

Culture and Religion of Enemy

Introduction

The United States is not an Imperial country like ancient Rome, which conquered enemies and governed them, imposing its culture in place of theirs. America is unique in that it's a nation of laws built on the recognition of individual rights. The primacy of the individual (i.e. Property Rights, Religious Freedom) and the Rule of Law are the foundation of the United States as opposed to an overriding ethnicity or common cultural bias. America is a polyglot country, with cultural roots that can be connected with every major population on the planet. Primarily for this reason, we typically accept other cultures and religions. Even though we value certain core principles, Americans generally have a liberal attitude towards alien or “different” cultures – an attitude that can be exploited by an enemy who can use cultural sensitivities as an excuse to justify egregious human rights violations or even to gain a battlefield advantage. When faced with a choice, a thoughtful American will probably err on the side of accepting alien cultures and beliefs.

As a matter of national policy, cultural tolerance is normally a wise and prudent strategy when dealing with trading partners throughout the world. Unfortunately, an ideological devotion to tolerance results in policies that should be unacceptable to a conscientious person. For example, ignoring domestic human rights violations—such as female genital mutilation or human trafficking—for political expediency should be a cause for moral outrage.

Dealing with cultural and religious sensitivities becomes more complex on the battlefield, when a ham-fisted approach to these sensitivities can yield less than ideal military results. The political, cultural and religious characteristics of the enemy influence the development of rules of engagement for military forces. Rules of engagement exist for several reasons, including:

- To protect local noncombatants.
- To avoid giving the enemy propaganda victories.
- To avoid escalating or widening the conflict.

The following demonstrates this in different types of warfare.

Total war

The simplest sort of war to fight in this regard is when we are at war with a nation-state and the soldiers and population of that nation-state. In WWII we saw both cultural similarity and cultural disparity among our enemies. In our fight against Nazi Germany, cultural and religious sensitivity issues rarely arose, because the German culture and religion were very similar to ours. Our common heritage effectively made these issues a moot point on the battlefield. Conversely, with Japan, we were dealing with a vastly alien culture and religion; not surprisingly this enemy demonstrated inexplicable behavior on the battlefield. Many veterans of the bitter fighting in the Pacific considered this “the right kind of war,” where no quarter was asked for or given, and no one cared if

they committed atrocities against the enemy, which had a history of atrocities to atone for themselves. It seems the only serious nod towards cultural or religious sensitivity was that Americans considered the person of the Japanese Emperor off limits for military strikes. General MacArthur understood the Japanese relationship to their Emperor, and knew that the Emperor would be necessary for a successful post-war occupation. Other than this, no one much bothered to be sensitive to Japanese culture or religion. They certainly had no regard for ours, and many people sympathized with Admiral Bull Halsey, who flatly stated that by the time he was done, the only place where Japanese would be spoken was in Hell.

Coalition war

The problems of cultural and religious sensitivity become more difficult when we are allied with countries who share the culture and religion of the enemy. Examples of this would be the Korean War and Operation Desert Storm. In each case, essential allies in these conflicts were culturally and religiously identical or very similar to our enemies, and much different from ours. American soldiers must be aware that an affront to our enemy's culture or religion may also offend our allies, and thereby weaken the coalition. This can lead to unsound operational objectives, such as restricting the movements and dress habits of female service members in Arab countries.

On the upside, if cultural or religious sensitivities in these situations cause operation difficulties that unnecessarily endanger American lives, a wise on-site commander can step back from the issue and invite our allies in, under the theory that their beliefs created the difficulty, so let them deal with the consequences. Such a tactic has the advantage of avoiding actions that can be spun by a hostile media as typical American insensitivity. Our allies who share the enemy's culture can often get away with politically insensitive actions for which America would be vilified.

Counter Insurgency Operations (COIN)

Counter-insurgency (COIN) operations are actions taken by the existing government of a nation to contain and defeat an insurgency seeking to destabilize the government. COIN is even more sensitive to cultural and religious issues than coalition warfare. In COIN, Americans are trying to win the hearts and minds of a native population, frequently with either no or very weak native military support. In this case, there is no moral high ground available, and any cultural or religious insensitivity by American soldiers and American policy can be used as an effective propaganda weapon by the enemy. The American soldier is thus placed in a difficult position where battlefield victories can become political defeats. An astute enemy will use culturally sensitive landmarks as battlefield strong points or safe houses, giving him a substantial tactical advantage against the American soldier, who is often barely tolerated by the native noncombatants.

The Current Status

Senior military leaders today came up in the era of the cold war, where conflicts between superpowers were waged by proxy in client countries, and it was essential to be sensitive to the natives to avoid alienating them and

driving them into the arms of the enemy. This is no longer the case, as we engage in conflicts directly with antagonistic groups that are often at least tacitly supported by the local populations where we find ourselves engaged. Rules intended to avoid offending the sensitivities of the local population, such as observing the sanctity of religious property or segregating male and female roles, often have no discernible effect on the conflict and only interfere with our war fighting ability.

The US employment of its military has become steeped in the liberal's political correctness. Sensitized by nearly fifty years of cold war propaganda, it has become anathema to offend anyone because of their culture or religion – including our enemies. This places the American soldier at a disadvantage on the battlefield, and does not accurately address the realities of modern conflicts.

There's a tendency to apply the lessons and cultural sensitivities learned in Vietnam to modern conflicts. It's an axiom of military history that armies usually spend their time practicing for the last war. The US military has gone to great lengths to break this paradigm, through a program of education that makes the midlevel American officer the best prepared, most professional soldier in world history. The problem is that our civilian leadership has no such educational program, and uses the military in missions and objectives appropriate to the last war, despite modern realities. This leads to suboptimal results in the (often vague) objectives, and wasted resources and American blood. A misplaced understanding of the social and religious traditions of the enemy is just one facet of a much larger endemic problem with how our leaders view our military ventures.

Islamic enemy: The current Islamic enemy has identified the American cultural sensitivity as a weakness and has learned to exploit it. These are enemies who use civilians—particularly women and children—as human shields, knowing our forces will be reluctant to engage at the risk of innocent life. They've used religious centers as armories and fortifications, knowing that our rules of engagement have such places off limits. They have sought and received tacit sanction for egregious practices such as female genital mutilation in western host countries such as the United Kingdom, claiming cultural immunity. As prisoners, the enemy has demanded and received special treatment, such as specialized diets and religious provisions, at considerable cost to the US with no consideration returned for such leniency. The enemy has learned to game the media war, posturing for the cameras to claim victim status, sometimes to the point of creating false-flag events to be blamed on western forces.

To effectively counter these tactics, the United States leadership needs to recognize that cultural tolerance for people who seek to defeat us and those who support them should always be subordinated or deliberately disregarded in favor of accomplishing of the mission and the safety of our own fighting forces.

Correction toward the Ideal

In a perfect world, the culture and religion of the enemy would be irrelevant to a combat situation, except where such things could be exploited for a tactical or strategic advantage. For example, General Blackjack Pershing didn't consider political correctness in his actions against the Muslim Moros in Mindanao, where he executed captured combatants and buried them alongside pigs, allowing one prisoner to escape and report what had happened. This single act quelled much of the resistance of the Moros for decades, because it so egregiously offended the Moro sensibilities. We understand that today's battlefield is populated with noncombatants who

share the culture and religion of our enemies, and we seek to avoid alienating them. This consideration should never take priority over the ability of our soldiers to effectively prosecute the mission.

Civilian leadership must recognize and communicate that in many ways the war on Islamic terror is more similar to the war with Japan than the Vietnam war, where we are fighting not only a dedicated enemy, but also the culture that produced the enemy; a culture antithetical to the values of western civilization, committed to eliminating western civilization and replacing it with a worldwide Islamic Caliphate. If civilian leadership cannot define a military operation without hamstringing the military to refrain from offending the cultural or religious sensibilities of the enemy or the local population, that's an indication that a military option may not be the best solution for the situation at hand. Culture, religion and political correctness should be observed within reason, but should never dictate or restrict military operations, or place American soldiers in danger that results from unsound and untenable rules of engagement.

MilitaryValues.org Principles and Mission

The content of these topical white papers from MilitaryValues.org is aligned with the organization's principles and mission statement. At the core is the protection of America and the founding principles—mainly summarized by freedom and liberty for citizens and a federal government with limited and enumerated powers. All of this is made abundantly clear in our Constitution and the founder's many writings. The US military's role to protect this is made very clear by the oath that is taken by military officers today:

"I, [name], do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter. So help me God."

For details on the MilitaryValues.org principles and mission statement go to www.MilitaryValues.org.

About MilitaryValues.org

The effectiveness of the United States military has been significantly compromised over the last 20 years by social engineering and politically driven decisions. This is especially true and serious with military units that face front line combat duties. In stark terms, this problem has unnecessarily cost the lives of our front line men and women—while many more suffer various combat-related physical and mental traumas. And there are untold tangents of pain and loss suffered by families, fellow soldiers, and others.

Combat units, and those that support them, greatly benefit from a culture in which there is a focus of effectively prosecuting missions and wars—and rejects unnecessary risk to the military personnel. This culture creates trust

and increases effectiveness and loyalty—which is truly critical for the best shot at success in the complex and dangerous endeavor called combat. However on the other hand, if a military is constantly beat down by forces that do not care about its well-being—then a culture of distrust, failure, and despair will increasingly result. This second culture is what we have today in America’s military.

MilitaryValues.org exists to educate millions of citizens on what has gone wrong and how it can be reversed. We hope you will continue to our website and learn more!

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