

"Culture as a Weapon System"

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US soldiers search for weapons and explosives between Falluja and Ramadi.

MARTIN SPECHT

At the fourth Culture Summit of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) in April 2010, Maj. Gen. David Hogg, head of the Adviser Forces in Afghanistan, proposed that the US military think of “culture as a weapon system.”¹ The military, Hogg asserted, needs to learn the culture of the lands where it is deployed and use that knowledge to fight its enemies along with more conventional armaments. This conceptual and perhaps literal “weaponization of culture” continues a trend that began with the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.² Endorsed at the highest level by Gen. David Petraeus, head of Central Command, the Pentagon unit in charge of the greater Middle East, the idea of culture as a weapon grows out of the “gentler” approach to America’s post-September 11 wars adopted after the departure of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.³ This approach is best articulated in the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, that Petraeus oversaw and that the Army released in December 2006.

In the *Field Manual*, this peculiarly military application of culture uses cultural anthropologists’ definitions of culture as the behaviors, beliefs, material goods and values of a group of people that are learned and shared.⁴ The weaponization of culture posits that culture can be a crucial element of military

intelligence, used to influence others, to attack their weak spots and, more benignly, to understand the others the military is trying to help. While scholars and military analysts have shown how “culture” was enlisted to play a role in the Vietnam war,⁵ today’s wars are the first in which culture has been so clearly articulated. Maj. Gen. John Custer, commander of the Army’s Intelligence Center of Excellence, describes this shift as “a tectonic change in military operations.”⁶

Culture, in this understanding, is configured as yet another weapon in the arsenal of the most powerful military force in the world. The shift to “culture as a weapon system” allows the military to conceive of culture globally, a category that is not specific to one theater or one enemy. New military institutes are producing materials for cultural training, language study and thinking about what the term “culture” means. The Army TRADOC Culture Center, formally established in November 2005, is part of the Intelligence Center of Excellence at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. The Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, also established in 2005, is focusing much of its effort on Marines deploying to Afghanistan. In 2006, the Air Force created a Culture and Language Center located at Air University, while the Navy established the Center for Language, Regional Expertise and Culture in 2007. While each of these centers hires experts and purveys knowledge, the Army TRADOC is far out in front,

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building a core curriculum encompassing social organization, political structure, cross-cultural communication, rapport building, cross-cultural negotiation, extremism and working with interpreters—as well as the foundational question of “what culture is.” These lessons, available to all members of the US military, start from what the Army has defined as “the four basic elements that define a culture: values, beliefs, behaviors and norms.”⁷ As of early 2010, educational units are available for many of the countries covered by Central Command and the new Africa Command, from the Middle East and South Asia to the Horn of Africa, North Africa and the Sahel. These specific culture trainings are provided to personnel based on rank, military occupational specialty and deployment location. Since 2009 the TRADOC Culture Center has produced Smart Books for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen, as well as Culture Smart Cards for Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, with more of these products in the works for the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Philippines, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Somalia, Korea and China.

Smart Cards

When the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, “culture” was not part of the vocabulary of war. The US had established major military bases in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and, later, Kuwait following the 1990 Iraqi invasion of its neighbor to the south. Veterans of the subsequent Gulf war recall that certain units developed informational and training materials concerning Arab and Muslim societies, including a small pamphlet or “smart card.” But this effort was fleeting. There was no cultural training policy in either the Army or Marine Corps to prepare troops to serve in the Middle East or Central Asia in the post-September 11 era. Just as the US failed to plan seriously for what would take place in Iraq following the toppling of Saddam Hussein, so the military, under the direction of Rumsfeld, failed to prepare for its own role in the long-term occupation and rebuilding of the country. This role has required considerably more of US soldiers than combat readiness.

In 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority under the leadership of L. Paul Bremer canceled regional elections in Iraq, disbanded the Iraqi army and fired all Baath Party members from government. With Iraqis thus prevented from doing their jobs within a functioning state, American soldiers, military contractors and civilian employees were tasked with “rebuilding Iraq.” Though the Americans had dismantled the state, many still attributed the failures of the CPA and the lack of enthusiastic Iraqi participation in its efforts to Iraqi “culture.” These experiences (and some similar ones in Afghanistan) provided much of the impetus for what the US military has deemed the cultural imperative, changing the military’s culture to take the culture of others into consideration. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, declared that the military needs to “change

the operational culture to connect with the people. I believe we must interact more closely with the population and focus on operations that bring stability, while shielding them from insurgent violence, corruption, and coercion.”⁸

In the period from 2003 to 2007, the vast majority of the military, both leaders and troops on the ground, saw culture as either irrelevant to the mission or possibly corrosive of military effectiveness. The military had a scattershot approach to cultural training—recycling old material and hiring contractors to churn out handbooks, compact discs and Power Point presentations about Iraq, Arabs and Islam. In 2006, the Army created the Human Terrain System, in which social scientists are trained for nine weeks on the language, culture, politics and geography of Iraq and Afghanistan and then sent to work with combat units to provide relevant cultural knowledge for day-to-day interactions and the collection of intelligence.

All of this early material described Iraqi culture with recourse to the national character studies that typified the culture research and cultural anthropology of the 1940s and 1950s. Anthropologists long ago abandoned this approach—which posited that peoples and cultures had a uniform character akin to a set of personality traits—as they found it did not adequately address cultural change over time and was frequently inaccurate. The US military’s adoption of national character studies allowed for an easy portrayal of what constitutes being “Iraqi” and “Arab.” In this paradigm, Iraqi-ness is timeless, uniquely determined by religion and family. It is never a product of history or political forces or government policies. Instead, the materials present all Iraqis as essentially the same, thereby lumping together 27 million people of varied educational backgrounds, residential locations, generations, ethnicities, religions and economic incomes, among other differences. These frameworks of national character further contend that Iraqi behavior will conform to inherent characteristics of the national group. The conception of culture as national character rests upon two important assumptions: first, that servicemen and women can learn “culture” as a list of character traits; and second, that Iraqis actually behave in these ways. The first is a pedagogical issue; the second is one of accuracy.

The Iraq Culture Smart Card is the best visual embodiment of the national character understanding of culture. The Smart Card is a 16-panel laminated folding pamphlet, compiled by the Army and Marines as well as the contractors Kwikpoint and SAIC, and sized for the pockets of servicemen and women in the field. Produced first in 2003, and reprinted and reformatted continuously ever since, as of 2006 over 1.8 million of them had been requested. According to Paul Nuti, who interviewed the creators of the Smart Card, it is not just “culture-at-a-glance” but rather “a byproduct of the country study, a rigorous multi-disciplinary analysis of the cultural context of the country for which the Smart Card has been requested.”⁹

The Smart Card provides basic information that US servicemen and women who know nothing about Iraq or the Middle East would find useful. The five pillars of Islam are listed

concisely and, for the most part, accurately (it would have been better if the Arabic word for “fasting” had been spelled *sawn* instead of *sawn*, which in Jordanian Bedouin colloquial means “donkey manure”). Panels on “what to expect” during religious celebrations, as well as cultural history and “Islamic” terms, are serviceable. More dubious are the panels on clothing and gestures, cultural groups and cultural customs, which purvey information that is not only inaccurate, but also could be downright harmful to Iraqis, US troops and US policy in Iraq.

The clothes and gestures section contains images of three men wearing headscarves (in Arabic, the *kaffiyya*, *shimagh* or *batta*) in white, black and white, and red and white. The Smart Card tells the reader that the white headdress signifies the man “has not made the *hajj* or pilgrimage to Mecca. The black and white is from a country with presidential rule (i.e., Libya or Egypt) and has made the *hajj*. And the red checkered is from a country with a monarch (i.e., Saudi Arabia or Jordan) and has made the *hajj*.” First, there is no item of clothing that designates someone who has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca. Second, it is not clear why the Iraq Culture Smart Card mentions the other Arab countries at all. Does this information mean that someone spotted in Baghdad wearing red and white is an infiltrator from Saudi Arabia? If so, should he be shot? And it is rare to see the headscarf worn this way in Egypt, except among Bedouins, who are a tiny percentage of the population. Third, by seeing Arabs’ dress as determined by the type of political rule under which they live, the Iraq Culture Smart Card authors suggest that Arabs do not have individual choices over what they wear; rather, they are subjected to the dictates of their “national culture,” which they follow obediently. Since Saddam Hussein was president of Iraq, such information would suggest that Iraqis wear the black-and-white headscarf. Does that mean that in 1958, when the Iraqi monarchy was dissolved, Iraqis threw off their red-and-white headscarves and donned black and white? In fact, clothing in Iraq, like clothing everywhere, is defined by things like seasons, fashion trends, disposable income and individual taste.

To be sure, this example of cultural knowledge (factually incorrect as it may be) says more about the US military and its conception of culture than it does about Iraqis or Arabs. For one thing, the strict order of meanings assigned to various types of headdress parallels the Uniform Explanation Chart of the Marine Corps, which determines who should wear what color uniform and when. Officers wear dark blue trousers or skirts to social events; enlisted personnel wear sky blue. Obviously, however, such rigid regulations about dress do not prevail within any culture outside controlled environments like barracks, factories and schools.

It is not that Arab male headdress does not have meaning; rather, the point is that the Iraq Culture Smart Card got the meanings wrong. Most of the time, a scarf on a man’s head is just a scarf on a man’s head, like a baseball cap is just a baseball cap. When a scarf on a man’s head is more than that, the meanings are specific to time and place. Among Palestinian political activists and militants from the 1970s through the

Cultural Groups

ARABS

- Arabs view Kurds as separatists within Iraq and are wary of their desire for autonomy.
- Arabs view the Christian Assyrians and Chaldeans as Iraqis, but recent Islamic extremism has sparked some hostility towards them.
- Arabs look down upon the Turkoman because Arabs generally view Turkish culture as inferior.
- Arabs view Iranian Persians negatively and fear the historically strong political and cultural influence of Persia.

SHIA AND SUNNI ARAB

- Tension exists between Shia and Sunni Arabs over access to political and economic power.
- Sunnis blame Shia for undermining the mythical unity of Islam and they view them as less loyal to Iraq.
- Shia blame Sunnis for marginalizing the Shia majority and resent Sunni attempts to question their loyalty to Iraq.

KURDS

- Kurds are openly hostile toward Iraqi Arabs and seek to assert their political and cultural independence.
- Kurds are distrustful of the Turkoman, as they have competing claims over Kirkuk.
- Kurds do not interact much with Assyrians and Chaldeans.

ASSYRIANS

- Assyrians experienced persecution by both Kurds and Arabs.
- Assyrians recognize their minority status as a religious and ethnic group.
- Assyrians believe they have much in common with the Chaldeans, including ethnic and Christian religious heritage.

CHALDEANS

- Chaldeans rejoined the Catholic Church in the 18th century and do not believe that they are similar to Assyrians.
- As a religious and ethnic minority, the Chaldeans distrust both Kurdish and Arab intentions.
- They have peaceful relations with Turkoman.

TURKOMAN

- Turkoman view themselves as a marginalized repressed minority and seek greater influence in Iraq.
- Turkoman fear Kurds, and there has been a long history of conflict between the two groups.
- Turkoman identify closely with Turkey and the Ottoman period of Iraqi history

1990s, for example, black-and-white *kaffiyyas* were associated with the Fatah movement of Yasser Arafat, while red-and-white headdress signified allegiance to the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. In the Gulf today, wearing a headscarf marks the wearer as a citizen, and thus is a marker of privilege in countries where the majority of residents are foreign workers. In Jordan, Syria and Palestine, wearing the headscarf today is generational—it is mostly worn by older men from villages and the desert. The cases in Iraq where headwear actually signifies someone’s rank, profession and status—Muslim and Christian clergy, most obviously—are not included on the card.

More to the point, these materials do a disservice to both Iraqis and US servicemen and women themselves. Pedagogically, the presentation fails to make clear why the factoids are important. Why does it matter if soldiers see a man in a white headdress? Should they not address him as *hajji* (as Iraqis are generically known to soldiers) because he has not been to Mecca? These questions could be asked of much of the material on the cards. Another section, titled “Islamic Flag Meanings,” features pictures of four flags with words on them—green (Islam), red (sacrifice), white (purity) and black (martyrdom). The accompanying text reads: “Muslims often fly colored flags to observe various holidays or dates of personal significance. Each color carries a specific meaning:

Green is the color of Islam and is particularly meaningful to the Shia.” Aside from the fact that Iraqis might fly flags for a variety of reasons—to signify that someone in the family is on *hajj* or to display loyalty to sports teams, for example—why would green be especially important to the Shi’a? Does that mean that all Shi’i Muslims are more pious than Sunnis? And what is the particular necessity of knowing that white means purity? Most obviously, this information is imparted to servicemen and women so that they know that flags have meanings other than signals between insurgents. It may be salutary to admonish soldiers to stop reacting to flags as signals, but then will insurgents use them as signals? Paul Nuti asked Art Speyer, who in 2006 was cultural programs head at the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, about who vetted the Smart Card information. The answer: Smart Cards are assessed “by scholars and military personnel known as FAOs—Foreign Area Officers. As the principal cultural specialists within the military establishment, FAOs are well positioned to evaluate Smart Card content because they understand the customer (the 19-year old Marine from Iowa). The FAOs quality-control bottom line is guaranteeing that scholarly research is presented in data that Marines can use.” The cards do not seem very smart on this count.

Sense and Sensitivity

It is not surprising that the vast majority of the 50 soldiers and Marines interviewed for this article assessed their formal cultural training as “not useful” because “culture” was described as a fixed reaction or behavior, often a list of dos and don’ts that could be obeyed like orders, rather than a contextual understanding.¹⁰ Of those 33 who received formal cultural training from either the Army or Marines, only five reported it to be useful. A 35-year old infantry company commander described his cultural training this way: “I mean, the things that they said were important. However, there was a lot of stuff you had to discover. But the things that we were told were in their own way, very useful. I mean it’s important not to show...the soles of your feet to an Iraqi. It can really make them uncomfortable.” This captain thought an advantage of such cultural training was that it helped the US military to avoid offending Iraqis. Many Iraqis, and other Arabs, will certainly agree with the proposition that it is rude to sit opposite someone showing them the bottoms of one’s feet. They will concur as well that one should not use one’s left hand to shake hands with a stranger. But behind their understanding is a lifetime of experience containing numerous subtleties. They know that if they are sitting with their grandmother or father-in-law, that they should not sit with feet pointed at their elder’s face, out of respect. Their young cousins and close friends will not necessarily take offense. Distilling culture into dos and don’ts does not capture the essence of why behaviors are meaningful. One Army officer recalled that “everybody was all freaked out about touching with the left hand and, you know, when

you sit down, don’t show the bottom of your foot. That’s all true, but it’s all in context. If it’s a friend or someone you’ve known for a while, they are not going to give a shit.” Most personnel on the ground turn to sources other than formal channels—other troops and translators—to gain what they define as “useful information.”

A persistent conundrum for US soldiers was trying to figure out whether Iraqis were “bad guys” or “good guys”—when to have their guard up and when to deploy their cultural sensitivity. Specific rules and regulations also forbade certain kinds of social interactions that made US servicemen and women’s contacts with Iraqis more difficult. One Marine colonel described taking his Iraqi counterpart (a general in the Iraqi army) who was on base in his official capacity to the store for a soda. The general was refused entry because he was Iraqi. The American recalled how hurtful this experience was to the Iraqi, who felt he was being excluded from places on his own soil, and how awkward it was to be put in the position of enforcing the exclusion upon his colleague.

The US servicemen and women are presented with the paradox of a directive for cultural sensitivity during a military occupation. Presumably, the cultural training material is supposed to be used when interacting with Iraqis in non-combat situations. And yet, while the Marine colonel treated the Iraqi general as a colleague in the field, the standing orders on base reduced him to a “potential enemy.” The very nature of occupation means that the occupier has the power to restrict the movement of the occupied and exclude them from decision-making. In this paradox, US troops see Iraqis as both their enemies and victims of Saddam Hussein’s repressive regime, and Iraqis also see the US soldiers and Marines as both liberators and occupiers. How, when and with whom the US troops are to use cultural knowledge is not inherently obvious. The dilemma has been further complicated by some of the early discussions of cultural knowledge, infamous among Iraqis and worldwide because of the abuses in Abu Ghraib prison, where the “cultural relevance” of specific kinds of torture and humiliation—related to sex, for example, or dogs—was cited in the testimonies of the perpetrators and revealed in the photographs. Cultural knowledge is not just another arrow in a quiver, not just one “weapon system” to be chosen from among others. The US military cannot take culture into its arsenal without evoking associations with a past that often reflects poorly upon its sensitivity.

Deciding Who Iraqis Are

Even as these materials set out to inform Americans about Iraqis, the vision of Iraqi culture that they presented undermined the stated goals of the invasion. The First Infantry Division *Soldier’s Handbook to Iraq*, first published in late 2003, pledged to provide “the basic information on Iraq’s culture by offering you an overview of the country, its people and their language, as well as their lifestyle and beliefs.” The *Handbook* declares, among other

Clothes / Gestures

MALE DRESS

White



Has not made the hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca.

Black and White



From a country with Presidential rule (i.e. Libya or Egypt) and has made the hajj.

Red Checkered



From a country with a monarch (i.e. Saudi Arabia or Jordan) and has made the hajj.

FEMALE DRESS

Traditional Dress



Arab women often wear Western dress with a shawl or head scarf.

Devout or conservative women wear a hejab, a full head covering, and an abaya, a body covering made of dark colors.



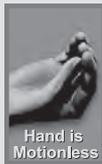
Western Dress

Western dress is common in urban areas, but traditional dress is still prevalent in rural Iraq.

GESTURES



Right hand over heart is a sign of respect or thanks



Hand is Motionless

Right hand, palm up, fingers touching, means to slow down or be patient.



Quick upward head snap with tongue click means no.

things, that the Arab worldview contrasts “wish” with “reality.” For instance, Iraqis’ “desire for modernity is contradicted by a desire for tradition (especially Islamic tradition, since Islam is the one area free of Western identification and influence). Desiring democracy and modernization immediately is a good example of what a Westerner might view as an Arab’s ‘wish vs. reality.’” Wishful thinking and unrealistic expectations are characteristic of many polities, of course; Americans notoriously refuse to pay the taxes necessary to finance the high-quality public schools that they demand. But, its inaccuracy aside, this cultural lesson was surely counterproductive to the US mission, because by the time it was widely taught the White House had announced that the purpose of the war was to bring democracy to Iraq. Indeed, the soldiers who studied the *Handbook* deployed in Iraq just as (after much delay) Iraqis went to the polls in January 2005 to vote for a 275-member transitional assembly. What kind of message was the military communicating to the soldiers who it was asking to put their lives on the line so that Iraqis could dip their fingers in purple ink? It would seem to be that while Americans have freed them from Saddam, Iraqis are not ready to reap the benefits. Such ambiguity cannot have been good for US troops’ morale.

The military’s cultural education material also fed into the omnipresent image of a sectarian Iraq, well before sectarian

fighting became sectarian. One panel of the Iraq Culture Smart Card from a 2004 edition presents what it titles as the “Cultural Groups in Iraq”—Sunni and Shi‘i Arabs, Kurds, Chaldeans, Assyrians and Turkmen. If a soldier read this material carefully, she would learn that: Arabs view Kurds as separatists, look down on Turkmen and view Iranian Persians negatively. Tension exists between Shi‘i and Sunni Arabs. Kurds are openly hostile to Iraqi Arabs and distrustful of Turkmen. They do not interact much with Christians. Assyrians experience persecution by Kurds and Arabs, Chaldeans distrust Kurds and Arab intentions, and Turkmen fear Kurds. The only positive relation is that Chaldeans have peaceful relations with Turkmen and Assyrians have much in common with Chaldeans.

Earlier, the Smart Card had portrayed Iraqis as having a unified national character, one that could be summarized in bullet points. But in this panel’s vision of a nation in existence for more than 80 years, there seem to be no Iraqis who are united by a sense of national interest, patriotism or love of country. It seems instead that ethnic and/or religious tensions trump all else. Put another way, soldiers are instructed that the national character of Iraq is hopelessly riven by primordial ethnic and sectarian hatreds.

Such material, put in the hands of every single soldier and Marine serving in Iraq, all of whom patrol the country, dictating people’s movements and more, is not neutral information. This assertion does not excuse Iraqis for the violence they have done to each other. Rather it is to suggest that the US training material helped to crystallize divisions that might have remained inchoate, by allowing the common soldier to understand the US mission as protection of the Shi‘a from the Sunnis, as many did before the civil war became entrenched. During the civil strife, the Smart Cards encouraged soldiers to view inter-communal violence as something inherent to Iraq or the Muslim world and therefore beyond human control, rather than a struggle for power, money and influence in the scum of war.

A number of scholars of Iraq have written about the post-2003 sectarianism in Iraq and how US policies encouraged it, either directly or indirectly. Bremer’s decision to allocate seats on his Iraqi Governing Council according to a sectarian-ethnic calculus, for example, was replicated by the Iraqis themselves when it came time to split up the ministries in the interim government of 2004. But individual American soldiers, armed with the facile delineations of the Smart Card, must also have helped to constitute the very sectarian mindset they were nominally in Iraq to police. It is necessary to consider the multiple levels at which the power of the US to constitute culture and define what it is to be Iraqi have played out.

The Cultural Imperative

In keeping with the new military imperative to foster cultural awareness in the US fighting force, two civilian psychologists working for the Army Research Institute for the Behavioral

and Social Sciences, Allison Abbe and Stanley Halpin, penned an article titled “The Cultural Imperative for Professional Military Education and Leader Development.” In this article they suggest ways to shift from what they describe as “cultural knowledge” to “cross-cultural competence.” They criticize the current cultural knowledge training as insufficient, because “region-specific training provides descriptive facts and figures about a locale,” but a “weakness of this type of training is that its effectiveness depends on the quality of the content, which can sometimes be inaccurate or outdated due to over-reliance on subject-matter experts lacking recent experience in the region.”¹¹ As should be clear at this point, the cultural knowledge material produced in the first five years of the occupation of Iraq exhibits major errors in content, as well as in shaping servicemen and women’s attitudes about Iraqis.

Cross-cultural competence, as proposed by Abbe and Halpin, contains three components: knowledge, affect and skills that

combine to provide capabilities required to work in a foreign culture. Knowledge begins with an awareness of one’s own culture and includes an understanding of culture and cultural differences, but has to progress toward an increasingly complex understanding of the sources, manifestations and consequences of a particular culture. Affect includes attitudes toward foreign cultures and the motivation to learn about and engage with them. Skills encompass the ability to regulate one’s own reactions in a cross-cultural setting, interpersonal skills and the flexibility to assume the perspective of someone from a different culture.¹²

But even if the military’s new vision of culture creates servicemen and women who have cross-cultural competence, a larger issue remains. The failures in Iraq and Afghanistan are not about culture, but about attitudes—individual attitudes and behaviors that are allowed and even promoted by the attitudes and policies of the US government and military.

The Iraqis interviewed for this article told tales that illustrate this point. First, most Iraqis complain about the ways that Americans have treated them as civilians, both in terms of danger and disrespect. Most have a direct relative who was unintentionally killed, injured or shot at by American troops while driving down the street or standing on his roof. They find that some servicemen and women are respectful, and others are not, and cite things such as using dogs for searches, male soldiers touching women and incidents of theft. But most importantly, when asked directly whether they thought culture was relevant to the role of the US military in Iraq, most replied that it was not. More important to them was ending the occupation and general respect, not in cultural terms but in terms of respect for their country and the capabilities of its people.

The issue of respect is pivotal in the experience of Iraqis with Americans after 2003. As one sergeant in the military police responded to the queries about the usefulness of formal cultural

training: “I don’t need training to treat people with respect.” Indeed, respectful behavior may largely be a matter of personal integrity and emotional intelligence—qualities that many American soldiers no doubt have in abundance. Yet soldiers are agents of a policy, and the fact is that the invasion and occupation of Iraq were never based on knowledge of or respect for Iraqis or their accomplishments. Iraqis have been seen as subjects to be liberated, and later, what Timothy Mitchell might call “objects of development.” This attitude necessitated that Iraqis accept what was given to them and complain, if they had to, only in the prescribed forums. From the official US point of view, respect was neither desired nor necessary.

Judging by the proposed content of the fresh “what is culture” material, servicemen and women are to develop attitudes toward others that are built on flexibility, acceptance and lack of judgment. It is ironic that this most anthropological of understandings about how to approach culture is becoming part of the military’s plan to make “culture a weapon system.” It remains to be seen, however, if such attitudinal change can take root among the troops. US attitudes toward the outside world have long been infused with a sense of American exceptionalism and superiority—a sense heightened by the grievance of the September 11 attacks and broadcast since then by most every politician near a microphone. It seems that the proposed shift in US troops’ attitudes toward the cultures and people they work with on the ground may end up being the gentler face of violent imperial policies that envision invasions and occupations as justified, sustainable and ethical. ■

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Endnotes

- 1 *Sierra Vista Herald*, April 19, 2010.
- 2 See Hugh Gusterson, “The US Military’s Quest to Weaponize Culture,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (June 2008); Keith Brown, “All They Understand Is Force’: Debating Culture in Operation Iraqi Freedom,” *American Anthropologist* 110/4 (2008); and Hugh Gusterson, “The Cultural Turn in the War on Terror” in John Kelley, Beatrice Jauregui, Sean T. Mitchell and Jeremy Walton, eds., *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
- 3 Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *On the Uses of Cultural Knowledge* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, November 2007), p. v.
- 4 David Price argues that this use of anthropologists’ work on culture, down to borrowing whole sentences from a who’s who of cultural anthropology without attribution, is a patchwork of plagiarism. See “Pillfered Scholarship Devastates General Petraeus’ *Counterinsurgency Manual*,” *Counterpunch*, October 30, 2007.
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- 6 Army Culture Education and Training Curriculum 2010, p. 3.
- 7 Army Culture Education and Training Curriculum 2010, p. 10.
- 8 Gen. Stanley McChrystal, *Commander of NATO International Security Assistance Force Initial Assessment*, 1–1, August 30, 2009. The document was obtained by the *Washington Post* and is accessible at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/21/AR2009092100110.html>.
- 9 Paul Nuti, “Smart Card: Don’t Leave Military Base Without It,” *Anthropology News* (October 2006).
- 10 Rochelle Davis (with Dahlia Elzein and Dena Takruri), “Iraqi Culture and the US Military: Understanding Training, Experiences and Attitudes” in *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*.
- 11 Allison Abbe and Stanley Halpin, “The Cultural Imperative for Professional Military Education and Leader Development,” *Parameters* 39/4 (Winter 2009–1010), pp. 21–22.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.