Restoring Priority on Cultural Skill Sets for Modern Military Professionals

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ABSTRACT: The Department of Defense has failed to distinguish and sustain cultural education relative to foreign language and regional expertise, putting servicemembers at a competitive disadvantage in developing skills to engage other cultures. This article draws on recent retrospective publications and multidisciplinary social science perspectives but goes beyond them to argue for social science approaches to culture, department-wide efforts to revive culture education, and an improved transition of sociocultural research to practice. Policy and military practitioners will benefit from understanding how culture-general skills complement other important skills in the human domain and from implementing its recommendations.

Keywords: culture, human domain, cross-cultural competence, military education

Participation in the war on terrorism obliged America's military professionals to confront complex human relations challenges. In contrast to their world-class instruments of annihilation, they were ill-equipped to deal with the trenchant human relations issues they regularly faced. They lacked the abilities to communicate effectively, recognize patterns and cues of social dynamics in unfamiliar cultural circumstances, understand cultural implications for mission success, and draw from a conceptual inventory of options for action. Even at the lower end of the conflict spectrum, these deficiencies could have lethal consequences (for example, the US failure to distinguish an Afghan rural wedding procession from an insurgent convoy or an earlier UN failure in Bosnia when a Dutch battalion failed to anticipate, recognize, or prevent a genocidal spree by Bosnian Serb militias in Srebrenica in 1995).[1]

When confronted with the cultural challenges of early twenty-first-century conflict, America's military leaders reacted with initiatives to acquire new and badly needed intercultural capabilities. Yet, just as those initiatives matured after a decade of effort, official attention and resources shifted again, and much of what had been built was dismantled. This was the third time in 75 years that almost the same process had occurred. Gifted Marine Corps University scholars

Kerry B. Fosher and Lauren Mackenzie chronicled the latest story in an edited work that leaves an unsettling sense of what might have been, and they suggest the process will be repeated in the future when sophisticated cross-cultural skills are again recognized as essential and missing military capabilities.[2]

Within a dynamic security environment, the need for cross-cultural competence has not diminished, and the US military continues to concede a competitive advantage in the human domain. This article advocates for a restart of the early twenty-first-century culture initiatives, with an emphasis on culture science. There are two key implications of this argument. First, it is possible to provide America's military professionals with conceptual tools that will allow them to get inside the heads (and decision cycles) of friends, uncommitted onlookers, and foes and understand, anticipate, and impact behavior for mission success. The second implication is that this expertise is not dependent on language skills or detailed prior knowledge of a foreign society, even though those skills add critical value.

This article describes how the US military has tried to come to grips with culture skills, has distinguished them from language and regional expertise, yet has seemingly abandoned culture skill to a trajectory of terminal decline. It then outlines the continuing importance of culture skills and offers recommendations for restoring the lost initiative. Rather than attempt a comprehensive historical review of cultural capability programs, this article focuses on educating and training military forces to understand and navigate other cultures.

General Background

In the aftermath of the al-Qaeda attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States faced novel threats, a situation worsened by the Iraq War two years later. Working in coalitions of partners with diverse organizational cultures and agendas presented challenges that were not new to the American military experience yet were problematic.[3]

Adversaries from America's long and painful conflict in southeast Asia were barely remembered. The new opponents were often amorphous, difficult to define, and increasingly skilled in asymmetric warfare against their technologically superior foes. They grew competent at information operations and the manipulation of modern media. They proved clever at exploiting ties of ethnicity, kinship, affinity, class, ideology, historical narrative, and educational cohort. They rarely fielded conventional military forces and could shift allegiance in reaction to important events and actors. They committed atrocities to intimidate local populations and energize attentive publics. While fluid,

opposition alliances and networks were often transnational, and host-nation civilians' all-important "hearts and minds" proved elusive.[4]

Problems on the ground prompted initiatives across the Department of Defense (DoD). At first, America's military leaders established a new vision and strategy to acquire and manage language skills, promulgating a *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* in early 2005. While commendable and necessary, the roadmap never satisfied demands from the field for greater foreign language capability. By the time of its publication, the services had concluded they needed something more.[5]

By 2007, all the services had inaugurated programs, including service culture centers, to generate the skills they believed they needed, and they engaged relevant experts in intensive cross-service communications and conferences to share ideas, expertise, experiences, and findings. The centers played a central role in service culture initiatives for more than a decade, but each service embarked on a different approach.

The Marine Corps emphasized pre-deployment training and integrated culture and regional studies in a career-long education program. Its Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning also harnessed a robust and effective effort to gather and integrate lessons learned from ongoing operations. The Navy's Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) Program and the Army's TRADOC (Training and Doctrine Command) Culture Center also emphasized pre-deployment training, but the Army invested its efforts into integrating contracted culture experts in tactical units in Afghanistan and Iraq—the Human Terrain System. Although resource intensive, the Human Terrain System proved controversial in academe and struggled to recruit qualified subject matter experts. After modest achievements, the program ended in 2014. The Air Force also offered pre-deployment culture training, through the Air Force Culture and Language Center. By 2009, the Air Force had also embarked on a remarkable long-term program to infuse its entire professional military education (PME) suite with culture content through an Air University Quality Enhancement Program.[6]

Through the culture centers, all the services expanded their emphasis from "just-in-time" pre-deployment training to long-term education of the entire force through PME programs. Accompanying directives from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Staff mandated culture education and established a framework for assessing and managing culture skills.[7]

By 2015, the US service culture programs had matured, but the centers faced significant obstacles. Senior leader support was, at best, inconsistent within PME establishments. The centers struggled to recruit culture scientists to operationalize and teach culture skills. At the outset, they also lacked empirical assessment methods to show learning achievement. Over time, the Air Force and Marine Corps culture centers progressed in developing and applying assessment tools, but the results were preliminary when the work ended.[8]

Although they did not meet all the hopes of their supporters, the culture centers achieved a much better definition of human relations challenges and a clearer understanding of the "art of the possible" in meeting them. Some new culture education had appeared in professional military education. The new curriculum seemed permanent and likely to produce some enhanced capability at the foundational level. Nevertheless, this early promise did not convince the skeptics and sustain the needed resources to progress to skill set maturity. By 2024, much of what was built had vanished. The sole remaining service culture center is the Air Force Culture and Language Center, which, among other roles, conducts an annual symposium to sustain collaboration within the LREC community.[9]

The Arrival of the Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Rubric

One change in military skill development after 2010 was a new interest in culture "at the top," regarding policy. In 2011, the Office of the Secretary of Defense embraced a novel rubric for a range of necessary new skills— language, regional expertise, and culture. Direction from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (supplemented by Joint Staff documents) established the new skill sets as critical military resources, charging the military departments and combatant commands with developing and reporting on their availability— though they lacked methods to assess capabilities other than language and to hold the services accountable.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense mandates applied the oversight infrastructure established in the 2005 *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*, making the foreign language infrastructure responsible for regional expertise and culture. The Department of Defense's embrace of these new skills suggested promising future capabilities. The documents identified specific skills, desired outcomes, and proficiency levels in the different skill set categories, acknowledging variation in different servicemembers' needs and abilities.[10]

The Office of the Secretary of Defense's LREC formula outlined a triad of separate-but-related skill sets, a useful distinction, since each set develops through different processes and produces different outcomes. Each "leg" of the LREC triad has a different history in academe and the Department of Defense. Language and regional expertise communities long predated the arrival of cultural skill sets, so two of the three "legs" already had influential constituencies (detailed below). The culture community's constituency was—and is— nascent, small, dispersed, and vulnerable. Although desirable and the most lacking at the outset of the war on terrorism, culture skills were the easiest to snuff out as senior leader attention waned, priorities shifted toward Asia-Pacific threats, and little advocacy remained after the United States withdrew forces from Iraq in 2011.[11]

The vulnerability of the culture skill set within the Department of Defense can also be attributed to the dearth of culture scientists with the requisite incentive and skills to navigate the complex DoD policy infrastructure or to collaborate across the distinct social and behavioral science disciplines. Few behavioral science graduate programs share a vision for this type of praxis or encourage students to seek out these opportunities to serve. Some academic disciplines have an aversion to government service from a historical narrative of morally questionable government-academic involvements (for example, the use of social science for counterinsurgency in Project Camelot in the 1960s).[12]

Distinguishing Culture in the Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Triad

Before arguing for the importance of culture skills and noting reasons for their institutional vulnerability, we first compare the status and roles of the different LREC skill sets.

Language

Foreign language had a secure and influential DoD constituency before the war on terrorism, which grew following the promulgation of the *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* in 2005. A flag-level senior language authority (SLA) directly subordinate to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness oversees DoD language equities. The senior language authority chairs a Defense Language Steering Committee with participation by senior representatives in the services, combatant commands, and national intelligence agencies. In the LREC world, language gave an early and clear impression of being first among equals.

The Department of Defense's world-class Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center has produced a steady stream of language-enabled service

personnel for decades. After 2005, in compliance with the roadmap, the Department of Defense also increased its emphasis on recruiting native speakers, encouraged language learning in pre-accession and service education, and increased financial incentives for servicemembers who maintained their language skills.

Fluency in foreign languages is a critical military resource at all levels of rank and across the entire conflict continuum. Notwithstanding the efforts to acquire and manage language resources more effectively since 2005, America's military has struggled to produce and distribute militarily qualified foreign language speakers, and many of them are absorbed by the Intelligence Community. Given the intelligence agencies' requirements and limitations of personnel assignment processes, this situation is unlikely to change soon. The impossibility of predicting future language requirements with precision and the length of the language learning process make it difficult to build a sudden "surge" capability to produce militarily competent speakers of newly needed languages.[13]

Language may be a critical resource, but its inventory and distribution limitations suggest a need for other communication options. Service personnel engaged in no-notice contingency operations may benefit from emerging machine translation technologies. Other options include proficiency in working with interpreters and mature cross-cultural communications capabilities, which are foundational culture skills.

Regional Expertise

Before the war on terrorism, regional expertise, like language, was already a present and valued skill set with several different DoD constituencies. Regional expertise is a detailed familiarity with a particular geographic region and an ability to use this understanding effectively in military roles.

Foreign area officers (FAOs) formed the most visible US military community of regional experts in the early twenty-first century. These officers were carefully selected, mature specialists developed by each of the services. Their expertise was built on a foundation of language learning, graduate education, and on-site regional exposure, a multiyear educational process. Embassies, intelligence agencies, and high-level staffs valued this small community. The 2005 *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* and later DoD policy emphasized the importance of the FAO specialists. The Department of Defense also had small communities of officer and enlisted regionalists in intelligence and special operations roles.[14]

The new LREC mandates signaled that regional expertise was not limited to the specialized communities and, while lauding the FAOs, implied the source of regional expertise was not critical. They identified a need for the expertise, specified the levels of capability, and noted the expected performance at each level.

While the Department of Defense values regional expertise, it also has limits. Understanding regional dynamics does not imply an ability to engage in more granular levels of analysis and navigate interpersonal interactions effectively. Additionally, familiarity with a particular region does not necessarily translate beyond geographic boundaries. For example, FAOs with expertise in Central America cannot necessarily apply that expertise in Central Asia. No matter how many regional experts a planning staff has, research has shown that experts are unskilled at anticipating a future contingency environment. Nor can one assume the US military will be able to find experts for all contingency environments in a timely manner.[15]

In future foreign interventions, America's expeditionary military will likely deal with unanticipated microcultures for which advanced preparation was impossible. This scenario is not the only context in which regional skills may be stretched. One can imagine a general war scenario featuring a temporary NATO command node containing Allied counterpart personnel from Finland, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom. Cross-cultural leadership in that context would be challenging and critical to strategic success. The only realistic preparation for such circumstances would be a kit of universally applicable conceptual tools—a culture-general skill set.

Culture: The Missing Piece

After 2005, the Department of Defense placed renewed emphasis on language and regional expertise. In doing so, it could fall back on solid constituencies in the department that were already sold on the value of these skills. It could also activate a well-established developmental infrastructure. Nevertheless, the experiences of America's service personnel suggested the most glaring missing capability was the ability to deal with the human relations challenges they regularly encountered. While greater foreign language capability would have helped, the deployed forces also needed better conceptual tools to understand and deal with people, individually and collectively, for mission success. These culture skills had no prior DoD constituency and had little educational content in service education before 2005.

The missing constituency would presumably have comprised a critical mass of behavioral and social scientists to define and operationalize culture skills,

apply them to service personnel's needs, and infuse them in development programs from pre-accession education through the senior service colleges. This community did not exist in 2005; today it exists only as a dispersed group in limited numbers.[16]

Beyond the defense context, the broader culture science community applies behavioral and social science tools to understand and enable interaction with multiple cultures. Culture science draws from the anthropology, sociology, psychology, cultural geography, and communications disciplines, among others. Culture is suited to scientific inquiry because human belief and behavior occur in repeatable patterns worldwide, making them amenable to scientific analysis, categorization, and prediction. Someone familiar with those patterns who can interpret observed cues and has an inventory of potential responses should be able to apply that expertise anywhere without prior exposure to a region.

While cultural patterns and cues can be learned, applying that expertise in security settings requires a foundation of personal attributes such as self-awareness, cognitive flexibility, and empathy and the ability to adapt without adopting and suspend judgment while maintaining a firm handle on cross-cultural communication skills. Fosher and Mackenzie's culture-general guidebook provides a recent compilation of necessary operational skills military personnel can develop through education and experience (see table 1).[17]

Table 1. Foundational culture-general skills

Foundational Culture-General Skills
Suspending judgment
Developing self-regulation
Cultivating perspective taking
Developing intercultural communication skills
Building rapport
Managing culture shock
Working with an interpreter

These attributes require development over time and are the prerequisite tools in the culture kit. It is difficult to use the more advanced tools without these foundational attributes. Most of the culture content in military education remains at this foundational level—a significant improvement over the situation in 2005, but still far from the skill set's true potential.

The more advanced culture skills address cultural dynamics that impact the strategic or operational environment and include the ability to use cues

to recognize patterns of thinking and behavior (or find them through astute questioning); draw from an inventory of approaches to build relations; solve problems; and impact behavior for mission success. See table 2 for examples of the relevant cultural dynamics that advanced observers would seek out. The patterns could include the local cultural norms of leadership, authority and legitimacy, local decision-making processes, patron-client networks, information networks, sources of local instability, ideological commitments, and degrees of resistance to change.

Table 2. Dynamics for advanced culture-general skills

Dynamics for Advanced Culture-General Skills
Social ties, including kinship, affinity, residential proximity, religion/ideology, recreation, class, and political connectedness
Local conceptions of prestige, legitimacy, and exercise of authority
Nature and characteristics of local elites
Male-female relations and societal gender tensions
Recent social upheaval (if any) and prevalence in local society of pathologies such as narcissism, psychopathy, and sociopathy
Processes of individual and collective decision making and the degree to which individual decisions are embedded in community consensus
Patron-client networks, including obligations and expectations
Information networks, including the identity/nature of information gatekeepers and influence brokers
Circumstances and sources of local grievance, resentment, insecurity, and instability
Local conceptions of threats to lives, livelihoods, and values
Tolerance of change and the nature of resistance to change
Role of the supernatural, sources and nature of evil, sorcery, and taboos
Local conceptions of disease, health, and healing

Cross-cultural competence is a shorthand expression for a set of interrelated culture-general skills. Typical, mature individuals can be expected to have an intuitive grasp of their society's norms, values, and expectations. These individuals are "culturally competent" in their society. Individuals who can also function in the social environment of a second society could be described as "cross-culturally" or "inter-culturally" competent. That kind of culturally generalizable competence was among the goals of some culture programs. Rather than a narrow focus on culture-specific knowledge for one country or culture, culture-general skills can be applied anywhere, in combination with relevant culture-specific preparation, in any circumstance. Such skills might

include the ability to recognize local conceptions of authority, the connections that bind individuals and groups in webs of obligation, degrees of autonomy in individual choices, and the local processes for collective decision making. That recognition would be accompanied by an inventory of techniques for intercepting those processes for mission success.[18]

These cultural skills are distinct from the regional studies that were well established in service education by the turn of the century. Regional studies, often taught by international relations scholars, familiarize students with the details of US interests and involvements, other nation-states and their interests, international organizations, regional and local conflicts, regional histories, politics, societies, natural environments, economies, and other similar topics. Cross-cultural competence, the province of behavioral scientists, addresses getting inside the heads and decision cycles of groups with culturally distinctive norms and values. The two domains draw from different lines of scholarship and produce different educational outcomes (specifically, more knowledge outcomes for regional studies versus skill outcomes for cross-cultural competence). Professional military education has sometimes conflated culture-specific and regional studies, defaulting to regional studies alone and describing that as culture education.[19]

Fusion of Language, Retional Expertise, and Culture

Culture skills warrant a greater emphasis in service education to equip service personnel with a capability that fully complements language and regional understanding. Professional military education should support advancing military personnel beyond the foundational to the more advanced culture skills the operational environment requires. Given the Department of Defense's range of consumers, some may be more interested in language skills, others in regional expertise, and still others in culture skills. Regardless, most military practitioners would be more effective if they could combine each LREC skill set appropriate to their missions and roles.

Where Are US Defense Institutions on Culture Now?

Reduced resources for culture followed a decline in US strategic emphasis on counterinsurgency and stability operations in the Middle East. The implications of reduced resources and senior leader attention are apparent in the current state of culture in defense education and training institutions. Advocacy for, and subject matter expertise in, culture show these losses.

Advocacy

When the services began reducing resources for their culture programs after 2012, they did not discard all the tangible accomplishments. Instead, the loss of focused attention the service culture centers had provided slowed the previously vigorous development efforts. Other organizational sources of cultural expertise similarly dissolved. Although the Air Force Culture and Language Center remains, the Army closed the TRADOC Culture Center, the Asymmetric Warfare Group, and its University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies (Red Team Education). The burden of advocating for the skills, guarding the content, and developing it further shifted onto the small and dispersed PME community of subject matter experts. Funding for culture initiatives did not last long enough to establish the DoD constituencies characteristic of the language and regional expertise communities.[20]

Content and Expertise

This critical problem was more profound than adding new professors or including more content in service education. Sadly, a comprehensive, mature inventory of conceptual culture tools did not exist. Usable curriculum content and exercises for military education were foundational at best. The full potential of this resource was far from realization. The culture initiatives had not been pursued long enough to muster enough experts to develop and refine a tool kit. While the culture content in professional military education had improved in scope and quantity, the community could no longer push beyond foundational skills. The service culture centers had many limitations, but they had served as laboratories for marrying culture science to DoD consumers' requirements for the expeditionary military by assembling subject matter experts willing to collaborate and share results among the culture communities.

As funding for culture centers declined, the availability and capacity of culture-oriented social scientists to influence policy also declined, resulting in a misalignment of culture skill sets in different defense-wide policies. Where there had been an emerging consensus around the aims of culture education, fragmentation reemerged. The collaborations across services and social science disciplines plummeted as organizations sponsored fewer formal opportunities to meet, advance, and disseminate research and best practices. Cultural skills models had proliferated without corresponding developmental recommendations or methods to assess gaps or strengths in servicemembers' abilities.

Culture-related DoD efforts have not equipped the expeditionary military with the ability to understand the cultural environment of an operational area quickly, establish rapport with supporters and noncommitted local societies, influence local elites, disincentivize opposition, and disarm hostile elements. In the US military's shift from irregular warfare toward large-scale and precision combat, the potential of culture remains unfulfilled, and opportunity is slipping away again.[21]

Across the spectrum from competition to conflict, the human domain is critical. Cultural capability holds the promise of a skill set as useful as any other wielded by America's military professionals, material or conceptual, and may be critical to their success in a complex, information-driven world. Within the conceptual capacities of its personnel, the Department of Defense must incorporate and sustain the cultural skill set required to achieve intellectual and competitive overmatch.

Where Do We Go from Here?

A focused and lasting approach to a military cultural skill set cannot be achieved without close attention to management, curriculum content, and the translation of research to practice. To succeed, several critical features are needed to ensure focus and alignment, including high-level sponsorship, an updated strategic plan, a culture talent pipeline, and a Defense Culture Center.

High-Level Sponsorship

The Department of Defense places responsibility for overseeing LREC (including culture) on a senior language authority in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, who, in turn, chairs a Defense Language Steering Committee responsible for reviewing and providing recommendations on "foreign language, regional expertise, and cultural capability training, education, personnel, and financial requirements." Although policy requires the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to produce an annual review to ensure DoD components meet the capability needs in each LREC subfield (language, regional expertise, and culture), the steering committee's focus prioritizes foreign language. The subordination of culture to foreign language program management within the Defense Human Resources Activity may render the culture equities too distant to impact professional military education or operational culture requirements.[22]

The Department of Defense needs a senior-level advocate for culture. It may be too much to suggest creating a senior *culture* authority (SCA) as a counterpart

to the senior language authority, but perhaps a position of that description could serve as a permanent deputy to the senior language authority. The role of a visionary advocate "at the top" with appropriate background and authority would make a tremendous difference to culture in the LREC paradigm.

An Updated Plan

The 2005 *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap* was (as the title claims) a transformative approach to language. It provided a vision and a strategy—ends, ways, and means. A similar instrument is needed even more for the culture domain of LREC.

The Department of Defense published the *Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities, 2011–2016*, followed by an implementation plan in 2014 but has not updated it as of this writing. Including culture under an LREC umbrella has not resulted in demonstrable progress. A credible and effective *Defense Culture Transformation Plan* should include collaboration among scholars and military practitioners with the passion and experience to connect requirements with solutions from culture science. An updated plan should also emphasize sustainable actions and oversight in a resource-constrained environment.[23]

Talent Pipeline

The vulnerability of LREC's culture component is partly due to the difficulty of recruiting culture scientists. This shortage has retarded the development of conceptual tools and assessment methodology and has prevented "culture" from developing the kind of constituency found in the language and regional communities. Policymakers and academia must prioritize recruitment and allocate positions for culture scientists. It will be a hard sell for current academics, and problems with recruiting behavioral and social scientists may continue. Funding for military officers to attend graduate civilian education in the cultural and social sciences would ensure the Department of Defense does not rely solely on civilian academe for a consistent talent pipeline. If the Department of Defense wants good culture scientists and can afford some patience, it may have to grow its own.[24]

A Defense Culture Center

Whatever other proposals leadership considers, a Defense Culture Center should be the capstone. Only a national center with its own funding could permanently garner, maintain, and protect the expertise needed to implement

the shared vision of a culturally competent military. This center would enable the Department of Defense to assemble the culture expertise necessary to integrate research with professional development. The center can pick up where previous efforts stalled by advancing methods to assess culture skills in education and training settings—a necessary step for service compliance with existing policy mandates.

This center could lead efforts to involve civilian academic institutions on educational approaches and talent pipelines, freeing and supporting the services to conduct education and professional development. Additionally, the center could participate in outreach to ensure transparency and gather input from external stakeholders. The military must engage the public and the academic community to avoid the pitfalls of its previous use of social and behavioral science (such as Project Camelot and the Human Terrain System).

A Defense Culture Center could combine science and praxis in a way never previously packaged for delivery to military consumers. The Department of Defense has allocated approximately $20 million per year in funding to social science researchers through the Minerva Research Initiative. The program has struggled, however, to disseminate research to practitioners and educators. A Defense Culture Center could bridge that gap by soliciting the best science, marrying it to service needs, and creating the conceptual tools best suited to user requirements. A key role would be to tailor instructional material to PME institutions and pre-accession education. Future roles might include informing policy and offering faculty development. Partnering with existing centers or institutions like the Air Force Culture and Language Center or the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute may help advance an integrated LREC education and research center while building on past lessons.[25]

Conclusion

In this article, we provided examples of organizational achievements to enhance military cultural skill sets and have argued for reviving those efforts. Cultural capability is important across the competition and conflict continuum, and the Department of Defense can build on service culture centers' efforts to address the LREC skills military personnel need to work effectively across cultural boundaries, whether during conflict against an adversary or in interoperability with allies and partners. Had the military culture programs of the past 75 years continued, they would have harnessed the relevant science, perhaps pushed it further, and found better ways to operationalize it.

For American military life, partnerships and coalitions will be the norm for the foreseeable future. Cross-cultural competence is a prerequisite for productive relationships with allies and demands anticipatory, deliberate force development. Likewise, the ability to perceive "reality" as seen by opponents or societies in a conflict environment may be key to intelligent management of violence at all levels of engagement—not to mention conflict resolution. Success in that future will likely depend on cross-cultural skills—from the rifle squads to combatant commanders and their staff. Regarding culture skills, partial implementation and inconsistent resourcing represent missed opportunities to prepare servicemembers for future foreign military involvements across the continuum of conflict. We cannot make the same mistakes again.

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