this way one must be, in a sense, "outside of time." This disregard for time is also seen in a lesser need to keep appointments, or to rendezvous at meetings and conferences. Raphael Patai, in *The Arab Mind*, cited an example of how an important meeting may close hours or days behind schedule, and how nothing may be accomplished in the Western sense:

[A committee] would reach a deadlock; it would refer the issue to the Foreign Ministers to decide on it; a deadlock would be reached here also; and the issue would be referred to the Prime Ministers; these, in turn, because of their inability to reach a decision, would refer the decision to the Summit Conference. By the time the issue is finally resolved it is too late, and the conference eventually comes out with a unanimous general decision which--more often than not--would not be implemented by the member states. [19]

Time, then, in the Arab culture carries the vacuousness of the Indian yuga, for as the Holy Quran tells us:

He rules [all] affairs
From the heavens,
To the earth: in the end
Will [all affairs] go up
To Him, on a Day,
The space whereof will be
As a thousand years
Of your reckoning. [20]

Time, measured on the plane of this life, does not equal time on the spiritual plane, where the "twinkling of an eye . . . will be seen as a thousand years." [21]

One attempt to explain the operation of time in non-Western cultures is recorded in C. G. Jung's theory of "Synchronicity," which incorporates the phenomenon of coincidence. This is important as it relates to human action, and may account for decisions that appear as irrational to the West.

Broadly speaking, Synchronicity is a meaningful coincidence as opposed to simply a coincidence; the former suggests connections that are beyond our immediate and limited knowledge. The following example illustrates the difference between coincidence and meaningful coincidence:

1. An aircraft crashes at the same time a person blows his nose. Such would be a *coincidence of events with no meaning*.
2. A woman buys a blue dress and, by mistake, the shop delivers a black one on the day a dear relative dies. In

this case, the events are *meaningfully connected*; the two events are not causally related, but they are symbolically related.

Jung developed his theory of Synchronicity while studying the Orient. He saw causal connections as only statistical truths and therefore not absolute. Synchronicity "takes the coincidence of events in space and time as meaning something more than mere chance.[22] For Jung, nothing in the archaic world is left to chance.[23] No statistic-gathering exists as in the modern world, and without the aid of statistics, the relationship between cause and effect cannot be validated. Here, spirit is outside of space and time. A special instance is the spirit of the age, which stands for the principle and motive force behind certain views, judgments, and actions of a collective nature.[24]

Conclusion

The sense of vision called for in the introduction to this article is derivative of the Buddha's wisdom eye (*prajnacaksus*), and the third eye of Siva that gives the unifying vision. To see to the heart of the matter in any particular low-intensity conflict is, more than ever, required of senior leadership and policymakers charged with the responsibilities of guiding the nation with skill and care.

Unfortunately, philosophers of culture, cultural anthropologists, and others are frequently overlooked as indirect contributors to strategy and policy formulation. Their insights into the ways of being of other peoples are invaluable for the long-range forecasting and prediction required for foreign policy vision. This article does not suggest that leaders should attempt to cover the vast intellectual ground of culture and time themselves, but that such an appreciation is fundamentally relevant to the times in which we live when the survival of Western institutions in their current form may be in question. It is also fundamental to problems one can encounter in failed or failing states, where the military instrument does not necessarily prevail.

NOTES

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19. Leila S. Kadi, *Arab Summit Conferences and the Palestinian Problem (1936-1950) (1964-1966)*, Palestine Books No. 4 (Beirut: Research Centre, Palestine Liberation Organization, 1966), p. 189, in Patai, p. 241.
20. A. Yusef Ali, trans., *The Holy Quran* (Maryland: Amana Corp., 1983), n. 3634, XXXII.5, p. 1093.
21. Ibid.
22. This and subsequent references to C.G. Jung's work, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Collected Works* (C.W.) second edition, 20 vols., Princeton Univ. Press. Foreword to the *I-Ching*, C.W. 11: 972 (592).
23. "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle" (1955), C.W. 8: 501 (94); also Marian L Pauson, *Jung the Philosopher* (Bern: Peter lang, 1988), 31-43; Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, trans. Lilian A. Clare (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925), pp. 73-74.
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