

Cultural Summit II Keynote Speaker Remarks
Fort Huachuca, AZ
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As Delivered

(Slide 1) Thank you MG (John) Custer... I am really excited to be here because developing leaders is one of the most important things we do and cultural “astute-ness” is one of the most important qualities that we need to develop in our leaders in the 21st Century.

(Slide 2) About this time last month, our Army published FM 3-0, Operations. Two of the critical takeaways from our new manual include the assumption that the future will be characterized by persistent conflict around the globe which may require our involvement and perhaps intervention in order to protect national security interests. Additionally, our Army has recognized in this manual that Stability Operations are as important as Offensive and Defensive Operations and in this era of persistent conflict, Stability Operations will play a critical role in maintaining security. (Slide 3) An inherent piece in Stability Operations is working among the people to build or rebuild their nation. These operations will inevitably possess some cultural challenges. Let’s face it, even when service members of our country come together, there are challenges.

For instance, in the US military standards of military bearing are different. Our Navy is very, very strict about the separation between officers and enlisted personnel with a variety of different facilities. When responding to an order in the Navy the Petty Officer shouts “Aye Sir” while in the Air Force, the response is usually “sure Jim whatever you say!”

(Slide 4) Telling time is also different, In the Navy, 6PM is 4 bells, In the Marines it is 1800 hours, (Slide 5) in the Air Force it is “Crew Rest” and in the Army.... (Slide 6) It is Mickey’s little hand is at the 6.

But in all seriousness... if we experience these kinds of challenges between uniformed services of the same country, you can appreciate the challenges we face when we conduct operations abroad.

(Slide 7) Our challenges will be numerous when we operate in a culture that is vastly different from our own.... There is a culture gap with a people who speak a different language... have different customs... and... religion... and values. We must constantly contend with a large cultural gap.

(Slide 8) The key to crossing this cultural gap is through building relationships by developing leaders who are culturally astute. Being culturally astute requires three basic elements, (1) Skills, (2) Knowledge, and arguably most important... (3) Attitude and Motivation. We believe that Skills and Knowledge MUST be specifically tailored to the area of operation and only Attitude/ Motivation have the generality to be truly cross cultural. (Slide 9) Today I would like to address how the right blend of Skills, Knowledge and Attitude/ Motivation can lead to the building of strong cross cultural relationships and that success in a stability operation will be greatly enhanced by those relationships. A critical thing to remember about developing relationships is that it isn't what we intend to do or say that matters as much as what we do and what they perceive are our intentions and motivations. With the right set of skills, knowledge and attitude we can ensure that the message we intend to convey is the message the people receive.

Skills

(Slide 10) Skills are the first critical component of cultural "astute-ness". Key among these skills must be language. Lack of a language skill or lack of USE of those skills can send an unintended message of arrogance to the people we interact with. When we make no attempt to learn any of the local language or use it, we can inadvertently convey a message to the people that we don't care about their culture... that we are here to impose OUR culture on them. While it

would be ideal to have every Soldier in theater fluent in the indigenous language, we all know that is impractical. It takes months if not years of diligent study to become proficient in a language. Additionally, we are searching for a set of skills that will make our leaders capable of operating across cultures...to be able to operate in an Arabic speaking culture now, but be prepared to and capable of operating somewhere else later.

At any rate, Language fluency is not essential for every Soldier; rather what is essential is a rudimentary grasp of the language and a willingness to use it. Remember, we are working on building relationships here and speaking some of the language is the first step towards establishing interpersonal relationships. The indigenous people do not expect us to be Arabs or scholars of the Quran. When our leaders use as much of the local language as they can, they demonstrate a willingness to learn from the indigenous population, it demonstrates a respect for the local people and places the interaction on equal ground avoiding the creation of a perception of American superiority. The people will then be more apt to forgive faux pas in other areas of their culture like showing the sole of the foot or extending the left hand.

Language skills are a combat multiplier – and with squads and platoons operating among the people this skill set becomes even more critical. If this is in fact true – how much time do we spend on language training? Does every unit going to Iraq or Afghanistan spend as much time on language skills as weapons proficiency? Should they?

Knowledge –

(Slide 11) It is not enough to have some language skills, our leaders and military members must also have some cultural knowledge of the area... knowledge that provides a solid context and aids them in using those language skills and provides an understanding of the history, culture and religion for maximum effect. American's are for the most part grossly ignorant of other cultures. This ignorance is as much a product of our geography as it is a lack of necessity to understand others. (Slide 12) The American culture and people are

arguably more isolated culturally than many other people of the world. Driving across the US from North to South, it is almost 1800 miles from Canada to Mexico. In comparison to Europe that would be equivalent to driving from the heart of the United Kingdom to the tip of the boot of Italy. Along that journey, you cross through four distinct countries with four distinct cultures including different languages, cuisine, architecture and different currencies.

That is just a north to south analysis. Our country's isolation from east to west is even more acute.... Because once you travel the almost 3000 miles east to West, or vice versa, you haven't reached a different culture, or country, but a vast ocean that now you must further traverse in order to experience a different culture.

Knowing this, we must make a conscious effort to learn about other countries, their cultures, especially those where we may have military forces operating. One of the best examples of a leader who possessed this knowledge is LTC (now COL (P)) Chris Hughes. (Slide 13) He studied the area he was going to operate in and it paid off. He was the Battalion Commander in the 101st Airborne Division during the initial ground invasion and push to Baghdad. On the way to the capital he was ordered to take the city of Najaf. In Najaf stood one of the holiest landmarks for Shiite Moslems, The Grand Ali Mosque. The key Imam of the city residing in the mosque was the Ayatolla Ali al Sistani and Chris Hughes knew that if he could get Sistani to issue a fatwa (religious decree) to his people, he could essentially sail through the rest of any Shi'ite cities and territory on his way to Baghdad. Therefore, he decided to go to the mosque and confer with the Ayatollah. However, on the way, an angry mob gathered and blocked his way chanting and growing more hostile by the minute. Chris didn't panic, instead, he quickly appraised the situation, correctly surmised that the crowd was only concerned about protecting the mosque and he did something which is very hard for a Soldier in a "sticky" situation to do... he used restraint... a critical skill that is essential in the 21st Century. So what did he do? First, he told his Soldiers to point their weapons down at the ground... then he had his Soldiers

take a knee... some of the Iraqis also took a knee.... then he did something that is in no Army manual I have ever read.... He told his soldiers to SMILE! In the end, the crowd quieted and he removed his force, later that evening he meet with Sustani's emissaries and a fatwa was issued.

How was Chris Hughes able to confidently issue those orders..., because he had studied the Iraqi people? You bet - both before deployment and even while in country, to include reaching out to his Iraqi-American translator. Chris got it! He understood the importance of using every element of combat power and being culturally astute was essential to his operations.

But having some language skills and knowledge are not enough. The other element which helped LTC Hughes succeed was his attitude and motivation

Attitude and Motivation communicated through non verbal cues

(Slide 14) As stated earlier, Attitude and motivation are key elements... but even more importantly, what matters is what the indigenous people perceive them to be. In order to effectively communicate across cultures we must fully understand the elements of effective communication and the one we typically don't do well as Americans, is understanding non-verbal cues. We are a very low context culture where what you say is generally what you mean regardless of how you say it. So we are not very good at reading or using non verbal cues and this has a direct effect on what the indigenous people perceive.

Non verbal cues send a message to our audience about our attitude and motivation and that is why they are so incredibly important.... perhaps even more important than language skills.

First, we can unintentionally communicate nonverbally an attitude of impatience. We probably don't even realize we are doing it and that is because we have an inherent lack of true understanding of our own culture. If we don't

fully understand our own culture, how can we expect to understand other cultures? The first and most important thing to understand about our culture is that we are an impatient people. Once we understand this about ourselves, we must understand that other cultures of the world are not so impatient. In fact, the areas of the world where we are currently operating are some of the most patient cultures on the planet. The Islamic Culture subscribes to the axiom “Insha’ Allah” which loosely translated means god or Allah wills it. To us westerners, it is a very laissez-faire attitude about life.... To them, it is normal. To them it is god’s timeline, not theirs. (Slide 15) T.E. Lawrence said it best “Go easy for the first few weeks... something that is very difficult for mission focused leaders, but if we do not... A bad start is difficult to atone for and the Arabs form their judgments on externals that we ignore.

(Slide 16) Our impatience or mission focus leads us to place business and task above pleasure. This creates a perception that we do not personally care about others. We unintentionally send a message that we care more about tasks and missions than people. Many cultures of the world, including the ones we currently operate in, place developing interpersonal relationships or pleasure, in many cases ahead of business. This is why it is said it takes at least three cups of tea to get anything accomplished in the Arab world. As Mortenson and Relin say in their book Three Cups of Tea, “the first time you share a cup of tea you are a stranger, the second time you are an honored guest and the third time, you are family.”

Arrogance and Aires of Superiority

(Slide 17) A second thing we may unintentionally communicate nonverbally is a sense of arrogance or superiority. We tend to approach a problem or situation with a set of preconceived notions and solutions. We rarely consult and confer at length with the people about a problem before we start trying to solve it.... And we normally tend to apply a western solution to that problem. Most individuals tend to view events, actions and people through the

lens of their own culture and experiences – but we cannot afford to while deployed. Additionally, how do we get the perspective of the indigenous people? How many TOC's in Iraq and Afghanistan turn on Iraqi or Afghan TV news stations to get their perspective of the news... or read local papers? Most writings on a region are by "western" authors so therefore, the writings may tend to have an unintended western perspective. As we analyze problems in the region, we do so with a western bias and therefore tend to attempt to apply western solutions. This causes two problems. First, we ignore or miss some of the complex and intricate cultural details which might have caused the problem in the first place and it creates a perception that we are superior and want to impose our solutions around the world. Consulting with the people may reveal some issues we hadn't thought about... some solutions that might work better or even more importantly that they take ownership of and want to see achieved. We must never forget that they have the total cultural context of the issue... a deep understanding we can never have. On the 21st Century battlefield we may have to redefine our understanding of "C2." Perhaps in this environment, "command and control" should be replaced by "collaboration and consultation." (Slide 18) Again, T.E. Lawrence understood this almost a hundred years ago! He said "Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them.

(Slide 19) I think we can all agree we know what we want in a culturally astute leader. We want leaders who have some language skills, knowledge of the area and culture, a good attitude and motivation to work with the indigenous people. How do we develop these leaders? First,

- We must develop leaders with a mindset that recognizes the importance of these attributes
- We need to inculcate them into our education and our school systems and require officers to be more culturally astute in an area of the world.

- We need to do a better job of preparing our leaders after they are notified of a deployment and they know the culture they will be operating in.

Finally and most importantly, we need to instill in our leaders the right attitude and motivation... a heart of a helper... a willingness to listen, to be patient, to understand others. It must be an attitude that searches for the problems with the people... that teaches them to fish for themselves... rather than one that attempts to impose a predetermined and outside solution to the problem. We can develop these leaders through a change in our organizational culture. We place a high value on warfighting. We need to put as much merit on the individual who is able to build interpersonal relationships and consensus among the indigenous people. This cultural change must take place in our educational institutions... in our promotion boards and our incentives...and in our operational units.

(Slide 20) In closing, I think no story illustrates this kind of leader than the story of CPT Travis Patriquin, you might know him as the officer who created the stick figure PowerPoint presentation for taming the Anbar Province. CPT Patriquin had the right attitude and motivation, knowledge and skills. According to Correspondent David Kerley, he could tell you the tribal factions not just in Iraq, but in Afghanistan as well...not just basic Sunni-Shia stuff... he knew about the tribes. He had been in many sheik's homes... had shared meals and conversations. He knew several languages. Kerley called him a student of the world and its cultures, who happened to wear an army uniform. He worked hard at developing a relationship with the sheik in Ramadi and he succeeded. His relationship with the sheik was so strong that the sheik considered him one of his own sons. Tragically, Travis was killed by an IED on December 6, 2006... but the bonds he built did not die that day. The sheik named a police station in Ramadi in his honor. Today it stands as the only building in Iraq that we know of named after an American! And the work he started has been touted as having been a significant factor in the Anbar awakening! Ramadi used to be one of the most dangerous cities in Iraq... today it is now one of the safest!

I have given you some things to think about... I have built the diving board and now it is your job over the next three days to jump in! Let's figure out how we can develop leaders like Travis Patriquin. Do we want leaders who are students of the world or do we want leaders who wear the uniform and happen to know something about the world? Thank you! (Slide 21) Now I would like to open the floor to any questions you might have.