Intercultural Communication Between International Military Organizations; How Do You Turn a ‘No’ Into a ‘Yes’?

Douglas A. Straka
University of South Florida, strakad64@hotmail.com

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Intercultural Communication Between International Military Organizations;

How Do You Turn a ‘No’ Into a ‘Yes’?

by

Douglas A. Straka

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration with a concentration in Management
Department of Business Administration
Muma College of Business
University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: Paul Solomon, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Rebecca Smith, DBA
    Paul Spector, Ph.D.
    Anol Bhattacherjee, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on both the discovery and analysis of individual elements that define the interaction between dissimilar militaries during communication. This will provide a greater understanding as to how (and how much) intercultural communications factors help or hinder collaboration between differing governments and their military officials. This greater understanding may provide insight that would provide collaborators the opportunity to improve their negotiating performance based on both increased effectiveness and efficiency.

Previous literature informing this research included expatriate adaptation to foreign cultures, power distance, sensemaking theory, intercultural communication. These provided foundations to use phenomenological methods to explore intercultural communication effectiveness. Ten well-versed individuals selected through snowball sampling participated in this study through semi-structured interviews. The balanced group of participants included six who had lived in the Middle East (three of which still reside in that region) and four who have been lifelong U.S. citizens.

The study revealed that participants in intercultural settings who self-monitor, and then make conscious changes to their behaviors to adapt to foreign cultures, will improve their intercultural communications effectiveness. The reciprocation by persons from the foreign culture(s) with which they are interacting further improves intercultural communication. This in turn has a positive impact on every communication process that follows.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Government, private business, and academia have been placing increasing emphasis on collaboration in multi-stakeholder, multicultural environments. Globalization and developing mutual relationships with other global partners make intercultural communication an essential consideration due to the visions and goals of the organizations. Stakeholder expectation management can be challenging. Differing organizations attempt to maximize their outcomes, which can create confrontational relationships among other stakeholders in this environment (Ali & Abdelfettah, 2016).

My experience in the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) has provided motivation to further investigate the influence of intercultural communication factors on collaboration in the multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural organizational environment. TSC is the framework the U.S. DOD uses to assist foreign partner nations in developing their security capabilities and capacities. This is done in a manner that is consistent with U.S. national interests and national security interests (R. Reynolds et al., 2015). U.S. DOD personnel often have misconceptions that, if not addressed, may result in missteps when performing their TSC roles (Klafehn et al., 2014). The negative perceptions by the respective foreign partner nations that may occur can also have strategic impacts on U.S. national interests (Braziel & Cummins, 2014), (Perthes, 2015). Applied research will enhance our understanding of this gap. National-level state-to-state interactions between the U.S. DOD and Middle Eastern partners provides a rich and relevant research environment to further explore this area.
The preliminary stage involved moving beyond my own personal anecdotal observations. An initial literature review on expatriate experiences offered insights into power distance and cross-cultural communications (also referred to in the literature at times as intercultural communications). Previous work was presented at the 2017 Informing Science and Information Technology Education (InSITE) Conference in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. A conceptual framework was developed, based on stakeholder theory, goal setting theory, intercultural communication and collaboration. Stakeholder theory provided an overall framework that was useful in defining the environment (Ali & Abdelfettah, 2016), (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016). Collaboration between nations has increased (especially in the geographically separated locations around the world). The literature indicated that cultural differences are quite pronounced. Successful communication was more difficult to achieve in highly diverse intercultural environments (Arasaratnam, 2015). The articles indicated that respective entities should develop, should define, and should come to some level of agreement on their respective outcomes (Latham & Locke, 1991). While this made for a fascinating study and resonated with the audience when it was presented, this model required a broad scope of research beyond the research time available.

Given how expatriate literature continuously cited intercultural communication challenges along with power distance differences between cultures as possible barriers to collaboration, this research will address those concerns (Björkman, Stahl, & Vaara, 2007; Caligiuri & Tarique, 2016; Dabic, González-Loureiro, & Harvey, 2015; Firth, Chen, Kirkman, & Kim, 2014; Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2013; Takeuchi & Chen, 2013; Wood & St. Peters, 2014).
To illustrate these points, imagine you are about to play a game of football. This seems simple, but the question remains, “Which type of football?” While many Americans would relate to the sport sponsored by their National Football League, others from France, the United Arab Emirates or Thailand would relate to another sport, which is referred to as soccer in the USA. At the same time, Australians and New Zealanders would be thinking of another full contact form of football referred to as rugby. Imagine the confusion that might occur if players from the United States attempted to play European Football on Middle Eastern football pitches using accepted NFL procedures. The results would be a huge number of penalties for carrying the ball and the lack of sportsman-like conduct by the visiting American players. Conversely, those rules/behaviors would be fully acceptable on the American football field.

Similarly, while communicating in the intercultural environment, it is important that those who are visiting and interacting with a hosting partner nation (or culture) are aware of the rules of their “football pitch” and adapt to it. A typical security cooperation meeting by an American defense official with his/her partners in the Middle East occurs as follows:

1. The American defense official requests to meet with the partner nation by forwarding an official signed letter to the appropriate foreign government representative. This letter typically is sent 30-45 days prior to the anticipated meeting date.

2. The American defense official coordinates air and ground transportation and lodging for his/her team and prepares meeting materials in advance of confirmation of the requested meeting. This coordination is done prior to any meeting being confirmed by the partner nation, with the belief that it will actually occur.
3. The partner nation official responds to the meeting request, typically in the form of a signed letter. This response may confirm, cancel or request to postpone the meeting. The signed response may be sent as late as the day prior to the meeting.

4. Three to four days prior to the meeting, the American official starts his/her travel to the Middle Eastern partner nation. The transit time for these flights is typically 20-30 hours, depending on where the traveler originated. There will be a seven- to nine-hour leap forward in time zones. This creates traveler weariness (jet lag) and irritability. The partner nation may have chosen to cancel or may have chosen to postpone the meeting, but they held the notification to the last day prior to the event. This caused the American traveler to arrive with no possibility of a meeting.

5. In respect to the partner, American civilians and contractors meet with their partners in coat and tie. Military uniformed personnel wear their duty uniforms. This establishes a formal meeting environment.

6. Multiple American government organizations are typically involved in the meetings. Many of the persons from the contributing agencies may not have previously interacted with cultures dissimilar to their own. When the primary coordinating agency or person has time available, he/she has the implied responsibility of orienting and adapting these persons to the partner nation’s culture. These multiple different organizations often also have differing goals, which further complicates the environment.

7. Male gender bias tends to be more pronounced in the Middle East than in the United States. Generally speaking, Western customs, such as handshakes between men and women, will be replaced with a gesture such as placing one’s hand over his/her heart
when greeting the opposite gender in the Middle East. Failure to make this accommodation would be the equivalent of carrying the ball on the European football field.

8. Greetings and extending of hospitality in the Middle East are important. American defense officials are not accustomed to sitting over tea and discussing what they see as the smaller issues of life. They might become irritated by the apparent lack of outcomes. Within the context of Arabic society, Developing relationships is a necessary first step prior to working toward results. This tends to frustrate many American defense officials, who are very conscious of their time limitations with respect to their desired outcomes.

9. Certain hand gestures and body language are acceptable within American contexts. Those same actions can be offensive to Middle Eastern or other cultures.

10. American defense officials must constantly manage their personal expectations when interacting with their Middle Eastern counterparts. The Americans must especially be conscious that many of their counterparts may not be able to make decisions when they meet with them. Discussing topics in the terms that will resonate with the partner nation representative’s next higher leader requires insight and adaptation by the American.

11. Differences in native languages by the participants may result in different sequences of words and phrases when English is the only language used. This creates cognition challenges for both partners (American and Middle Eastern), especially when jet lag is also a factor. Special care must be taken to ensure accuracy when technical terms
are used when multiple languages are used through interpreters (such as Arabic and English).

From this basis, the following research question emerged:

‘How do US Department of Defense employees perceive their intercultural communications effectiveness and shortcomings during their state-to-state interactions?’

This research will focus on both the discovery and analysis of individual elements that define the interaction during communication for the purpose of gaining a greater understanding as to how (and how much) intercultural communications factors help or hinder collaboration between differing governments and their military officials.

As a result, this greater understanding may provide insight that would provide collaborators the opportunity to improve their negotiating performance based on both increased effectiveness and efficiency.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Protocol

A literature review was undertaken to gain a broad range of articles of academic interest. 65 articles were identified using Google Scholar and JSTOR. Persons working within the Department of Defense Theater Security Cooperation environment must regularly interact with others coming from cultures that are not similar to their own. They interact for extended periods of time, implying a need to adapt to cultures and norms that are different from what they are accustomed to (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013). To address this, expatriate adaptation literature became the first area searched. Further searches included cross-cultural communication, intercultural communication, collaboration/conflict, cultural humility and power distance in order to more fully establish a literature base on this topic. The following subjects were determined to be relevant contributors:

1. Expatriate adaptation to foreign cultures
2. Power Distance
3. Sensemaking Theory
4. Intercultural communication
Figure 1. Concept Model – Effective Intercultural Communication, created by author

Individuals from national militaries must first adapt to their anticipated multicultural environments to achieve effective intercultural communication. The literature review revealed that expatriate adaptation included two factors:

1. Internal factors involve the strength of the knowledge of the culture the expatriate brings when he/she starts interacting with the partner.

2. External factors involve the uncertainty expatriates experience (based on their knowledge or lack thereof) when interacting with the foreign culture. This creates challenges and further shapes behavior and interactions.

Successful adaptation prepares the expatriate to resolve disparities that occur due to power distance differences. Power distance is described in terms of two types as listed below:
1. High-power distance cultures personify centralized authority; decisions are held at higher levels. Lower-level leaders typically have less autonomy to make independent decisions.

2. Low-power distance personifies decentralized authority; decisions are “powered down,” meaning that lower-level leaders typically have greater autonomy to make decisions on behalf of the organizations they represent.

Individuals from diverse cultures negotiate and resolve differences in power distance; this may improve sensemaking.

Expatriate adaptation also informs identity and retrospection aspects of sensemaking theory during intercultural interactions. Sensemaking within this intercultural environment is characterized by:

1. Participants identifying their personal and organizational roles.

2. Participants “setting the problem.” Problem Setting involves constructing problems from puzzling, troubling and uncertain situations.

3. Participants extracting cues. Processes are hard to determine. Participants view outcomes at exact periods in time to see what is relevant and interpret those outcomes to describe processes.

4. Participants favoring plausibility over accuracy. Often, they view “good enough” as being achievable while “perfect” may be an aspiration.

5. Participants finding retrospection and reflection on past actions to be helpful.

Participants look for what has worked for them in the past to inform present actions.

6. Participants finding the social aspect (discussing the problem with others) of working through the problem to be helpful. Problems within the sensemaking construct tend
to be very complex. Socializing problems with others helps in solving the problem. Competing narratives provide the opportunity to explore more potential solutions. 

7. Participants recognizing that the environment always influences them. Activities are persistent and ongoing. Nothing ever stops and participants must shape and react to the environment they are in.

Successful application of sensemaking theory may positively contribute to effective intercultural communication. The Arabic social network termed “wasta” influences every interaction within the Middle East. I observed wasta’s influence in most of my previous interactions with Arabic culture. I had to adapt my behavior to improve intercultural communication effectiveness in most of those cases. It is relevant to include this as a topic in my literature review. Social dimensions exist in every form of communication. Wasta will influence intercultural communication with and within Arabic societies. Wasta also appears to influence the social aspect of sensemaking.

A discussion of the focus follows, with summary tables to offer some further detail for the respective areas to explore their contributions.

**Literature Summary**

**Expatriate Adaptation to New Environments – the Military Context**

Expatriates are immediately thrust into high-pressure situations when they are placed in foreign assignments, (Haslberger et al., 2013). They must adjust as rapidly as possible in the new environment to perform at optimum levels. More businesses are seeing the need to expand their expatriate work forces. Gaining greater understanding of this adjustment would help it occur more efficiently. Previous research has indicated that “both work-related international experience and nonwork-related international experiences can affect expatriate cross-cultural adjustment” (Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun, & Lepak, 2005).
Literature suggests expatriate adaptation occurs over a period of time, based on individuals’ motivational states and challenges met and faced over that time (Firth et al., 2014). Interestingly, this article also introduces sensemaking theory as the means for individuals’ adaptation to the new environments they face while being immersed in a foreign culture (Weick, 1995). This connection will be further explored in a following section of this literature review.

Some articles have attempted to categorize the dimensions of expatriate adjustment. One article in particular has proposed that “adjustment has three dimensions: cognitions, feelings, and behavior” (Haslberger et al., 2013, p. 338). The article also highlights that expatriate adaptation involves internal and external factors. The internal factor is the knowledge of the culture that the expatriate brings with him/her to improve his/her cognition. The external aspect is the uncertainty expatriates have in their knowledge when challenged by actual conditions and situations that exist when he/she is placed in the foreign culture. The expatriate establishes his/her internal standard for feelings (whether he/she feels positively or negatively about something) in the affective or feelings dimension. The host society or culture establishes the acceptable way those feelings may be displayed, forming the external aspect of this dimension. Finally, in the behavior dimension, the internal aspect is how effective the expatriate judges his/her behavior to be (whether he/she gets what he/she wants or not). The host society imposes the external aspect in judging whether the behavior is appropriate or not. The external aspect may inform the internal in each of these dimensions. This gives the expatriate an opportunity to adjust the dimensions and experience a more desirable adjustment experience. The article states that if there are predominantly negative experiences with little change to the internal dimensional aspects made by the expatriate, then he/she “will exhibit lower levels of satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance and higher levels of the intent to leave and more
often actually leave the organization than those experiencing consistently positive adjustment outcomes.” (Haslberger, et al., 2013, p. 344).

Self-monitoring is when individuals adapt to foreign cultures and they are aware of how their interactions and behaviors affect (and are affected by) external situational factors (Snyder, 1974). Additional research on this topic further points out that “High self-monitors will adapt their behavior to meet the behavioral requirements for a certain situation, therefore they reactively adjust to the situation. On the other hand, low self-monitors maintain their behavior and do not change their actions to meet the needs of the situation. They try to actively change the environment to maintain their standards of behavior” (Harrison, Chadwick & Scales, 1996, pp 171-172). This ability to sort out the norms of a situation is imperative in intercultural settings.

Research has explored how negative experiences within the intercultural settings have impacted U.S. soldier performance and skill development in the military ranks,(Klafehn et al., 2014). Military personnel often must exercise their tasks while being immersed in foreign cultures. The physical environments may be adverse or even life-threatening. The previous issues and possible resolutions for effective expatriate adaption could be very helpful for military personnel who are called upon to work in these very uncertain environments.

Perceptive individuals within Western military organizations may adapt their behaviors to turn potential negative experiences into more positive ones. This would result in better adjustment during their interactions with other nations’ officials who have dissimilar cultures. These principles may appear to be obvious when casually observed from the outside. The expatriate who is within the situation may become overwhelmed or may become insensitive when those adaptations are combined with the other pressures of the work environment. This
may result in lack of self-monitoring and behavioral changes that might otherwise provide a positive impact/influence on intercultural communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, Year of Publication</th>
<th>Key Considerations</th>
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| (Dabic et al., 2015)        | “Provides a comprehensive review of the evolving research on… expatriates and their impact on business performance.” (p. 316)  
|                             | Assesses over four decades of previous research, finding areas that remain nascent and suggests building higher order content.  
|                             | Conceptual maps assist in graphically visualizing previous research focuses. |
| (Firth et al., 2014)        | Proposes motivational state and stress cognitions as factors in expatriate adaptation over time.  
|                             | Distinguished between challenge and hindrance stressors.  
|                             | High levels of cross-cultural motivation and psychological empowerment positively contribute to expatriate adaptation/success. |
| (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013) | “Compares organizational expatriates (OEs), who are dispatched by their companies to international posts, with self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), who by their own volition move and work abroad.” (p. 1953) |
| (Harrison et al., 1996)     | Revealed expatriates with higher levels of self-efficacy and self-monitoring adapt better and achieve greater job satisfaction. |
| (Haslberger et al., 2013)   | Attempts to expand concepts of expatriate adjustment by categorizing multiple adjustment dimensions.  
|                             | “Adjustment has three dimensions: cognitions, feelings, and behavior.” (p. 338) |
| (Snyder, 1974)              | Defines “self-monitoring” in the context discussed in Harrison article above. |
| (Takeuchi & Chen, 2013)     | Highlights “issues associated with conceptualization and operationalization of international experiences.” (p. 238)  
|                             | Attempted to find out why previous international experience was not a reliable indicator of expatriate performance.  
|                             | Distinguishes between work, living and travel in expatriate environment.  
|                             | Urges future researchers to investigate “the relationships among prior international experience, cross-cultural or expatriation self-efficacy, and expatriate adjustment.” (p. 278) |
| (Takeuchi et al., 2005)     | Differentiated international experience into current and past experience; work and travel; cultural specificity (U.S./non-U.S.)  
|                             | Prior international experience contributed in Asia, but did not appear to be as useful in other regions.  
|                             | Stress levels for expatriates higher when assigned to new, similar cultures, rather than the same country repeatedly. |
Power Distance

Hofstede’s seminal work on power distance documented cultural differences in the international workplace. It provided new understanding of an increasingly global economy (Hofstede, 1980). He described five dimensions of national culture, of which power distance was one of the factors. Individuals from low-power distance cultures tend to have significant autonomy in decision making; they often are empowered to make decisions on the behalf of their organizations when they negotiate with others. Conversely, individuals from high-power distance cultures do not have similar authority to discuss or decide on matters and must defer to higher authorities for decisions. The other four dimensions included are:

1. Individualism/Collectivism (Is it about me, or the larger group?),
2. Uncertainty Avoidance (Can I accept risk/failure or do I have to succeed?),
3. Achievement/Nurturing (Am I focused on goals, or are relationships more important?)
4. Short/long term Orientation (Do I value tradition and the past, or am I looking to the future?).

Hofstede expanded on his initial research, discussing relationships between the dimensions of national societies (Hofstede, 1983). Additional writers have contributed to a growing body of research since that time.

My previous anecdotal observations indicated there appeared to be significant differences in power distance between western (American) and Arabic military counterparts. U.S. personnel would participate in meetings with regional counterparts believing that decisions would be made in that session by the participants. The U.S. teams would discover that the decisions they thought they had come to agree upon had been changed by someone in higher authority after the conclusion of the meeting(s). The national culture dimensions established by Hofstede, 1980,
could provide criteria to explore objectively the effectiveness of these interactions and to make recommendations for future increased effectiveness and efficiency. The five dimensions, with paraphrased definitions/meanings are listed below:

1. **Power Distance**: Can the participant make an autonomous decision (low-power distance)? Or, must that participant defer to a higher authority (high-power distance)?

2. **Individualism/Collectivism**: What is the participant’s focus? Does the participant focus on himself/herself (individualism, which also inclines towards low-power distance)? Or, does the participant have more concern about the group, community or tribe (collectivism, inclining toward high-power distance)?

3. **Uncertainty Avoidance**: Does the participant believe he/she can make mistakes not lose his/her credibility (tends to occur in low-power distance)? Or, does the participant fear loss of reputation or livelihood due to fears of leader perceptions of his/her mistakes (high-power distance)?

4. **Achievement/Nurturing**: Is the participant focused on the outcomes (low-power distance); Or does the participant believe relationships are more important (high-power distance)?

5. **Short/Long-Term Orientation**: Does the participant believe that things need to be done the way they have been done before? Is the participant focused on intermediate short term goals? Does the participant want to make sweeping changes, or focus on a continuum or series of goals?

Participants from respective low- and high-power distance cultures may desire to match power distances when they interact. This may be possible when nations’ leaders, such as presidents and prime ministers, meet. Hofstede illustrated at lower levels that becomes more challenging due to
the levels where decisions are made. Lower level employees may be able to make decisions in low-power distance cultures. The decision might require a higher-level supervisor for the high-power distance cultures. The high-power distance higher-level supervisor will likely see his role as too important to meet with the low-power distance lower-level employee when meetings occur. Participants from both sides of this cultural divide must increase their awareness and adapt their behaviors while interacting with the other culture to overcome those potential barriers. This reinforces the importance of expatriate adaptation and self-monitoring discussed in the previous section.

**Table 2. Power Distance Literature Review Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, Year of Publication</th>
<th>Key Considerations</th>
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</table>
| (Hofstede, 1983)            | • Seminal work, connecting and comparing individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity of national societies  
• Understanding the difference and reacting appropriately appears to have direct relevance/contribute to success in any cross-cultural interactions or communications |
| (Bochner & Hesketh, 1994)   | • Study of power distance and individualism/collectivism amongst employees with different cultural/national backgrounds in a large Australian banking firm.  
• Confirmed Hofstede’s proposal – broad cultural values spill over into work.  
• Strength of this study was conduct in a natural work setting, rather than experimental (laboratory conditions); recommends this for future research |
| (Daniels & Greguras, 2014)  | • Links power distance work related processes and outcomes; well-being, attitude-behavior relations, emotions, justice, abusive supervision, leadership, feedback/performance ratings, HRM practices, organizational innovation, venture creation, ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility  
• Recommended research area – negotiations between differing power distance cultures (US is lower power distance than most Arab countries)  
• Recommended research area – humble leadership in the context of power distance values – leader connecting with subordinates. |
Table 2 continued

(Fock, Hui, Au, & Bond, 2013)

- Explored difference in outcomes/satisfaction of discretionary, leadership and psychological empowerment between high and low power distance cultures.
- Similar improvements in employee in leadership, psychological empowerment for both high and low power distance; discretionary empowerment mitigated in high power distance.
- Recommends future research introducing additional factors (e.g. role ambiguity)

(Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007)

- Cross cultural organizational behavior – the authors believed this to be an immature topic at the time of the article
- Particular areas of interest are topics of culture and negotiating; culture and teams.
- Proposes that explanations for cultural differences too narrow – focus primarily on collectivism/individualism.
- Recommends study of intercultural comparisons; dynamics of the interfaces in multinational teams and negotiations

(Hui, Au, & Fock, 2004)

- Study of power distance/empowerment.
- Uses three different methods to gather evidence – multi-country, surveys of employees, and manager scenario role-play as employees; complimentary results.
- Recommends using other methods to further investigate cultural values and empowerment.

**Sensemaking Theory**

The literature review previously highlighted that expatriate adaptation (Firth et al., 2014) and sensemaking are relevant aspects of the adjustment to foreign cultures. The seminal work, *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Weick, 1995), introduced a framework that was extremely consistent with the author’s previous observations. The framework the book discussed is extracted below:

- “Sensemaking involves problem setting – constructing the problem from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling and uncertain
- Sensemaking states that identity and identification affects interactions in the applicable environment. (an individual’s perceptions of who they think they are in their own context)
• Retrospection or reflecting on past actions is helpful for people, realizing that interruptions may be caused by the environment or other competing projects that the actor is working on.

• Sensemaking is enactive of sensible environments. Participants must create/enact structure. They must take undefined space, time and action to draw lines, establish categories and coin labels to create new features of the environment that did not exist before.

• Sensemaking is social. Participants must socialize complex problems rather than keeping things at an individual level. Narrative accounts are often very helpful, because they reveal competing and complementing viewpoints and can develop into plausible stories that get preserved, retained and shared.

• Sensemaking is an ongoing activity. Individuals must simultaneously shape and react to the environments they face. They must project themselves onto this environment and observe the consequences they learn about their identities and the accuracy of their accounts of the world. Given this ongoing nature, individuals find themselves responding to the following:

• Sensemaking is focused on and by extracted cues – because process is sometimes hard to view and determine, individuals must observe outputs or products created in a snapshot in time to determine relevance and explain processes. They then can link those cues as points of reference to broader networks of meaning to further determine what might be happening.

• Sensemaking is driven by plausibility (reasonable or probable) rather than accuracy (being correct or precise) (pp. 17-62)."
I have made anecdotal observations that the parameters of sensemaking theory are consistent with my experiences from 28 years in the U.S. military. The last eight years involved working directly with Middle Eastern military partners. Puzzling, troubling and uncertain problems with very little structure commonly challenged me. I had to identify myself within the context of the cultures I was working with. Even more importantly, I had to identify and adapt to persons from other cultures. These were just a few of the observations where research could potentially add more depth through further exploring this phenomenon. Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, further described the environment that sensemaking may respond to, stating,

“Explicit efforts at sensemaking tend to occur when the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world. In such circumstances there is a shift from the experience of immersion in projects to a sense that the flow of action has become unintelligible in some way. To make sense of the disruption, people look first for reasons that will enable them to resume the interrupted activity and stay in action” (p. 409). The intercultural environment requires action and requires socializing of the participant’s respective narratives (Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar, 2008).

Those authors emphasize that “sensemaking as a process that is ongoing, instrumental, subtle, swift, social and easily taken for granted...Sensemaking is about the interplay of action and interpretation rather than the influence of evaluation on choice” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409).

Military personnel in particular often operate in this space, given the life and death decisions that often face them when they participate in armed combat. They are poised to engage with sophisticated weapons systems. They may cause massive destruction, in the case of battle tanks, fighter aircraft and naval vessels, when they pull the triggers on their weapons.
Decisions and actions, based on the service member’s interpretation of his/her rapidly changing situation, must happen in a split second. Miscalculations do occur in this complex sensemaking environment, resulting in fratricide of friendly forces or collateral damage to civilians. The book *Friendly Fire*, by Snook and Project (2000), illustrated this point when it analyzed an April 1994 friendly fire incident. Two F-15 pilots shot down two Blackhawk helicopters. Twenty-six people perished that day. Snook emphasizes that the F-15 pilots did not “decide” to pull the trigger.

*I could have asked, “Why did they decide to shoot?” However, such a framing puts us squarely on a path that leads straight back to the individual decision maker, away from potentially powerful contextual features and right back into the jaws of the fundamental attribution error.* “Why did they decide to shoot?” quickly becomes “Why did they make the wrong decision?” Hence the attribution falls squarely onto the shoulders of the decision maker and away from potent situation factors that influence action. Framing the individual-level puzzle as a question of meaning rather than deciding shifts the emphasis away from individual decision makers toward a point somewhere “out there” where context and individual action overlap... Such a reframing from decision making to sensemaking—opened my eyes to the possibility that, given the circumstances, even I could have made the same “dumb mistake.” This disturbing revelation, one that I was in no way looking for, underscores the importance of initially framing such senseless tragedies as “good people struggling to make sense,” rather than as “bad ones making poor decisions” (pp. 206-207).

The situation is consistent with many operational decisions made by military leaders and servicemembers. Sensemaking theory describes a construct military personnel may use to respond to these uncertain environments.
Kurtz & Snowden, 2004 states that in many environments, conditions of emergent order (new conditions or ways of doing things) may compete with conditions of directed order (or things which have been routinely the case). Kurtz & Snowden use the terms order (directed order) and unordered (emergent order) in their discussions and further state that both types of order exist and create complexity in the environment to simplify terms of reference. Military leaders and servicemembers must interact in many different ways, ranging from lethal to diplomatic engagements.

Sometimes the diplomatic, or consensus building situations, can be most challenging and uncertain. Organizations have both formal command structures and informal trust networks that support and compete with each other (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The commanding officer of a military organization will give an order and he expects it to be carried out by his subordinates. This is an example of a formal command structure. A subordinate who has close relationships/friendship with the unit supply sergeant who may assist in procuring resources is more likely to be successful than his peer who does not. The friendship between the subordinate and the supply sergeant is an example of an informal trust network. The literature posits that the informal trust network can have either positive or negative impacts on formal command structures.

Table 3. Sensemaking Theory Literature Review Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, Year of Publication</th>
<th>Key Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Brown et al., 2008)</td>
<td>• Highlights the value/importance of using narratives for sensemaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discusses how narratives may complement each other, or compete and clash, in the process creating order in a complex environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Introduces “impression management” and “attributionable exoticism” as terms of reference (p. 1042)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Highlights the need to recognize how individual conflicting perspectives contribute to a single, homogenous account.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 continued

| (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007) | • Emphasizes the importance of social interactions in creating order through sensemaking.  
• Further discusses interaction process as an autonomous domain and defines cognitive engagement as a sensemaking activity |
| (Fuchs & De Jaegher, 2009) | • Emphasizes the need to move from a detached representationalist view into the actual social sphere, for true social cognition to occur.  
• States that interactional coordinations fluctuate between synchronized and desynchronized actions – this drives processes forward. |
| (Kurtz & Snowden, 2004) | • Cynefin network introduced as a way of describing how order and un-order coexist, complement and contrast each other within the sense-making construct. |
| (Snook & Project, 2000) | • Discusses friendly fire incident when U.S. F-15 jet fighter aircraft shot down Blackhawk helicopters over Iraq, killing 24 people.  
• Uses context of sensemaking to discuss complex and often confusing action environment that military combat operations usually work within. |
| (Weick, 1995) | • Seminal work in sensemaking theory. |
| (Weick et al., 2005) | • Expansion on previous Weick book – refresh after a decade of observations. |

Intercultural Communication

Gundykunst & Mody (2002) define this term as interpersonal communications between persons from different cultures in their handbook on intercultural communication. Another article conducted a thematic analysis of articles over the previous decade. It grouped those articles into eight themes including “(1) identity, (2) acculturation and global migration, (3) communication dynamics, (4) intercultural competence, (5) theories, models, scales, and frameworks, (6) perception, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination, (7) cross-cultural differences, and (8) intercultural education, training, and study abroad” (Arasaratnam, 2015, p. 290).

Selected categories in the article discussed some of the same areas addressed in expatriate research, such as identity, acculturation, intercultural competence, perception, prejudice stereotypes and discrimination, and cross-cultural differences (Firth et al., 2014; Harrison et al.,
One might infer that individuals immersed into different cultures must identify and adapt, while at the same time recognizing their differences. This would help them avoid the negative perceptions, stereotypes and discrimination that prevent effective intercultural communication. Militaries conduct security cooperation in very diverse subject areas. They must align national interests and national security interests, which often are different for each of the partner nations that work together (R. Reynolds, Aseltine, W. C., Burke, T. S., Chess, B. D., Hawkins, P. K., Horvath, M. A., Krolkoski, C. M., Martin, K. W., O'Connor, T. B., Prince, A. M., Scott, R. A., Smilek, J. M., Vilches, R. T. and Williams, T. N., 2015). Effective intercultural communication is essential for the partners to align their respective interests.

Working (and communicating) within a foreign culture brings challenges. Albrecht, Dilchert, Deller & Paulus (2014) stated, “Living in a foreign country involves a great amount of uncertainty that stems primarily from unfamiliarity with values and norms prevalent in another culture. Different cultural values and norms can be a source of misunderstanding or conflict, which most individuals seek to avoid in their day to day work environments” (p. 65). Military personnel operate in foreign environments for uncertain lengths of time (a nine-month deployment may be extended to a longer period of time). Snook and Project (2000) illustrated the reactions that involve life-and-death situations as mentioned during the previous sensemaking discussion. Combining the weight of the life-and-death consequences with interacting with other cultures may further exacerbate stress and limit intercultural communication.

It is important to work through the uncertainties that arise from unfamiliarity with dissimilar cultures. Capabilities are often transferred from one nation to the other in the Security
Cooperation and Assistance roles that different nations’ militaries perform with each other. This may come in the form of information sharing, or in the form of equipment and training. This requires close integration between the respective partners as is highlighted by the following statement by Björkman et al, (2007), “Social integration is conceptualized as the creation of a shared identity, the establishment of trusting relationships, and the absence of divisive conflicts between the members of the combining organizations (p. 662).” Absorptive capacity is a key concern in the military Security Cooperation context; the article also emphasizes this: “Potential absorptive capacity consists of the organization's capacity to acquire and assimilate knowledge and realized absorptive capacity centers on knowledge transformation and exploitation. We propose that potential absorptive capacity is an important intermediate variable between cultural differences and the extent of capability transfer” (p. 662).

The focus of this study is in the Middle East; it is perhaps useful to offer the following quote from one of the articles focusing on intercultural communication, “…firms have to face very unstable social contexts; they have to overcome complex bureaucratic systems and low transparency of laws; last but not least, they have to overcome the mistrust existing towards the West – mistrust, which can make relations difficult both inside and outside the organizations. To overcome mistrust in Islamic Countries, firms have to develop a deep knowledge of local culture and traditions” (Calza, Aliane, & Cannavale, 2013, (p. 173). Partnering militaries tend to share more trust than the article described. Perceived levels of integrity and honesty that respective military officials have for each other positively contribute to intercultural communication. Building trust is the next stage within the military context where trust is implied; this becomes a very personal and individual matter.
A key concept for individuals from Western societies to consider is the social network established by the term “wasta” when building this trust. Expatriate’s initial reactions, opinions and observations may be summed up for some who find themselves working in Middle Eastern Arabic societies by the following: “Regulation, trust and cronism in Middle Eastern societies: The simple economics of “wasta”” (Barnett, Yandle, & Naufal, 2013). Berger, Silbiger, Herstein, & Barnes, 2015 explain that “a good understanding of the social and interpersonal networks, i.e. Wasta, which fundamentally stems from the tribal and collective Arab social system is paramount in order to foster effective business relationships...business relations stem from social relations, hence the importance of social relationship building, especially for Western firms, in order to promote successful business interaction with Arab counterparts” (p. 455).

Many Western counterparts may focus on the cronism aspect of “wasta.” They may associate negative connotations to their Arabic counterparts’ affinity towards the Middle Easterner’s established relationships or with power figures. Western counterparts can increase their ability to gain trust by prospective Arab partners through introductions and collaboration with others who have already gained trust through the “wasta” concept.

This Arabic social structure is based on the Bedouin or tribal customs (Kandari & Hadben, 2010). Kandari explains this comes from generations of living in desert conditions, causing ruthlessness, spaciousness, resource scarcity and the need to protect oneself against risks. The result is a tribal zeal that relies on blood kinship relations, ultimately leading to chivalrous behavior (Pely, 2010). Those who observe or interact with a person believed to have “wasta,” recognize his/her social power over others, due to wealth, family name, or political positioning. Military unit and individual servicemembers deployed frequently to these regions are often placed in very stressful situations. Perhaps soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines,
government civilians and contractors who support the government should have an appreciation for these social networks when working with partners in the Middle East (Perry & Flournoy, 2006).

Table 4. Intercultural Communication Literature Review Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, Year of Publication</th>
<th>Key Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Albrecht et al., 2014)</td>
<td>• Studies whether openness leads to employee cross-cultural adjustment and satisfaction when working abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explores dimensions of openness to fantasy (or creativity), aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas and values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Arasaratnam, 2015)</td>
<td>• Thematic analysis of articles authored over the previous decade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Grouped into eight themes: (1) identity, (2) acculturation and global migration, (3) communication dynamics, (4) intercultural competence, (5) theories, models, scales, and frameworks, (6) perception, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination, (7) cross-cultural differences, and (8) intercultural education, training, and study abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Linkages to concepts discussed in sense-making theory articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Direct mention of Hofstede’s work in power distance in section (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Barnett et al., 2013)</td>
<td>• Suggests that “wasta” contributes to business dealings and outcomes in the Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Berger, Silbiger, Herstein, &amp; Barnes, 2015)</td>
<td>• Analyzes business to business relationships in an Arabic context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Describes the importance of “Wasta” – tribal based, vs. national/business loyalties and its influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Björkman et al., 2007)</td>
<td>• Presents an integrative model of the impact of cultural differences on capability transfer in cross-border acquisitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Proposes social integration and the degree of operational integration of the acquired unit will moderate cultural differences effects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Block, 2013)</td>
<td>• Explores structure-agency relationship in intercultural communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Analysis of previously written work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• May inform approaches to gathering empirical evidence in my study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Caligiuri, 2014)</td>
<td>• Emphasizes individual differences (personality, attitudes) that affect knowledge sharing behavior may interact with cross cultural environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recommends additional study in this area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| (Calza et al., 2013) | • Intercultural bridges between European firms and Islamic countries.  
• Emphasis on impact of manager’s cultural knowledge (consciousness of cultural differences, and basis for adaptation and competence (capability to use cultural knowledge in the best way). (p. 173)  
• Poses the value of local national management (a cultural bridge) in the business partnership, and discusses the resulting trust that builds in the workforce. (p. 179) |
| (Drew, 2014) | • British interviewer of German business elites.  
• Very useful “how-to” guide, taking into account cross-cultural differences, insider/outsider context, language (to include local cultural nuances).  
• Recommends semi-structured interviews – a useful resource to refer in present interview strategy. |
| (Elnashar, Abdelrahim, & Fetters, 2012) | • Discusses intercultural communication issues in hospital setting in Qatar, when many other country nationals were part of the patient base.  
• Recommended options for training medical professionals to become more competent in this multicultural setting. |
| (El-Said & Harrigan, 2009) | • Discusses Arabic social networks (wasta) and their effect on business conducted with or in Jordan. |
| (Feghali, 1997) | • Discusses Arab cultural communication patterns, within the context of 1) basic cultural values, 2) language and verbal communication, and 3) nonverbal and paralinguistic patterns.  
• Compelling research that encourages future research into Arab cross-cultural communications. Direct practical application to this current research effort. |
| (Gudykunst, 2005) | • Useful reference to define intercultural and international communication.  
• Article by Kim, Y.Y. included in this book – reference three dimensions of adjustment: cognitions, feelings, and behaviors |
| (Hofstede, 1980) | • Seminal cross-cultural study |
| (James P. Johnson, Tomasz Lenartowicz, & Salvador Apud, 2006) | • Expatriate failure and inability of headquarters managers to understand the complexities of doing business overseas.  
• Distinguishes between cultural competence and cultural intelligence.  
• Focuses on the “doing” in intercultural relationships, rather than just the simple knowledge. |
| (Kim & NetLibrary, 1988) | • Introduces three dimensions of adjustment: cognitions, feelings, and behaviors, supporting (Haslberger et al., 2013) |
| (Kim, 2001) | • Further discusses three dimensions of adjustment: cognitions, feelings, and behaviors, supporting (Haslberger et al., 2013) |
| (Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2013) | • Explored stereotypes, including lower perceived individuals that projected more self-worth than they had and the resulting interactions.  
• Identified how national cultures differences, when interacting, shape the work environment. |
Table 4 continued

| (Merkin, Taras, & Steel, 2014) | • Individualism is positively related to direct communication and self-promotion, and negatively related to sensitivity and face-saving concerns and the propensity to use deception.  
• High power distance is positively related to sensitivity and face-saving concerns and indirect communication and negatively related to a propensity to interrupt.  
• Masculinity is positively related to a self-promoting communication style and direct communication and negatively related to sensitivity and face-saving concerns.  
• Uncertainty avoidance is positively related to both sensitivity and face-saving concerns. |
| (Pely, 2010) | • Discusses the importance of honor within Arabic culture, within the principles described by social networks (wasta). |
| (Ruben & Kealey, 1979) | • Study of intercultural adaptation of Western technical advisors in Kenya.  
• Investigated seven interpersonal and social communication skills, including respect, interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, empathy, role behavior, interaction management, and ambiguity tolerance.  
• Explores impact of language barriers on trust in multinational teams.  
• Proposes how managers can manage subordinates’ reactions to language barriers  
• Limitations – causality direction between communication and trust is not clear; Study done only with German auto-multinationals – may not generalize; Study did not seek to find psychological underpinnings of trust; Study did not investigate different types of interdependencies/interactions. |
| (Wang, Feng, Freeman, Fan, & Zhu, 2014) | • Explores intercultural competence mechanisms for Chinese expatriate managers working in global environments.  
• States that how skills work together toward cross-cultural competence has not been previously examined.  
• Limitations: Short term study, sample size; self-reporting introducing bias  
• Possible research extension – focus in Middle East; qualitative data – reach for long term experience – tease out common threads |
| (Xu, 2013) | • Proposes that being dialogic, celebrating difference, otherness and plurality required to be intercultural.  
• Proposes critical dialogic approach to understand difference in intercultural communication; value both grand narratives and local meanings.  
• Proposes additional work in the critical dialogic research area. |
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD

Sensemaking theory implies taking “undefined problems ... and then managing undefined space, time and action to draw lines, establish categories and coin labels to create new features of the environment that did not exist before” (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking further states that each participant (or action taker) in the environment accumulates a narrative account of his/her actions. He/she then socializes his/her account with other participants that he/she is collaborating with in that environment (Brown et al., 2008). Brown further states, “An understanding that sensemaking involves processes of narrativization (narrative-making) permits nuanced investigation of the extent to which individuals in a work team agree, share, disagree and contest understandings.”

Research on intercultural communication between nation states’ militaries did not appear to be as robust in comparison to their business counterparts. The apparent research gap, and the narrative accounts within sensemaking suggested exploring this by using qualitative, phenomenology research methods (Creswell, Creswell, & research, 2007). Creswell’s summary of phenomenological methods was further referenced (Moustakas, 1994) for the psychological perspective and (van Manen, 1990) from a human science orientation. Following is an extract from Creswell on the characteristics of Phenomenology.

- An emphasis on a phenomenon to be explored, phrased in terms of a single concept or idea. In the case of this research, the central theme is “exploring factors of intercultural
communication and whether they help or hinder collaboration in U.S. Department of Defense State-to-State interactions.”

- The exploration of this phenomenon with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Thus, a heterogeneous group is identified that may vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15.

- A philosophical discussion about the basic ideas involved in conducting phenomenology. This turns on the lived experiences of individuals and how they have both subjective experiences of the phenomenon and objective experiences of something in common with other people. Thus, there is a refusal of the subjective-objective perspective, and for these reasons, phenomenology lies somewhere on a continuum between qualitative and quantitative research.

- A data collection procedure that involves typically interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon.

- Data analysis that can follow systematic procedures that move from the narrow units of analysis (e.g., significant statements), and on to broader units (e.g., meaning units), and on to detailed descriptions that summarize two elements, "what" the individuals have experienced and "how" they have experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

- Phenomenology ends with a descriptive passage that discusses the essence of the experience for individuals incorporating "what" they have experienced and "how" they experienced it. The "essence" is the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study. (pp. 78-79)

Snowball sampling selected optimum interview candidates during the data collection process. “Snowball sampling is a method for recruiting subjects for research studies in which
people who have already participated are asked to recommend others to take part. Also known as chain sampling or referral sampling, this method is especially helpful to sociologists who are seeking information about specific groups of people who may not be easy to identify” (Ungvarsky, 2017).

The snowball sampling technique resulted in ten viable individuals participating in this study through semi-structured interviews conducted in neutral locations (for a list of the general interview questions/topics, see Appendix A). The researcher encouraged the participants to “take charge of the interview” during the discussions in order to create a more relaxing experience and to encourage the flow of ideas from the participants. Physical geographic distance between the researcher and some of the participants required some of the interviews to be conducted using Facebook Messenger. The completed interviews were then transcribed using Rev.com transcription service. The researcher then cleaned up the transcripts and removed any material that might be of a sensitive geopolitical nature or reveal security vulnerabilities for Middle East nations and their security force partners. The text transcripts were sent back to the individual participants for their final approval.

Each study participant had previous and current relations with multiple nations.

Table 5. Intercultural Communication Study Participant Selected Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession/ Current Job</th>
<th>Years Experience</th>
<th>Birth/Childhood Region</th>
<th>Resident/ Citizenship Country</th>
<th>Described Interactions with:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Senior Military Officer – Directorate of Military Cooperation</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Middle East, Europe, East Asia, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. DOD Cultural Advisor</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

31
Table 5 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S. Navy Officer – U.S. DOD Coalition Support Officer</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>Middle East</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Middle East, Central Asian States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Army Officer – Middle East Gulf Area Nation Country Desk Officer</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Middle East, Europe, South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. DOD Program Analyst working in Security Cooperation; Previous U.S. Senior Military Officer</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. DOD Program Analyst working in Security Cooperation; previous U.S. Army Soldier</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Middle East, Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. DOD Program Analyst working in Security Cooperation; previous U.S. Special Forces Soldier</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Middle East, Europe, East Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Army Officer – LEVANT Region Country Team</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreter Support Contractor/Small Business Owner</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Middle East, Europe, East Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreter Support Contractor</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Middle East, Europe, East Asia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant’s origins, birthplaces and places of current residence are also noted to offer a global perspective (Figure 2).

While the world map graphically represented the two sides of the explored dyad on a global scale, it did not provide the necessary resolution to accurately depict actual locations of the participants. As a result, regional maps were developed for better clarity (Figures 3 and 4).
Figure 2. World Map Showing Locations of Study Participants (Locations overlayed on map obtained from Wikimedia Commons (Menegaz, 2008))

Figure 3. Middle Eastern Subregional Map with Middle Eastern Study Participants Depicted (Locations overlayed on map obtained from Wikimedia Commons (By Siamax [Public domain], 2012))
Most nation’s military organizations tend to have larger proportions of males in comparison to females within their military, civilian and contract support personnel. This was found also to be true with three (3) females within this group of ten (10) participants. As a note, two of the females were Arab support contractors and one was a U.S. government civilian.

Figure 4. United States of America Map with U.S. Study Participants Depicted (Locations overlayed on map obtained from Wikimedia Commons (Briangotts, 2008)

Figure 5. Gender of Study Participants (created by author)
Interestingly, six of the participants in this study were born and were raised in the Middle East than in the United States. Three of these persons continue to live within that region, while three of them have since moved to the USA and are now U.S. citizens.

![Physical Origin/Formative Years](created by author)

**Figure 6. Physical Origin/Formative Years (0-18+) of Study Participants** (created by author)

![Current Citizenship](created by author)

**Figure 7. Citizenship of Study Participants** (created by author)

There was a fairly equal division among military, government civilians and support contractors in this study. Each of these groups provides key contributions to the U.S. DOD
mission. The original intent of this study was to have more “native” participants from the Middle Eastern side of the investigated dyad. Gaining approval for additional participants was difficult, due to the higher power distance present in their countries in comparison to Western culture. The additional Middle Eastern military officers working within U.S. military organizations could not get approval from their parent country leadership within the available time allocated for interviews to participate.

The researcher used nVivo (Version 10) from QSR International to do thematic coding of the respective interviews. Starting with the first interview, tentative themes were extracted from the interview topics previously mentioned (Appendix A). During each successive analysis, the themes were refined, until themes appeared to converge. This appeared to happen between the seventh and eighth interviews. The surviving themes will be introduced during the “Results” section of this study.

Figure 8. Employee Role (Military Officer/Government Employed Civilian/Government Support Contractor) (created by author)
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Some individuals reading this study may not be familiar with the environments where militaries do intercultural interactions or communications. I have provided some terms of reference and associated definitions. Having a basic understanding of those definitions will establish context for readers who are not already familiar with the military, government agency and non-government agency discussion points within the interview narratives. This glossary is located at Appendix B.

Thematic Analysis

The themes introduced below were common to the ten interviews during this study. It is useful to frame this discussion through restating the research question, “How do U.S. Department of Defense employees perceive their intercultural communication effectiveness and shortcomings during their state-to-state interactions?” Following are the five individual themes that comprise Effective Intercultural Communication.

Theme One – Personal Factors

Given that intercultural communication and the resulting effectiveness involves individuals, it seemed appropriate to establish the first major theme as Personal Factors. Supporting themes included:

1. [Expatriate] Adaptation

2. Awkward Moments (some of the interviews revealed the greatest intercultural communication gains during the most vulnerable and embarrassing moments)
3. Language Comprehension

**Theme Two – Operating Environment**

The environment influences individuals as they conduct intercultural communications. Therefore, Operating Environment appeared to surface as a second major theme, with supporting themes including:

1. Engagement Geographical Locations (where the engagements occurred)
2. Engagement Frequency (how often)
3. Engagement Prominence (how important/influential were the people they met with)
4. Openness and Trust
5. Military and Civil Interaction Comparisons

**Theme Three – Power Distance**

Power Distance became the third major theme and focused upon resolving differences between high and low power distance cultures/societies when they interacted.

**Theme Four – Sensemaking Theory**

Sensemaking theory was the fourth major theme. Logically, the subordinate themes included many of the characteristics of the theory:

1. Identity
2. Problem Setting
3. Creating
4. Retrospection
5. Socializing
Theme Five – Wasta (Considered)

A final theme the researcher considered was Wasta. This theme emerged late in the process of conducting the interviews, due to the apparent importance of informal social networks on communication. Although this thousand-year Arabic social network appeared to be a factor for consideration in this study; there was not enough data to support its inclusion as a theme. Figure 9 below shows the thematic model that was developed as a result of the 10 interviews.

![Thematic Model](image)

**Figure 9. Effective Intercultural Communication – Thematic Analysis**

To give the reader appreciation for the amount of discussion returned on each of these respective themes, I used nVivo to create a theme hierarchy chart (Figure 10). This graphic
representation provides a general idea of the amount of discussion of each major theme and the component subordinate themes by the ten participants. The size of each box within the chart indicates how many responses were returned by the study participants for the topic(s) during their interviews. One may infer from this chart that most discussion was about the operating environment, then followed by sensemaking, personal factors and power distance.

![Intercultural Communication Interactions Hierarchy](image)

**Figure 10. Intercultural Communication Interactions Hierarchy, created using nVivo**

The topics returned by the interviews suggested modifications to the earlier proposed conceptual model as shown in Figure 12 below.
Participants emphasized internal adaptation factors as personal factors and further categorized them as:

1. General Adaptation
2. Language Comprehension
3. Awkward Moments

Given the emergent categories above, and the participants’ interview content, there also appeared to be an apparent linkage to identity within the sensemaking theory portion of the revised model. This remained consistent with the originally proposed model, which had linked expatriate adaptation to the sensemaking identity category.

External expatriate adaptation factors became known as the operating environment and were comprised of:

1. Geographic Location
2. Frequency of Intercultural Interactions
3. Developing Openness and Trust
4. Prominence of Interactions
5. Military and Civilian Interactions

These factors, when aggregated, appeared to influence or inform all of the sensemaking categories, as shown in the figure.

Participants did not respond to all of the sensemaking categories proposed in the original model. This resulted in the removal of plausibility and ongoing activities, leaving the following categories remaining in the revised model:
1. Identity
2. Problem Setting
3. Creating
4. Retrospection
5. Social

Wasta, as previously discussed, was considered as a contributing factor to effective intercultural communication, but there was not enough data to confirm this; it was removed. For additional explanation of how the original model transformed to this revised model during the interviews, please see the Conclusions chapter.

**Figure 11. Modified Concept Map – Effective Intercultural Communication, by author**

**Personal Factors**

[Expatriate] Adaptation

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As previously introduced in Figure 11, effective intercultural communication starts with personal adaptation. Recall Harrison, et al., 1996, from the literature review which stated “High self-monitors will adapt their behavior to meet the behavioral requirements for a certain situation, therefore they reactively adjust to the situation. (pp. 171-172). One interviewee from the Western side of the dyad expressed this to be his experience when he stated,

_Can you look at the other person across from you and accept them for who they are, or are you going to come with a prejudgment, with preconceived notions and judgements of what you think they should be, or what you think you are. When you can get past that, you can find a common ground with them, then you can move forward._

He emphasized that one must open his/her mind and put aside his/her own past thinking, and then fully connect with a culture that is dissimilar to his/her own. He further elaborated on different roles he had held/filled within the intercultural space, distinguishing among his US military, his family and his religious interactions.

_There are different roles I go in as if it's me in a uniform, then they'll view me as representing the US military. I've got to be careful, because they will take that as U.S. policy. If it's me with my family, and you're dealing with friends or just on a personal level, then that's a completely different nature._

_I've engaged in also some other responsibilities for my religion. It just depends on who you are that day, what you're representing as far as how they're going to react to you. It's different. There's not just one way just because you're an American._

He expressed there were times he did not understand the culture combined with his curiosity and his desire to know more about it. He stated the admission compelled his foreign hosts to educate him, making his adaptation to the new culture more effective. He made a
distinction between unique self-monitoring and behavior changes he made in response to work, personal and religious interactions with other cultures. Each situation was different. He highlighted another aspect of self-monitoring when he discussed discovery of cultural knowledge gaps. He emphasized the value of asking direct questions when he felt he was unaware of something about the other culture. These actions promoted common understanding between the two cultures and improved intercultural communication.

Just by saying, "I don't understand. Can you explain this to me?" And saying, "This is how I am. What's going on?" Or, "Hey, this is something new for me. Can you please tell me more about your beliefs, your customs." These have been methods I have used to better adapt to new cultures I have worked with. I've never found them to not be appreciative of that.

My goal is to be familiar and comfortable with other cultures, being out of my zone and able to adapt. I can then overcome some of these other things. Understanding the culture and the history of the culture has helped me understand there may be more than one meaning when I am interacting with other cultures.

Interpreters must often assist dissimilar cultures in all stages of communication. The interpreters participating in this study originated and currently live in the Middle East. One echoed her Western counterpart’s statement, by saying, “I've seen the kind of people who will get deployed somewhere, and then within three weeks, a month, they kind of understand where the limits are. They fit into the new environment. The people who usually make it faster are the people who are thirsty for knowledge. They want to understand the country, they get fascinated by new cultures and new history.” This participant spoke with great passion throughout her interview about her appreciation for those who successfully adapt to Middle Eastern culture.
She further expressed personal adaptation was an essential first step towards successful communication in the Arabic and Western intercultural setting.

She spoke about interactions she had with American military personnel who adapted to Middle Eastern culture. She also discussed the close friendships that could come as a result. As friendships develop and strengthen, conversations become more candid. These stronger bonds between American and Middle Eastern friends would increase intercultural communication effectiveness in this case. “When we make friends with some American military, they are friends for life. Many we don't see them for years, but we still talk to each other and ask about each other families. We've been in millions of conversations with each other about cultures and life and differences.”

The individuals she was speaking about were working at the tactical (or “hands on”) level of military tasks. She stressed this adaptation was equally important at senior levels of interaction. Strategic level executives and senior support staff also enhance their effectiveness when developing friendships. Those friendships create environments that result in more candid conversation. This leads to more exploration of cultural differences and resolution of those differences. She offered both positive and negative examples of her role as a linguist role in adapting. Words that are translated between different languages may be technically accurate. The words may cause minor or even more serious offenses between disparate cultures when they are included in the context of sentences as originally stated. A knowledgeable linguist will carefully listen to one side of the conversation, and then will translate the spoken words into acceptable terms in the other language.

My work as an interpreter sometimes shapes the words that are being said because I can notice when a person is not considerate of a culture. It's pragmatic.
translation, where you translate also the meaning of the person because some people are not smart in using the words.

I've seen with [another nation’s representatives] a big fight with one third world country government where there was an MP from a certain country. A person told him that you are reluctant as a country to perform your job. The interpreter said it as it was stated by the source. The word was very insulting and it turned into a fight. I've learned these things along the years. I sugarcoat words that the speaker himself may have wished to deliver that way. I've also seen people who are perfect with the culture. I have no problem translating their sentences word by word. They know exactly what to say and when to say it to not clash with the culture.

She expressed the effects of popular news/media upon individuals during their adaptation to foreign cultures. She believed individuals needed to keep an open mind when taking information in from such sources, further emphasizing their need to independently research. “People who follow certain media channels or certain media outlets, and this is their first source of information are greatly challenged. They don’t research the information, they don’t verify it. They believe that, "I don't have to. My culture is the one which should be the reference to all people.”

She continued her thoughts on adaptation by speaking about what she saw occurring when individuals did not self-monitor and adapt (counterproductively, they might expect everyone they worked with to see through their lens). Her thoughts were directed at Western individuals coming to the Middle East as guests, but this might also be observed from the other direction. “People who resist multicultural understanding, they underestimate and undermine anything that does not go along with their culture. Their culture for them is superior. It is the
One participant had a fascinating background, having been born and raised (until he was 18 years old) in a Middle Eastern country by parents that expatriated from the United States, then moved to the U.S. as an adult. His parents, unlike many of others who left the home nations’ shores to work overseas, did not move into expatriate clusters or compounds (often protected by security guards and walls). Instead, they chose to live on “the dusty desert street corner next to the local families.” This gave him a much higher level of interaction with the local culture and made him an exceptional contributor to this study. He spoke of deep interactions that he had with his Middle Eastern childhood friends and introduced his adaptation strategy by stating, “One of my main coping strategies was just becoming a chameleon because nobody wants to be an outsider. Nobody wants to be passed aside because you look different or speak different or act differently. I just became a chameleon of whatever I was around or whomever I was dealing with. I would adopt the way people were speaking.”

He indicated how he adapted with different groups of people during his youth. He was quite animated as he recalled his experiences,

*When I was a teenager, I just wanted to be accepted. I developed a coping strategy of accepting customs and courtesies of other and I desired to be accepted. I have friend groups that I get along with easily and I mean, really great friends that I got along with. But they would never be friends with each other.*

He emphasized the value of emulating others within dissimilar cultures to gain greater acceptance in the narrative above. He bridged multiple other groups that might not be able to get along with each other due to his multiple interactions. Given his skill in this role, he would have
improved not only his own abilities in intercultural communications, but he also assisted others in bridging their differences. He shared his efforts in adapting to other Arabic cultures. He was assigned to U.S. units performing operational missions in the Middle East. Sometimes, it is the very minute details that count. He described how sewing an Arabic name tag on his military uniform was recognized by his host nation counterparts as his sincere attempt to adapt to his new environment (at that time). “It's a problem to [do personal] introductions if you don't know how to say names of people. I made myself an Arabic name tag. Technically, that's not allowed according to the uniform standards but my commander didn't have a huge issue with it. You walk up, introduce yourself, they can't say your name, they look down, they see it and it's done, right?”

This officer became a Middle Eastern Foreign Area Officer as he continued to serve in the U.S. Army. He was assigned repeatedly to security cooperation offices within U.S. Embassies in Middle Eastern countries. He has had many opportunities to adapt not only to the military culture of those nations. He also gained greater understanding (and appreciation) of those nations’ cultures while adapting to the norms of the larger societies of those countries. Continuing as a “bridging” ambassador between both Western and Middle Eastern culture, he has taken on the role of assisting other Westerners to adapt to the region. He highlighted one of the most significant misconceptions that surfaces with Western women and how they view the independence and treatment of women in the Middle East as he discussed this role further.

One of the main things that blows me away is when women come to the Middle East and all they see is black. "Oh my gosh, these people are so oppressed" or, "Oh, look at that lady who has to wear a burkini in the pool.” The Middle Eastern woman views that as empowerment. Do you know what they used to wear in the pools? It was literally
illegal for you to wear clothing in the pool. Women used to sit on the side of the pool watching their kids and husband swim and they weren't allowed to. The burkini, as ironic as it is, is actually freeing and most women can't understand that idea, right?

His statement reiterates the need for Westerners to seek greater knowledge of Middle Eastern culture, and the need to personally adapt their behaviors. Westerners would see womens’ wearing of the burkini as repression when viewed through their Western lens. Middle Eastern women might be able to describe how the garment has liberated them if they discussed this with their Western counterparts. This simple conversation might open up unprecedented intercultural dialogues.

A female U.S. government civilian who often works directly with Middle Eastern men within Arabic society discussed her adaptation. She described the measures she had to take to work effectively with her regional colleagues. She discussed how she adapted her manner of dress and was careful about physical touching in mixed gender situations. Clearly, she was self-monitoring within the context of the society that had accepted her as their guest.

_I've always been a person to look someone in the directly in the eye, shake their hand and be very outgoing. [When starting to work in the Middle East] I found myself being immediately reserved, you know, wearing very conservative clothing and only reaching out my hand to take a hand if one was offered. Even if I did reach out, you know say we were on the receiving line, if someone wouldn't shake my hand, I realized that it was a cultural thing and not intended to be disrespectful._

U.S. Special Operations Forces soldiers regularly embed with other nations’ militaries in order to advise, assist and accompany them in missions in the host nations’ countries. They often do their partnering with foreign military forces for much longer durations than
conventional military forces. Unit senior leaders also emphasized the need of outreach to the
greater local community while serving in their Foreign Internal Defense roles. The military
Special Operation Force community emphasizes this more than other military organizations,
because of the embedded and sensitive nature of their operations. “When we were on missions,
we had to do cultural immersion. We had to go out and engage in the community and see what
the people are like. That reduced our prejudices of the people. We would see things
differently.”

He further described one of the interactions he experienced while advising and assisting
one of the Southeast Asia Special Forces. That rewarding experience helped him to adapt.
Notable is the Americans’ desire to “not intrude,” even in the face of the described family’s
insistence. He echoed a previous participant’s statement about laying aside “preconceived
notions” as a necessary first step to adaptation.

_We walked up to a river bank. It was me and two other Chemical Reconnaissance
Detachment guys. There was a family of six eating sticky rice and mekong whisky. We
didn’t want to intrude. We walk by and they have a waterfall. It’s a nice river. They
wouldn’t take no for an answer. It was our job to let go of our preconceived notions
about these folks. Every time we went out and did a JCET we took time to do cultural
immersions. That’s what I loved about being in that community._

He elaborated further, describing the hospitality of this family in detail and the deep
impressions it made upon him. He contrasted this with how his own American culture might
embrace others. This experience made an impression on him during his formative years in the
U.S. military. This eased his future adaptation and intercultural communication effectiveness.
We sit down on this blanket. We were trying to talk and engage and they were giving us sticky rice. Then the Mekong Whiskey came out. Then the rice wine. Next thing you know they were trying to say jokes, and we were telling jokes. It was an unbelievable experience. We were still doing your military thing but we thought these people were really cool. Can you imagine, just for a second, a family of six sitting around in a park out here in Tampa and some Asian special forces guys walks up? What do you think would happen?

They'd freak out. What are you doing? No, you can't have my sandwich. Get out of here. These folks were very generous. They didn't want anything. They wanted to sit down and talk to us, and have a good time. They wanted to share their world and what they had. They knew we'd come from a land of plenty. They still had a welcoming attitude, saying, "Here's rice. What else do you want? Here's all my rice and wine. Here's my Mekong."

This participant further emphasized how this cultural immersion assisted his team when they were back on the job, training with their Special Forces colleagues. The passion with which this account was shared, in turn, fully immersed the researcher in the environment. Many, who observe how militaries act or interact from outside of those formations might say that soldiers carry out orders in a lock-step behavior, with little flexibility to change procedure. Conversely, he emphasized a change in behavior, or an adaptation by the [American] “E8 jump master on the team.” What might normally be perceived by the jump master as a safety violation to be immediately corrected within an American formation was allowed to occur. This prevented the American team from offending their Southeast Asian counterparts.
We did an airborne drop by C130. There had to be a partner nation jump master for us to get to jump. Normally ... We had our E8, our jump master on the team, he was doing jump master too to make sure the Thais were doing it right. One partner nation guy was all jacked up. His elbow was all crooked. He looked out the door and his helmet was in his face, he couldn’t see anything. There’s our E8, he was uptight all the time. In this case, he just laughed because he’d been immersing with these folks. He just held the partner nation soldier’s helmet back and helped him up. Finished his checks, stuck him out the door, and then we jumped.

When we hit the ground, it was just hot. The first thing you did was to pop up and pull your reigns. You got down there and gathered your chute and started doing an S roll with it. Before I could get down to the Apex in my chute there was already a partner nation guy rolling up my chute for me and packing it better than I could pack it. Then he took it and put it on his back with the reserve, and ran off the drop zone.

First, I was like "Hey man that's like taking my ruck. What are you doing? I wanted to take that." This was another example of cultural immersion. These guys wanted to be nice, they wanted to help us. I offered them money and they said, "No I don't want any money." They just wanted to be a part of us. They wanted to learn from us and be a part [of us] with no strings attached. That was the most amazing experience.

The cultural immersion described in the previous account had an impact on the interactions when the U.S. Special Operation Force team was back on the job with their Southeast Asia counterparts. Certain U.S. norms or standards were not held in place, to offer the host nation colleagues to have a bit more space and independence in their actions. Likewise, U.S. Special Operation Force thought processes where each person cleaned up “his own kit”
after landing by parachute on the drop zone were relaxed. The U.S. special operators accepted assistance from their hosts, even though they would never do so in their traditional environments. These compromises developed greater inclusion and contributed to greater communication efficiencies in this intercultural setting.

Each of the participants emphasized the need to actively observe their surroundings, to self-monitor their behaviors, and to adapt throughout this section on personal adaptation in the expatriate environment. Adaptations described included work, personal and religious settings.

**Awkward Moments**

Sometimes we have experiences that make us cringe, perhaps even causing us severe embarrassment. Later, when we have reflected upon those events, we realize we have learned great lessons or even have developed close relationships as a result of those awkward moments (business or personal, or perhaps both). This section will reveal participants’ reflections on the awkward moments in their intercultural communication experiences. Each person indicated that the apparent floundering moments spent with other cultures brought them closer and improved intercultural communication during their interviews.

Our forward-based Foreign Area Officer shared a personal story about one of his awkward moments in the men’s shower room at a U.S military base. The U.S. military base was located in the Middle Eastern country where he spent his childhood years. One can sense a severe embarrassment for his friend during his telling of this account. Then one realizes the outcome brought them much closer together. He emphasizes the value of these moments that brought them much closer, particularly in the context of Arabic culture. There were differences in standards of personal hygiene following a bit of sport (basketball). The American preference was to wait until they arrived at home; the Arabic preference was to get clean now! To get clean
now, they ended up, “in the middle of the shower with a bunch of Marines who were just cutting up.” His Middle Eastern friend was severely embarrassed, not to mention vulnerable (naked) in a semi-public way that he was absolutely unprepared for. Through this awkward moment, a deeper bond was formed.

The South Arabian Peninsula heritage U.S. Navy Officer attended courses at the American University in Cairo and shared an experience. This situation started in a misunderstanding that developed over time and culminated with one of his college professors asking him why he was ignoring her. He was reliving this experience as he recounted it. He cringed when he shared his account. One could see that professor and student ended up forming a very close bond that endures to this day.

I used to pass by the director of the Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL) program, an Arabic foreign language program's office. I was on my way to class at the American University in Cairo. I would just pass by and say, “Good morning, Doctor,” and she’d say, “Good morning.” I would just keep going. A week later, the professor approached me and she told me, “May I have a moment with you?” I went to her office thinking nothing of it, and she asked, “Have I offended you? Have I upset you? Is something going on?” I said, “No, not at all. Everything is great. I enjoy your class.” She replied, “Well, why are you short with me every time you pass by my office?”

I told her, “Well professor, you're after the program, you're too busy. I'm a new student.” She said, “Most of my students, they pass by, they say hello, and they spend a minute saying how are you? How was your morning? And then, they keep going. You are the only one who would just say hello and brutally just keep walking on to your
Dr. Rupta and I are now very close friends. We keep in touch. It's one of those almost-disastrous, complete misunderstandings. All is good now.

Just as cues may be misunderstood between a professor and a student in the academic environment, use of humor is another area that can lead to awkward moments. One of our Middle Eastern interpreters offered some caution in use of jokes or humor in mixed culture settings. One seldom knows how statements will be interpreted. Interpreters intercede or intervene to explain the meaning of words.

*When an American tries to translate what a joke means in English or a Jordanian tries to say something in English which makes sense in Arabic, it comes out really heavy. The way we joke in Arabic is a little bit edgy. Our country's way of joking is to tell someone, "I'm going to shoot you or explode you." It means nothing dangerous. One of my countrymen said to an American, "I will shoot you in the head and I will explode you." The American freaked out because this was his first visit. I had to take him to the side and tell him, "Don't worry. My peer loves you so much, this is just the way we joke." Everything involves bombs and bullets because of the world we live in – it is crazy; maybe sometimes we laugh at misery.*

Our South Arabian Peninsula-heritage U.S. Navy Officer described a misunderstanding that occurred during an International Night at U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM). The command periodically conducts those events at the headquarters to promote inclusion of the many different nations that contribute to form a coalition within the command. His account spoke to the value of diplomacy and restraint during awkward experiences.

*During the last International Night at our U.S. Central Command Headquarters, one of the Senior National Representatives was very excited about a student event. The*
U.S. Central Commander was going to be there. I politely asked them to make sure it doesn't take much of his time.

I thought that the general would not make the commanders dance for over, maybe 30 seconds, 60 seconds. He had brought students from his nation from the University of Florida. They got very excited meeting a four star American general. The general was dancing out here for three minutes, and I was watching the entire time. The commander’s entourage are basically looking at me, as if to say, “What the heck's going on? Why is the boss still dancing?”

He was very gracious. The commander, he danced and the partner nation representatives were happy. I went to the Senior National Representative office at the end, and I said, “If your Crown Prince was here, or if your Sheik was here, we wouldn't have had him dance for three minutes.” We would have had maybe quickly photo op and then we would have kept going. Sometimes, over-accommodating, and thinking, Oh, we don't want to offend that culture, prevents us from voicing a really valid concern.

The awkward event persisted and caused this U.S. Navy Officer discomfort. Afterwards, he was able to tactfully but candidly ask the Senior National Representative if his key leaders would have tolerated a similar situation. He was able to address the issue, in terms both cultures would understand based on similar military courtesies. This resulted in improved intercultural communication between those parties in the future.

Some U.S. DOD actions with international military partners involve very technical information. The specialized words do not easily translate into Arabic (the words often do not exist in their language). Additionally, many of our U.S. personnel who work with Arabic militaries were selected to do so because of their technical capabilities, rather than Arabic
language skills. The default language many U.S. DOD personnel use to communicate is English. U.S. DOD employees may not speak through interpreters or linguists when Arabic officers have strong English skills.

A government civilian recounted her awkward moments. She always has been passionate about her job. She spoke rapidly during her interactions with foreign cultures because of being nervous. One might visualize the Arabic officer on the receiving end of this conversation with her, and his polite, almost apologetic interruption. That interaction has brought them closer to each other and has improved their work relationship.

_I speak very fast in English. One of the key leaders I met with is very proficient in English but he would always say, “I need you to slow down because you speak way too fast.” Every time we see each other, we recount that conversation. He still reminds me to slow down speaking. I keep telling him that I'm very passionate about my work. I enjoy doing what I do. There is a lot of camaraderie between us because of that._

These accounts have shown that awkward moments shared between different cultures bring dissimilar individuals closer. It offered the potential to improve future intercultural communication when it occurred.

**Language Comprehension**

Language comprehension and its contributions have been documented in previous literature. Many Western collaborators limit their understanding to a few greeting phrases given the challenge of learning the Arabic language and its dialects. The small gesture of learning a few common phrases appears to show deference and respect for the Middle Eastern culture when a Western guest is visiting. The offer of respect, when positively received, would then likely influence intercultural communication in a positive manner.
One of the female linguists from the Middle East indicated this positive influence. She stated her countrymen appreciated Western counterparts’ efforts when they used simple Arabic greetings. She used terms like “joy” and “in love with our culture” to express her reactions to these efforts. She indicated “bridges of confidence” were built between the two cultures when this was done. She emphasized the need to identify differences first, and then explore the similarities, thereby strengthening the relationships that might follow. “When foreigners learn the very local traditional things, when they say them, they can now bring happiness and joy to the heart of the other person. Our culture then believes that, “Oh, he's in love with our culture and we love him back.” This is how it feels exactly. It shows that the person is paying an effort to mingle in our culture and it has also built bridges of confidence, to be honest.”

This sentiment was reinforced by Western study participants. One individual stated, “It's a frequent strategy that I use when I am working with the partner nations medical services or the ministry of health. When I am going through something that's in a lecture format, I try to introduce those local colloquialisms. It shows the partner nation participants that I have an understanding of their culture.” He further elaborated on a situation where he forcefully used the Arabic word “fasakh” (فسخ) to get his point across. Fasakh means to nullify, annul, or to void something.

I was working with [them, training them on] a mass casualty decontamination system and instead of 24 people working in eight-person teams with defined leaders of those three teams, everyone was trying to do everything together. I looked right at them and said, "Stop the fasakh!" “I need a leader and I need you to take and give tasks to each of the individuals. In other words, put this person on power probe, put this person...
on the internal setup." As soon as I said the word fasakh, they looked at me as if to say, "Wait, you know something."

Use of the words translated from English to Arabic might not have nearly the same effect. The use of “fasakh” in Arabic caused an instant response. During previous training, the Arabic participants had learned the most effective way to employ this mass casualty decontamination system with their 24 personnel was to organize into three eight-man teams. Yet here they were, working as 24 individuals, all trying to do all the tasks together. The simple, one-word expression of “Fasakh!” got their attention. It appeared to be the equivalent of, “Stop! What you are doing is not working! You know what to do, now do it.” That one word, spoken in the native language by the American event facilitator, brought forth instant cooperation. The previous account by the Arabic interpreter emphasized feelings of joy and love in the use of pleasant phrases. In contrast, the more jarring words and phrases can have equal positive effects on intercultural communication.

The two previous discussions highlighted examples where individuals took the time to learn key phrases and words. Conversely, many U.S. Department of Defense employees who work in the intercultural environment become focused on their technical core competencies and they do not spend time on this. One of the study participants believed this was her situation. She felt she was weak in this area, but she said it was rewarding when she made the effort to learn and share a few phrases.

_I have not become very proficient in the native language. My partners, they actually joke with me and say, “How is it that you haven't become fluent, given you have been doing this with us for four and a half years?” I said, ”You make it easy because you speak English.” I've made a point to learn key phrases, greetings and slang that they_
wouldn't expect me to know. It's gotten some chuckles and good camaraderie between us. The most important thing is knowing when to use it and who to use it with.

The Special Forces participant further emphasized the positive influence of language comprehension skills on intercultural communication. Similar to the Middle Eastern interpreter’s account, he emphasized the practical necessity of understanding host nation languages for basic needs, such as ordering food or getting a taxi. He recalled some words he used more often during those interactions to further illustrate his points.

“Kudasai. Nihau biiru kudasai”, “Two beers please.” “Pom Chew, Wes”, "My name is Wes.” The biggest compliment you can give is to speak to a culture in their native language, not yours. In certain cultures, it didn't work – like Germany. You try to speak German they get impatient, for the most part, from my encounters. They can speak English and they just do that.

They would let their prejudice go if you actually, if you actually tried to talk. Tried to talk to say, hi how are you. Any kind of phrase. Any kind of language, any kind of words you would try. Then when they start correcting you and you smile and laugh it would make them comfortable. They would loosen up and sometimes you would sit there for two or three hours just learning words and trying to communicate. What do you do when you're in a country and you don't know the language? It makes you get out there and say to a cab driver or whoever, I want to go here, I want to go there. It makes you do all those things.

Another Western participant spoke of his vacation experiences, emphasizing how language comprehension improves intercultural communication. He intentionally picked a geographical region where it would be unlikely to find other Americans. The former Special
Operations Forces Soldier stated before how important it was to use the regionally native language to order food and use local transportation. This participant’s account of ordering breakfast for the family each morning while on vacation supports this. Recall also what our interpreter previously stated, “Using the local language brought joy to the host.” This would appear to be the case, given the smiles that were returned to the American customer from the French bakery staff.

_I do not speak French. I took our family to vacation in southern France for a couple weeks. We were the only Americans around there. Being able to go to the local bakery in the morning and being able to order ... Because we’ve got six children, we need eight baguettes, or eight, or whatever it is, eight croissants in the morning. To be able to say, "we need that", in French, so they could say eight croissants, it broke barriers. It brought smiles to their faces. They spoke English, they clarified it in English. But it'd bring a smile to their face and they would be more willing to work with you. We were at least trying._

U.S. citizens who have traveled abroad may have heard the joke, “How do you tell an American from a European or person from another non-U.S. nation?” The typical punchline to that riddle might be that the non-American knows English and three or more other languages. The American knows just English. The previous account emphasizes that simple language comprehension improves intercultural communication effectiveness. This is true even if comprehension is limited to simple greetings, numbers, letters of the alphabet and other elementary items.
The Foreign Area Officer born in the Middle East further emphasized how his conversational Arabic has assisted him. When a person is capable of speaking at higher conversational levels, it has a positive effect on intercultural communication.

*They really value time you spent and it just gives you huge street credibility when you not only know the language but can understand the dynamics on the ground. My language became fossilized at an early age. I was able to pick up the dialect exactly. They have certain letters and sounds that just don't exist in the English language. Maybe you don't know every word but just the pronunciation of Arabic is huge for them. As soon as I open my mouth with any Arab, it immediately is a game-changer. They immediately know that I've lived in the Middle East. I've been around and they assume that I know a lot about their culture.*

*It's being able to speak quickly with a proper cadence and more than just the initial hellos or pleasantries. There's a term that I think you're familiar with: a culture kid. That was certainly me growing up just because I was here, fully immersed in the culture of the Arabian Gulf.*

*I had this very sponge-like approach to language. I was in my old neighborhood which were, mostly Shiites. I spoke their dialect all the time and then when I moved to Rifaa. I started speaking their language which was more Sunni and then eventually we moved to Juffair. I've had this cocktail of accents along the entire way. I never stuck with one necessarily. It's interesting speaking to someone and they'll say, "Wow, you can just go back and forth so easily."*

This participant's Arabic skills were superior to those of many Westerners that interact with Arabic societies. He did not take an elitist attitude over others who were limited to simple
greeting phrases. He offered encouragement and was very supportive of the viewpoints expressed by the study’s other Western participants. He stated, “You don't have to speak the language to bridge the gap. Just an effort to learn some phrases or an interest in their culture.” This statement further supports that increases in language comprehension will provide a positive influence on intercultural communication.

This viewpoint was also reinforced by the U.S. Department of Defense Middle East Cultural Advisor. Born and raised in the Middle East, he moved to the USA when he was 23 and is now a naturalized citizen. He offered additional insights when it came to proper use of phrases and context. He cautioned those who might choose to use slang. He focused on the phrase, “sausage making” because it did not appear to translate into Arabic very well.

*It's very important [to learn host nation simple greetings], especially if it's coupled with some cultural background and knowledge.* First impressions are very important for the Arabs. It's a lasting impression. The judgment comes out right away the minute they meet you. It makes things much easier. They see that you're making the effort to come to their side and get it from their perspective.

*You have to know your subject matter and be aware of the background of who you're talking to.* Knowing your audience is at what level you're talking. Are you talking military to a politician or military to a military? Is the interaction between four-star generals or colonels. You have to know how you address them, what do you talk about, and how you can textualize. The context itself can change things dramatically on how you address the issue because they're not listening to their counterparts, they're listening to you. Taking that the wrong way or using one wrong phrase can turn things 180 degrees to an undesirable outcome.
The cultural situation also dictates what kind of verbiage you're using within a sentence and how you address an issue. Certain words in certain cultures mean completely different things. You don't want to offend that person.

There's a lot of phrases that ... and I hear that a lot, and I keep telling people don't use it, like 'sausage making.' It doesn't translate well, into Arabic. Even those who understand English, once you say 'sausage making,' they just start looking at each other because it's a cultural nuance. It's an American term.

They stated that guests to foreign cultures who made the effort to know some of the native language had a very positive action in all the participants’ discussions. Those who knew only a few words or phrases demonstrated their desire to be part of the local collective, while some visitors had extensive language skills. This would improve intercultural communication effectiveness.

Operating Environment
Geographic Locations

Table 5 introduced earlier that the ten participants possessed 166 combined years of international intercultural communications experience. I saw it prudent to further explore this by inquiring about the geographical experience from each of the participants. Literature had indicated differences between each country within each region (or sub-region) throughout the world. Typically, the more an individual works within a geographical region, whether as a native, or as a guest to that region, he/she gains more knowledge of the regional culture. This increased knowledge can then inform his/her interactions. More diverse geographical experience (interacting at more locations in the world) would increase this cultural awareness. The individual with more interactions would then be more sensitive to varying cultural norms. This would increase intercultural communication effectiveness. One of the female Middle Eastern
based linguists described her experiences working throughout the Middle East region with Americans and with Europeans.

My work requires me being based in my country to manage my company. It also requires me being in every other country that requires my job. The places I have supported with my interpretation include Middle Eastern and North African countries including Lebanon, Kuwait, UAE, Oman and Egypt. I have also supported events in Turkey which is close to the Middle East as well. I worked in the United States, in Italy, France, and Germany. I also visited Iraq, Erbil, 2011, before the problems started.

The other female interpreter had equally diverse experiences stating, “I usually work with Arabs who need my services in interpretation. I support them primarily in the English Arabic languages. Usually I work with US citizens, but also work with Europeans, Japanese and Chinese.”

The senior cultural advisor highlighted his Middle Eastern origins; he spoke of his status as a naturalized U.S. citizen. “I'm 38 years old, I was born and raised in the Levant region of the Middle East. I started working for DoD right after the 2003 war. I have been a US citizen for a while now, and I'm working for the DoD office. I remain mostly focused on the Middle East area. This includes the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), and the Levant (Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon).”

He stated the experiences he has had living in both cultures has improved his intercultural communication effectiveness through his enhanced understanding of both societies. More importantly, that knowledge has enabled him to advise and to empower others in their journeys to improve their intercultural communication.
A senior military officer from one of the Middle Eastern regional nations offered the following: “My scope of work and position has allowed me to interact with different cultures. These cultures are from different regions, depending on the nationality and the region they come from. It could be a Western culture, or an Eastern culture, or even other Middle Eastern countries.” He mentioned he worked with North Atlantic Treaty Organization Nations, Russia, China and the European Union. He believed that working with these diverse groups on a recurring basis has contributed to his intercultural communication effectiveness.

Another Foreign Area Officer, currently based out of Tampa, Florida, described his interactions in the Middle East as, “multiple countries going overseas, mostly in the Gulf region, also in Iraq and Afghanistan. Military to military engagements with both senior leaders as well, as at the tactical level partner level as well.”

The female U.S. DOD civilian response was, “I've had interactions with people of various backgrounds, mostly Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) backgrounds. As a female project officer most of these partners were males. My current position allows me the opportunity to work with people in the Middle East and mostly males.” Her emphasis on interacting with males was significant because of her understanding of the patriarchal nature of many of the MENA nations and their beliefs in Islam. Those customs exhibit more patriarchal societies and male gender bias than Western countries. She has remained conscious of the limitations placed on gender in the Middle East. She has been successful in overcoming that challenge by acting within the constraints of the culture. She further stated that contributed to her intercultural communications effectiveness as she continued to work in this geographic region.
Comparatively, a male U.S. DOD civilian responded by saying that he worked “predominantly in the role of security cooperation and building partner capacity the region of the world that I’ve been involved with has been the Middle East. I’ve dealt with the countries of Qatar, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates.” He did not emphasize interacting with males. This indicated he did not feel the same pressures that someone of the female gender might react or respond to during his regional duties.

The Special Forces participant offered insights on his numerous intercultural experiences, framing his comments with the following statement:

*I will highlight the Southeast Asia folks, the North East Asians, Balkans states, Iraqi Special Operations Forces, Special Weapons and Tactics Teams, Emergency Reaction Brigade, and non-U.S. North American Special Forces. I think is important to examine what our perceptions were of them, what their culture was like, and how their leaders were.*

He emphasized having the willingness and/or desire to try to look back upon himself from his counterpart’s viewpoint. He postulated his genuine intent to consider negotiation or to compromise. This demonstrated willingness to discuss differences (some of which would likely be cultural) would improve intercultural communication effectiveness. This goes back to the previous discussion on personal adaptation and language comprehension. A consistent discussion thread from the participants was, “*When the host culture observed we made an effort to understand their position, they reciprocated and our collaboration increased and had much more depth.*”
The Special Forces soldier went on to compare how he saw interactions differ with respect to Southeast Asian and Northeast Asian Special Forces, respectively – and offer some military operational context for why those differences might exist.

*When you go from the Southeast Asian Special Forces to the North East Asian Special Forces, because of their different training, they seem like they’re more set on goals and getting to it and they're really stern. The North East Asians, they were less about talking to you about anything. They wanted to learn from you and then they wanted to get out there and fight. There's a reason for that. It's probably called the DMZ [demilitarized zone]. The way they've been trained, that's where I think they've lost something there because it was a big stark contrast between South East Asia and North East Asia partners on how they were.*

The perception by North East Asian Special Operation Force of an urgent security threat seems to have limited intercultural communication (perhaps due to their focus on that immediate, imposing threat). I compared the relationship between the U.S. Special Operation Force team and the South East Asian host culture to the experience with the North East Asian host culture. The interview participant stated the North East Asian culture was less open and this limited the intercultural communication that could occur.

He offered another geographical regional example, illustrating how a host culture’s past adversities negatively affected intercultural interactions.

*In the Balkans, I was working with NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. They were technically proficient and sound at what they did. They had older equipment but their TTPs [tactics, techniques and procedures] were spot on because they were always in defense. They were always worried about somebody else coming in and taking
over or using some kind of chemical weapons on them. But because of the war that they
had when I first went in there I saw all these buildings with huge 20 mm rounds in them.
They were still blown to pieces. Then I went to the military and I started engaging. They
didn't laugh, they didn't smile, they didn't want to talk to me. The military was so serious.
If you thought the North East Asian Special Forces I previously discussed were serious,
these guys in in the Balkans, they were just not talking.

He had described communication challenges while interacting with military personnel
from this culture. They had experienced unspeakable horrors of war, perhaps with their own
eyes, or through verbal accounts from relatives and friends, and or post-traumatic stress disorder
symptoms. One perceives that the entire culture may have internalized unspeakable horrors of
war they had either witnessed or been part of. Their defense mechanism apparently was to limit
their outward interactions with others. This Special Operation Force soldier further explored the
reduced intercultural communication in the social setting.

    When I went out into the population, I spoke to the folks. they were still struggling
from decades ago of fighting. That's the best way to say it. They were not as open and
they were not as friendly. There was this captain, a female, that was 35. My friend and I
went out to have dinner with her and her friend. There was a guy and a gal. They
understood English perfectly. They wouldn't crack a smile. We would talk and joke and
stuff. They would not reciprocate because they were part of a generation that have had
brothers, aunts and uncles get slaughtered.

    Then I went out to a place called Seven Falls, it's just beautiful. I never knew
anything like that existed. I saw the bluest creeks and rivers I had ever seen, but the
people there are so withdrawn from all the fighting that's gone on that you really can't engage them. Even if you try to talk the language they don't want to speak.

The Special Operations soldier had described a culture that was so withdrawn that the people simply would not communicate with others. They simply would not or did not open up even in the face of all the physical beauty surrounding them and the opportunities to welcome a person from another culture over dinner. Severely traumatic events experienced by this culture had prevented effective intercultural communication.

I had assumed that due to common language, similar histories and values, the U.S. and the former British commonwealth nations would have very similar cultures. I further assumed their intercultural communication effectiveness would have very few barriers. The Special Operations soldier’s accounts of his experiences in Australia contradicted my previous belief when he said:

I would like to discuss an experience I had in Australia. It's very plain and simple. It's very raw. I was assigned to a CJSOTF [Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force]. We had DTRA [Defense Threat Reduction Agency] with us and we were prepping for our mission. I was part of the CRF [crisis response force] team. Our leaders told us, “You guys got your pagers and all that stuff. Get out there and do some cultural immersion.”

It was like WWE [World Wrestling Entertainment]. Most of us couldn't even speak to the male locals. We tried to talk to the guys and just say, “Hey what's up with you?” They didn't even want to look at us.

We turned to the girls. "What's going on?" They say, "Hey, look – those guys think America is imperialistic, cocky, arrogant, and they're all over the world. They have
nothing to do with our forces." There was a group of us that didn't let up. We kept on talking to the females and they relaxed a little bit around us. They started actually learning something from us, that we're not bad folks either. We just happen to live in a different country. It was a two-way thing; they were learning as we were learning these are regular guys just like us, we both had a wrong perception.

Arguably, both the U.S. and the “down under” counterparts in Australia might be considered as modern, first-world Western societies, yet there was a clear separation between the two cultures. At first, during this cultural immersion experience by our Special Operation Force Soldiers, the differences appeared to be irreconcilable. Persistence paid off, both in changing whom they interacted with (the girls, rather than the guys) and the focus of those interactions. They were able to identify and overcome misperceptions and the lack of effective communication between the two cultures.

In summary, with respect to geographic locations, all participants stated they had interacted with cultures from multiple countries that were different from their own. They further expressed that the more interactions an individual has had with other cultures, the greater proficiency that individual has in intercultural communication.

**Frequency of Intercultural Interactions**

The previous theme explored geographical locations and indicated individuals who interact with more countries increase their intercultural communication effectiveness. If someone does something more often, he/she tends to increase his/her proficiency at that task. All participants in this study had intercultural interactions with dissimilar cultures to their own on at least a monthly basis. In some cases, it was more frequent. The Foreign Area Officer who
currently works in a Middle Eastern regional U.S. Embassy spoke of his early adult experiences prior to his present job.

*I went back to the U.S. for studies at at a Midwestern U.S. University. After I got into the army, I did some deployments: a full year in Iraq, then I had some time in Afghanistan. I then became a Foreign Area Officer focused on the Middle East and North Africa. I've lived about 14 months on the Arabian Peninsula as a working adult. I've traveled nearly the entire Middle East to North Africa as well as some other locations. Recently, I've just been living in the Levant. The cultures that I've worked with has primarily been with Arab Muslims over my entire life. I would not only label myself as bilingual but really bi-cultural because I lived it for so long. Now that I'm back, this really feels like my stomping ground and it's pretty easy for me to get nested here.*

His account reveals his passion for interacting with Arabic culture. His interactions were more frequent (and he had more diversity of locations within the region) than you would expect from most Westerners. That frequency contributed to his intercultural communication effectiveness in those environments. He referred to his experience as being bi-cultural, further indicating his comfort in interacting with Middle Eastern culture. He explain the value of full cultural immersion during his childhood, describing how his experience increased the comfort he felt in interacting with Middle Eastern culture as an adult. His experiences of “just playing on the dusty corners of these Middle Eastern villages and towns” and developing close and enduring friendships with Middle Eastern peers as a child had a positive impact on his intercultural effectiveness from that young age. That was in contrast to the experience to other American and British expatriates who, “built themselves this little secure bubble.”
When you're at an embassy or on a U.S overseas military base, you live in a type of bubble. — That is the experience for American and British expats in particular. They built themselves this little secure bubble whether they’re military or civilian or whatever. My parents chose to not do that. Although my dad worked for the local Middle Eastern national government, he and mom didn't live on an expat compound or anything. That's the way I grew up, playing on the dusty corners of these villages and towns. That's really why I became so invested in the language and grew up around the culture my entire life. Most of my friends were locals growing up. I knew Americans that lived in their bubbles for 20 years and couldn't even say ‘marhaba’ (or hello) in Arabic. That's just the way they were brought up there.

The senior cultural advisor from the Levant spoke about his frequency of intercultural interactions. He offers a useful comparison from the previous one from the Foreign Area Officer who works in the regional U.S. Embassy. Similar to the Foreign Area Officer, the cultural advisor also grew up in the Middle East, but as a native citizen. He discussed his experiences in phases. Significantly, in his first phase, he mentioned his support to Generals Petraeus and Odierno. Both four-star generals, they were the highest-level U.S. commanders during their respective tours in Iraq. Managing military interactions in a foreign country at that level during a time when lethal combat operations might occur required a very mature individual. He continues providing mentorship by periodically supporting the U.S. Central Command’s Commander. He is often requested by many other organizations throughout U.S. Central Command. Many others continue to recognize his contributions to intercultural communication effectiveness.

I would like to discuss my intercultural communication in two phases. First, I was working overseas from 2003 till 2010. As a DoD contractor I was an advisor for
General Petraeus and General Odierno in Iraq. I managed those relationships on the behalf of the U.S. mission in Iraq and the Iraqi counterparts.

The second interaction phase was when I moved to the States full-time. I interacted on behalf of the U.S. government when I traveled overseas.

Developing Openness and Trust

Two of the words that kept emerging when performing this study were “openness” and “trust.” Interactions between two different cultures will be guarded until they are willing to fully collaborate and trust each other. They may not initially understand certain customs and courtesies of the culture different from their own. This might cause the different cultures to display guarded responses. This provides opportunity to become transparent, open and receptive to sharing their respective cultural dissimilarities mutual trust may be the result. One of our Middle Eastern linguists expressed that she saw the need for being open with others. She described that “being open” was a personal evolution for each person. She laid out her personal experience, and described her thoughts in her childhood years as “a little girl in a little country... thinking that my country was the most important country in the world.” In her current profession as a linguist (since 2009), she has interacted with other cultures. This changed her viewpoint. She stated, “the idea started fading away more and more, and I learned that I'm nothing but a global citizen, that I fit in a certain place on earth.” Her thoughts evolved as she frequently supported nations other than her own. Her comments became very philosophical as she reflected on this.

I believe the key is being open. The world does not revolve around a certain country or a certain culture, because ...I take myself as an example. Before I started this job, when I was in college and was just a little girl in a little country, I always thought
that my country was the most important country in the world and that our culture was the most important one, because this was what we learned during our childhood. Every group of people have their own pride when it comes to their heritage. Then I grew up, started this job in 2009, and started traveling the world. This idea started fading away more and more, and I learned that I'm nothing but a global citizen, that I fit in a certain place on earth. Maybe a thousand years ago, my people never existed. They were in a different form in a different place with different ideas. I became more open, and I've seen this exists in every culture. I've seen Middle Easterners who do not accept others. I've seen Americans who do not accept others. I've seen also people who, when they travel and when they learn, they cannot change their conceptions about so many things. Being open to other cultures, accepting that the world does not revolve around your culture, will help you in understanding others so much.

Her discussion of this topic was very retrospective, but her closing statements were especially poignant and pragmatic. They connected back to previous themes on expatriate adaptation and self-monitoring. Individuals in the intercultural environment should self-monitor and modify their behaviors to meet the host culture’s approval. The host culture often reciprocates, and openness and trust may be the result, leading to improved intercultural communication. The alternative as the closing sentences state, is continued misunderstanding, which diminishes communication potential.

Arabic culture does have several proverbs and reflective wise sayings. Some of these were invoked by the Arabic participants in their discussions. This interpreter used a parable to further express her thoughts: “Whatever you have on your back, put it outside the door, and come in clean and open. Do not have previous ideas, previous thoughts. Just open your mind and
heart to learn, and that will guide you to maybe make your own principles about everything.” She analogized that previous ideas and thoughts about other cultures were like burdens. It might be a relief to unburden oneself of those to better enjoy the relationships that might open up.

I have seen people who take the extra mile in order to understand a culture. They are sensitive towards it. This helps them to win the hearts and the trust of the people they are supposed to work or live with. There is a big difference when you deal with someone who you trust and someone that you're trying to be careful with [because the trust has not been established].

The second linguist echoed some of the previous sentiments and elaborated upon trust, first stating that “I believe [trust] is the core of everything.” She further stated that when trust is established “things will go smoother, and people will be more than willing to help, provide, communicate, and cooperate.” When further pressed on the topic of trust (based on her experience in providing linguistic support for military, civil government and non-governmental organizations), she highlighted the trust that exists between nation-states militaries.

I believe military groups are more efficient in building trust than any other groups. They're quicker than the political groups. It's because they have this set of ethics that makes you trust them immediately. The other thing is that they show us that they are more than willing to build the good relationships with us. They show us that they already trust us. We feel that we need to trust them, or they are trustworthy as well. Truly, each one of them is very close to my heart and once they leave we feel like we wish they had stayed longer.

The military groups usually interact with a less level of formality. They open their hearts, and that lets us also be ready to open our hearts. Formalities usually
prevent others from touching the soul of the others. I believe if we would drop
formalities aside, or a little bit, I believe we will be able to open the door of warm
relationships.

What was interesting in this conversation were the phrases “close to my heart,” “we feel
like we wish they had stayed longer,” and “touching the soul of others.” This indicates
extremely close relationships were built between these dissimilar military organization (and the
larger cultures they originated from), because they pushed aside formalities and developed closer
ties. To create a moment of stress in this dialogue, the participant was asked what the impact
would be if a Western military (such as America) came into a meeting with the Arabic host
displaying a boastful, arrogant and self-centered attitude.

You're entitled to brag and people understand that fully because America is the
greatest nation on Earth, now. But it will build a fence between you and me, as if you are
looking at me in a superior manner, and whatever I would do, I will never live up to your
level. This jeopardizes the whole process of building bridges of trust and it stands in the
way of having a healthy relationship.

This ties back to the section on expatriate adaptation and self-monitoring. Failure of an
expatriate to adapt and self-monitor reduces effective intercultural communication. Her
comments also connect with what the other interpreter’s previous statements, “I've seen also
people who, when they travel and when they learn, they cannot change their conceptions about
so many things. Being open to other cultures, accepting that the world does not revolve around
a certain culture, will help understanding others so much.”

The Foreign Area Officer from Tampa and invoked the word, “Love” in one of his
responses. This tie to the heart resonated with the two interpreters’ reflections. Building full
trust and openness is something that comes from the heart, not just a surface level relationship, similar to feelings of love.

*Anybody can make friends with somebody and understand, but to truly love somebody for who they truly are as a person, as a human being, you have to gain an understanding of their heart. Once you start to be more self-aware of yourself, and start looking inside, understanding who you are, you may understand they come from their own similar circumstances. Once you start seeing that, the boundaries are limitless. I've seen that over and over again with people with me. It's a mindset change. The light bulb flicks off of their head. They become a better person. Both sides gain a better understanding of each other, and the possibilities are limitless, because you can work together.*

True friends tell their true friends when they make mistakes. True friends accept when their friend has informed them of the mistake. This same participant expressed that this remains constant in the intercultural setting. Perceived offenses will happen between different cultures. When offenses are candidly revealed between different cultures, they should be viewed and embraced as opportunities when they are surfaced. As previously mentioned, accepting slights and their resulting corrections could move the relationships forward and increase future intercultural communication.

*You're going to do something that will be offensive to another culture, unknowingly. When you come across someone who's been exposed to other cultures and has some understanding of that, that there's not meant to be a perceived slight. They're open to say, "Hey, you just did this." Being able to overlook something like that is*
normally an indicator, to me. They have been exposed to other cultures and they're either familiar or comfortable with working outside their norms and their own culture.

The Foreign Area Officer in the forward embassy reinforced some of these points. He continued to emphasize the personal nature that trusting and open relationships must have. He also was candid when speaking about some of the relationships he has developed. He stated he would not maintain them past his current posting, because they were not productive to current or anticipated future outcomes.

To have really true and meaningful relationships, you must have some depth. They can't just be surface level conversations. You have to move beyond just common chit-chat and "what did you do today" or "what are you interested in". There has to be some actual sharing of personal, vulnerable or very emotional information.

When I leave this place and come back some day, there's going to be folks that I never talk to again and I wouldn't even visit. But there's going to be friends and colleagues and people that I've gotten to know that I would maintain that actual real relationship.

Many of the discussions emphasized that openness and trust involve interactions at a much more personal level, where formalities were slightly relaxed. There were other discussions that emphasized that boundaries must be established and maintained. This seemed to be more pronounced at the more senior levels of interaction, where general officers and colonels (and their civilian equivalents) are involved. The DOD cultural advisor, who has assisted many senior and executive military leaders offered,

You have to watch what you say. It's a cultural nuance that you have to understand before trying to be friendly with someone. Most of the Arab nations are
generous. They're welcoming. You meet them the first day and they take you back home for a meal. Their mom cooks and all that stuff. But still there are some issues that you cannot talk about. When we brief the commander or someone on how to address an issue talk to, or socialize with general officers or counterparts, we tell them to refrain from discussing family, religion, and some other aspects. Even though they've known each other for four or five years, and have worked together, we tell them to just keep it professional.

He further stated he had observed consequences when those boundaries were ignored and interactions stepped beyond: “[I have] seen best friends stop talking to each other over a silly joke because it touched a sensitive topic for the other person and they did not address that issue [or remedy the perceived offense].”

The Middle Eastern senior military officer appeared to corroborate this viewpoint, at least when discussing the initial stages of his interactions with foreign partners.

When I do interact with newcomers, I try to keep the discussions on an official, open, formal level, until they feel more comfortable. I don't go into a lot of details. I try to make them feel more comfortable during those first interactions. This allows them to buy time if they’re reticent. This gives them space to become aware of the culture and how things may go during our next interaction.

His frequent interactions involve many different cultures (spanning Levant and Gulf Arabic Nations, Europe, East Asia, and the USA). His leaders have recognized his skill and have instructed him to monitor and assist others from his country to ensure their interactions are positive toward other cultures: “it's my duty to sometimes to make sure they are going on the right track and doing the right behavior, to make sure that the cooperation and the collaboration
extend. It’s based on trust and inter-agency diplomacy.” Diplomacy is defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “1) the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations; or 2) skill in handling affairs without arousing hostility (“Diplomacy,”).” It was interesting that he introduced diplomacy in his comments. Compromise and negotiation certainly would appear to be positive contributors to effective intercultural communications.

In all participants’ discussion on this topic, they strongly indicated increased frequency of interactions between dissimilar cultures increased intercultural communications effectiveness.

**Prominence of Interactions**

Perhaps the best introductory statement for this theme was offered by our Foreign Area Officer from Tampa. He stressed the importance of culturally sensitive conversations, regardless of the level of the other nation’s interlocuter.

*Intercultural relations are extremely important at all levels. I've expressed my beliefs many times before. Can you look at the other person across from you and accept them for who they are? Are you going to come with preconceived notions and judgements of what you think they should be, or what you think you are? When you can get past that and you can find a common ground with them, and not judge them for any issue, then you can move forward.*

This statement tied back to his comments about love when he was discussing openness and trust. People express love for others, and when they do this, they also may become less discriminating about the other’s shortcomings. His statement was consistent with that. His discussions continued on with a focus on the most senior levels of power that he had worked with or supported.
I have worked with senior leaders in the governments. With the partner nations, I have worked with ministers. These would be chairmen at the congressional or heads of state level. I have interacted all the way down to privates. Many of the engagements I've had throughout my career have been at the senior levels.

On the US side, military side I have worked with the General levels and higher. For the state department-hosted engagements, they included up to the head of state level. At the senior level and the head of state engagement, confrontations are almost always never really an issue. Challenging issues are worked out prior to that engagement. Those conversations are not going to get into the weeds. Neither side wants to go into a problem set where they're going to be told no.

Diplomacy appeared to be more pronounced at the senior levels. The more candid or unfiltered conversations appeared to occur at the lower levels. Consider the current interactions between North Korea and the United States with reference to North Korea’s “denuclearization.” President Trump and Kim Jung Un displayed broad smiles to the world stage after their initial meeting on this topic. Following that initial meeting, there have been various confrontations between the two governments and their lower officials’ negotiations continue.

**Military and Civilian Interactions**

This study also explored the effectiveness of military individuals’ intercultural interactions in comparison with their civilian counterparts. Militaries prepare for and respond to threats that may place individuals into physical danger when they are performing their security missions. Civilian organizations also face threats during their operations, but those tasks often do not involve the possibility of physical harm or death. Participants reflected on how experiences in adverse military environments might positively affect intercultural interactions.
Our forward-based Foreign Area Officer offered some insight as he discussed one of the former Middle Eastern military leaders who works throughout the region:

"Generally speaking, when it came to a leader or someone that was effective, we looked for how they were going to respond to a challenge and how came out of that. How would respond or overcome it? It helps for people to have experienced difficulties in some way and go through hardship.

The experiences abroad, the difficult scenarios, the shared hardship brings brotherhood and also allows people to shine ... Considering this region, I think there's a lot of respect for those people that have gone through adversity. There's one general that works here in our region. He served under a former Middle Eastern leader considered by many throughout the world to be a tyrant. This General is no longer a military leader, of course. He's no longer living in in his nation of origin but his reputation carries. They know that he was a military leader under what they consider a strong leader. His previous president was considered to be pretty evil by many people's standard, but that means something to people here. He already starts from a position of authority just because people know that background.

The female Middle Eastern interpreters had supported military, civilian government, non-governmental organizations, and commercial industry in their past contracts. One interpreter emphasized military discipline and how that affects interactions. "The military system works based on ranks, positions and organizations and it's more serious than the civilian world. There are repercussions to not doing or not obeying a certain military division. In the civilian sector it's usually not that serious. Mistakes are more tolerable or tolerated." In her next comments
she emphasized how militaries adapt to change in comparison with humanitarian projects she had previously supported.

*The military always leaves a margin for change. They understand there are variables and they think that they have to adapt whenever they arrive to a new country.*

*The humanitarian or civilian projects take more time in planning because they are so worried about funding. Then they come to the realization that it wasn't what they thought it was. The military are always confirming what is going on. They don't just go away and then come back with a plan. They usually work it out through the year.*

Her discussion indicated that militaries, when interacting at the international level, tended to interact more frequently than their humanitarian counterparts. This coordination frequency would increase collaboration and communication. It also tied back to the previous frequency of interaction theme. Organizations that commit resources for their individuals to interact more often with dissimilar cultures (such as the military organizations discussed in the narrative) will improve intercultural communication effectiveness.

Her colleague also favored interactions with militaries. She spoke not only about the relationships between countries, but how nations’ militaries work together to maintain peace. She further emphasized the effective communication that must occur to strengthen those relationships.

*Military organizations, due to the sensitivity of their mission, have huge impacts on the bilateral relationships between countries. I used to think that the military's role is to fight. I believe that the militaries around the world are doing their best to maintain peace and to find ways to communicate and strengthen relationships. They are more adaptive, more willing to mingle, and very respectful.*
She pointed out the world’s militaries high standards and ethics. She believed those standards improved their intercultural communication effectiveness when compared to civilian counterparts.

*Militaries often have a high standard of ethics. This has assisted them in respecting other culture's norms and traditions. When our military guests have respected our culture, it has made us feel that we were ready to trust these people, and not look at them as if they were enemies. They respected us. They were not here to hurt us. They were here to establish a friendship with us. Now we were ready to open our hearts and let them into our lives and into our souls.*

The Middle Eastern senior military officer spoke about the interactions between militaries. Similar to the interpreters, he emphasized the frequent intercultural interaction that international militaries have with each other. He also highlighted the boundaries of discipline (or ethics) and organizational chain of command that exist within and between militaries.

*Militaries do stand out, depending on the experience they have. Military personnel have more experience in interacting with different cultures. This is different from civilian. Militaries do stand out because they fall under the boundaries of military discipline, good relations, instructions, and the chain of command, which sometimes, as military personnel, keeps things more understandable between the two parties.*

One of our government civil servants emphasized the unique and challenging environments that military personnel work within when he stated, “In regions where there are real war threats, operational decisions are made on a daily basis. That requires making rapid decisions. On the civilian side, they don't necessarily see imminent threats. It's just more of a “hey this might happen” type thing.
The U.S. Navy Officer spoke about one of his combat deployments to Afghanistan, which further illustrates the conditions introduced above. He expressed great discomfort in reacting to that situation, based on his lack of language comprehension.

*When I was in Afghanistan, it was very confusing for me.* Culturally, they were raised Muslim. *I was raised Muslim, so I know some of their etiquette, some of their norms of society. I did not know everything though. I did not know about the differences between the Dari and the Pashtun. I didn’t know the languages. Dari and Pashto are dialects of Farsi. Farsi only borrowed some lexical idioms from Arabic, some words.* I would hear them talk, and I would just hear flower, tree - OK. I would know they were talking about outside.

He went on to describe a situation that required a rapid decision. It involved local Afghan culture during one of his previous combat deployments. A wrong decision or miscalculation could have resulted in immediate injury or loss of human life in this scenario.

*There was a situation at the ministry of defense.* One Afghan guy in uniform moved quickly towards one of our guardian angels. *I was also standing guard because we had a high level official out there. I was the O-4, and there were like E-6s and a couple of O-3s. I saw the sergeant almost going red on his weapon (taking the weapon off of SAFE and chambering a round), because Afghan in uniform was approaching him and was very aggressive. He wasn't yelling but he was moving fast. I was there, but I did not understand the language. We had two seconds to figure out whether this guy was about to blow himself up in the middle of the ministry, or whether he was trying to explain that he was upset about something.
The sergeant was standing on the dirt where that guy was planting stuff all week. The guy yelled, "Why are you ruining all my work?" He was dressed as a soldier, but he was a gardener. One of our captains looked at the guy pointing on the floor - he wasn't pointing at our sergeant. The captain realized the situation and said, “Hey, guys. No, no. There's no harm. He's pointing at the floor. Let's go and see what's going on there.” We asked the gardener, and he pointed at his flowers.

This was one of those situations where, if we didn't keep calm, people could have died. Our captain was a prior enlisted soldier [with years of experience in operational or combat situations]. He was very seasoned and in his fifth operational deployment, so what we looked at for a fraction of seconds as complete chaos, for him, he was informed by previous difficult experiences. He had that calmness about him and we were able to see all the facets in the situation.

One can feel the tension in his account. The captain’s previous combat experience informed his actions. From his experience, he gave the sergeant an order. This very tense situation would further inform the captain’s responses to future potential clashes with other cultures. He stated he believed the environment the deployed soldier, sailor, airman or Marine works in is not conducive for intercultural communication because of the necessity for split-second decisions. This contrasts with other participants who described working within less threatening and more permissive security cooperation environments. “The military is very limited, not only because we don't have resources. We don't have time to react, especially if we are forward deployed in combat, your time to react is very limited.”

The Tampa-based Foreign Area Officer added some of his thoughts about intercultural interactions between military, state department and non-governmental (NGO) interactions.
The military is more direct. It's a little bit easier to work — you can be more blunt and more short and more to the point. You are trying to get to a certain end state pretty quickly.

State department, or the political side of the house -- there's always an end game you may not understand. They're taking a different angle than a military person would. You have to have that in mind when talking to them. They may just want to talk right now, and not have a specific goal in mind.

When we worked with non-governmental organizations, they're very human-oriented and more needs-oriented. It's just understanding where they're coming from, what they're doing, versus with ours.

Intercultural interactions between militaries are more direct (perhaps implying that those engagements are easier or more expedient in developing outcomes). Military leaders are not formally prepared or trained to communicate in intercultural situations, thereby limiting their intercultural communication effectiveness.

I would say the NGOs and Department of State are a little more prepared for intercultural communication than the military. For the most part, we don't train our military leaders to be culturally aware. The State Department does. That's understandable, because the State Department wants to be partner-focused like that all the time, as our national departmental lead for Foreign Policy. The Department of Defense is getting better at it though.

Military counterparts have an advantage in being more direct, which positively contributes to intercultural communication effectiveness when comparing military and civil interactions in the intercultural environment. Lack of formal training and the military’s short decision cycles and the
urgency of their situations (especially in combat) reduce their intercultural communications effectiveness. The military mitigates those challenges by distributing intercultural experienced personnel throughout its formations (such as the captain mentioned in the Afghanistan vignette).

**Power Distance – Resolution of Differences**

Discussions that are anticipated to result in agreements can be challenging when cultures with differing power distances come together. A representative from low-power distance society is often empowered to speak for his organization’s equities without needing to refer back to higher authority. His/her counterpart from a high-power distance society does not have this same ability. He must go back to his leader to receive guidance, and then convey decisions back to the low-power distance society representative. This detracts from intercultural communication effectiveness. Our Tampa based Foreign Area Officer stated,

_I've seen multiple occasions where there is a major on the U.S. side who is very comfortable with making decisions and has the power to do so. We would be sitting at a table with a partner -- a major or lieutenant colonel and who has equal authority in his mind with the same amount of troops underneath their command. There will be an agreement at the table that the U.S. side will interpret as the partner said they will do this. This must be the truth. They will brief the chain of command on the U.S. side that partner X has agreed to do this – whatever it may be. In reality, that partner was just saying “yes” to be polite to the U.S. partner. The partner representative had no real authority to make any decision whatsoever. Decisions were only made at their senior either minister level. They were just placating the situation until they can move forward. They then went back and said, “the Americans want to do this, are we able to do that?” This has often caused a disconnect on both sides._
Any individual who might have autonomy to make decisions might become very frustrated in this type of situation, where he/she would believe the counterpart also had the same level of decision making authority but did not. This participant added, “For the US, when you say something then it's not just describing, it's action. For other cultures? Words are a means to delay. Words are a means to extend. Words are a means to pacify.” Following are some of the outcomes he has observed that came from these misunderstandings.

One side has been preparing and seeing if they were able to do a problem where the other side is ready to action. I've seen this – the two nations don't get back together again until the American side has spent money. The Americans have gotten troops in place. They met with the partner and aid, “Okay we're here let's go play!” The partner was sitting there saying, “I don't know what you're talking about, we've never heard of this. Why are you even here?” This has happened too many times to even count.

All organizations expect a return on investment when they apply resources to a problem. Imagine being in the situation above. They had brought their soldiers and equipment based on their perceived agreement with the partner. The partner claimed to not know anything about the agreement the U.S. partner believed. Imagine the frustration for the Western counterpart who had to explain the situation to his/her superior officers.

Middle Eastern-based participants in this study indicated the affinity of their cultures towards high-power distance. From the Western perspective, the Tampa-based Foreign Area Officer stated, “Words seemed to be a means to delay or pacify.” A senior Middle Eastern military officer confirmed this when he said:

Middle Eastern people, Arab countries, to be honest, this is how they do it. They don't give you a decision. They go through a process after the discussion ends. Other
countries than us, sometimes it's Western or U.S., they are sitting in front of you and have the authority to say yes or no, or we can't continue with this. We don’t have this same authority. I prefer to have a conversation and the ability to discuss options. I have found this to keep our work more flexible and continuous.

He elaborated on the challenges in getting the right people to meetings – those who could make decisions. He also had to interact with others who couldn’t make decisions (which echoed what the Foreign Area Officer had previously described).

Sometimes you think that you are sitting or meeting with the right person that could give you the decision, but maybe, depending on the culture and the background, he can't give you the right answers that you are looking for. You have to accommodate that, to give the excuse for not having the right answers for you.

The DOD cultural advisor further elaborated on this, sharing an experience when he supported General Petraeus while he was commanding forces during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The U.S. military is very straightforward, they tell it as is. No matter what the consequences are, because we want to get the messages through. The difference between that and the Iraqi culture, the Iraqi are indirect. They're not confrontational and do not want to deliver the message. They have to ease in, which comes in with the pleasantries and the tea. It takes them 45 minutes to ask how your family is doing before they get to the point.

I remember we had some issues with the Iraqi special forces leaking some targeted information to some groups. We had lost a lot of targets. They've vanished. They've relocated. That was the message that General Petraeus was trying to get to his counterparts, the Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) guy. He was telling him that "this is
what we're going to do" and "we can't compromise," "we can't do this." The Iraqi CTS
guy started telling stories about when he was a first cadet in 1980-something. “In 1980-
something this is how we did things.” This aggravated Patraeus and all the
commanders. They lost control of composure. I had to get in and diffuse it. We broke
the session for 10 minutes to regroup.

I mitigated the issue, I talked to Patraeus. I said "That was his first meeting
coming in. You can't just sit in a meeting, say hello, and jump into it. You have to spend
30 minutes acquainting yourself to the guy."

"If he tells you a story about what happened 30 years ago, it's just normal
conversation. He's trying to ease into his point.” Those were some of the cultural
differences that I noticed.

Iraq’s Counter Terrorism Service are Iraq’s most elite security forces. They would be comparable to U.S. Special Forces and U.S FBI agents. They would have great autonomy in their thought processes and in carrying out their missions. Most U.S. commanders expect great urgency in every action, given the types of missions that they did. One can understand why General Petraeus and his commanders were frustrated with this CTS commander. These officers were fortunate to have a regionally-born advisor who was familiar with culture, customs and courtesies. He assisted the U.S commanders’ both in engaging the CTS commander and managing their expectations.

The forward-based Foreign Area Officer further elaborated on challenges in resolving differences in power distance,

Let’s say you have a Western field grade officer that is empowered to make
decisions. His counterpart has to go back and run and staff things all the way up to his
director. I've had situations where we tried to get an answer from a minister on an important subject like someone going to a course. If that minister went overseas they had to wait until he came back into the country. Our U.S. sponsors were asking, "How about email? Couldn't you send this guy a note or something? Couldn't the deputy make a decision?" Nope. That's not happening. The minister had to come back from overseas, back to wherever country he's from and then he would make the decision.

The Southern Arabian Peninsula-heritage U.S. Navy Officer who was assigned as a Coalition Operations Officer was born in the Northern region of the Arabian Peninsula. He stated his views on expectation management and his being sensitive to the high-power distance viewpoint prevalent within the Middle East,

> When you communicate across cultures, you have to have patience. It's easy to jump to conclusions and say, “Oh, he's disregarding he's disrespectful, or he's not a hard worker like us Americans.” The more you reflect, you think, “He's got his own challenges. He has his own limits. He has his own marching orders.” Those things start clicking, and the more I have reflected on why I didn't get that very basic answer back from the Kuwaiti officer, I have understood, “Oh, he probably has marching orders to not speak about the Saudi. He had to go back to get authorized.”

He explained his view of power distance in the Middle East. He emphasized the need for Westerners to be sensitive to the constraints that high-power distance puts upon Middle Eastern military officers.

> All Middle Eastern nations have very little delegation of authority. I have observed that is always, “They're 'about to make a decision.'” In the case of Jordan, they will need to go back to the king. If the Emiratis make a decision, they need to go back to
Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan (MbZ), the crown prince, and so forth. You are not dealing with incompetent counterparts. They're very competent. They're intelligent. They know what their leadership stance is going to be, it's just it is what it is. This is how their country is being ran. Sometimes when we go and engage the leadership, we're too hesitant to actually ask the question of what they are authorized to answer to or to decide, because it's not the right venue for it.

We're stuck. You can’t do it at the lower level. At the top level, there are even more competing priorities to discuss than something coming up from the lower level. Sometimes important issues are not answered, or answers delayed. This, from my experience has been because the disparity between high-power and low power distance disparities in the respective culture’s approval levels and processes.

When I worked with the Emirati, many of my U.S. peers attempted to influence me, stating, “The Emiratis are not doing anything. They're lazy.” I realized a different reality and informed them, “No, he knows what he's not authorized to speak about, and how and where he's limited in his actions.”

He elaborated on this, illustrating some of the challenges he has observed when working with Coalition Senior National Representatives to U.S. Central Command.

We, as the lead coalition nation, often have wanted other nations to assist in filling in gaps in capabilities and force structure. This has allowed us to answer the task to our leadership. The gap needed to be filled out by a Brit, or by Swedish, or by an Emirati. The partner nations had their own approach, and timeline.

We have often forgotten that the decision-making level in some countries is different than ours. Their delegation of authority has been completely different than
ours, and the more junior the person was who handled the situation, the more oblivious they were to this. That's when you had all these misunderstandings. The U.S. Central Command Commander has had delegation authority from the Secretary of Defense, but his equivalent might not have had the same from the Crown Prince, or their sheik, or their king. That's when we have gotten confused.

In this section, our participants discussed how differences in power distance influence intercultural communication. Western societies such as the U.S., as low-power distance societies allow their representatives to make decisions for their organizations. However, Middle Eastern societies tend to be high-power distance, meaning they have to defer to higher authorities for decisions. Participants’ comments agreed on this. They proposed further, that Westerners working with high-power distance cultures should first be aware of the power distance differences between the two cultures. Once aware, they should manage their expectations. When taking these things into account, Westerners would be able to increase their intercultural communications effectiveness with their Middle Eastern interlocuters.

Sense Making
The Influence of Identity

Previous literature review revealed that “Sensemaking states that identity and identification affects interactions in the applicable environment (an individual’s perception of who he/she thinks he/she is in his/her own context)” (Weick, 1995, pp. 17-62). The DOD cultural advisor’s Iraqi heritage and his support stated to senior level DOD executives (including Generals Petraeus, Odierno and Votel):

The American social model has been based on promoting individual identities, and independence. Our social pyramid is completely upside down compared to the Middle East. When you look at the social pyramid in the Middle East, it's the State, the
people, the tribe, the family, and then at the bottom comes the individual. In the US, it's completely the opposite; the individual comes first and then everybody else.

In most of the Middle East countries, the person himself and any decision that he made or any step that he made, he was concerned about his family, his neighborhood, his tribe, and his society. That's what has dictated any decision that he has made. It has sometimes even caused him to make decisions that it's might eventually hurt him or cause harm, whether it's physical, emotional, economic, or financial. He has done that to fit in the social sculpture that he has been part of, the fabric that he has been part of. That is completely different than what exists in the U.S. The identity is a big thing in the Middle East.

Westerners, who may have a more individual focus, when finding themselves interacting with Middle Eastern cultures that have a collective focus, should appeal to the (collective) nature of the host culture. A participant from Tampa echoed this by stating, “You work to build the relationship to gather an understanding not only of the individuals that you are working with, but also their family, and what is that family's role within the country? Specifically, some families in countries have very pronounced roles whether that be in a formal or an informal context.”

A female civilian from the U.S National Capital Region frequently travels to the Middle East to work on projects with her host nation counterparts. She emphasized religious influence on identity in the nations she works with.

Understanding where I fit and the person who I'm speaking with fits in the overall picture is very important. Who the person is makes a huge difference. In the Middle Eastern culture that I deal with, the person's position, their tribal affiliation and their
religious affiliation all play a part. Those aspects develop the leverage, respect and the influence that they have on the decision that's being made or the recommendations that they're proposing to their senior leaders.

She emphasized the importance of self-awareness and the need to understand the impact of her interactions with her host nation interlocutors. She regularly asked others to critique her on her interactions, so she could more appropriately engage.

*I try to maintain self-awareness of how my comments come across to the partner nation. I try to make sure my comments are not ambiguous. After the meetings, when I'm back in the car with my colleagues, I ask, “How did that go?” If one of my colleagues says, “I would have stated it this way or maybe you should have handled it that way,” I try to take that feedback into the next meeting that I have.*

She also brought out times when individuals leveraging identity could either hinder progress or cause projects to fail. She offered an example where one executive limited or obstructed outcomes. He imposed himself into projects of which he had little knowledge. He disrupted progress. Her teams (she had multiple teams that worked with this one executive) had to develop solutions with his subordinates to get the work done. Communication would not have resulted in work getting done if they had continued to work with the executive. Lack of self-monitoring by the executive resulted in self-identification in a manner that blocked effective intercultural communication.

*Unfortunately, it's not always the case – [that individuals use their identity to get things done based on the parameters at the time]. It could also be the reverse, where they use their identity to hinder progress.*
On the partner nation side, there's one key leader who has projected himself as a source of power in the project I have been working on. He stove piped everything and he's always interjected himself into situations. He may not always have had a complete understanding of the technical solutions we were trying to apply. At times, we've had to talk to folks beneath him or around him to work different solutions. This has brought resolution rather than following exactly what he said.

The forward-based Foreign Area Officer also observed a misuse of identity by American project officers working with partners. This resulted in relationships that did not contribute to project outcomes.

I've seen a lot of project officers that loved hanging their hat and being these little kings and queens. They came here with deep pockets. They fixed some issues or build a capability and heard their name a lot and that's what they hanged their hat on. It was harder for them to see the difference between a colleague, a friend and someone that was a mix of those two things. All three exist and one has to be able to recognize which of the three each person is. Someone would typically act like their friend when they really need something. Then as soon as the project officer’s finance stream was gone, they thought they were to go hang out with them. All of the sudden. They never answered the project officer’s calls. In a subtle and social way, they were getting played, right? They're not lying to the project officers but just manipulating them with friendliness.

That has been common and has regularly happened here.

The American project officers self-identified with the resources in their programs in the previous discussion. They tried to buy friendships. Instead, they acquired “fair weather friends” from the partner nation. The partners would maintain the friendship as long as the Americans provided
them resources. Once the resources dried up, the “friendships” ended. Had these American project officers focused more on the professional aspects of the relationships rather than advertising their budget lines, they might have self-identified differently. They would have been more objective in developing less numerous but deeper friendships that had more effective intercultural communication.

The Middle Eastern senior military officer pointed out the importance of identification – especially of the culture that is dissimilar to one’s own. “Knowing the culture of my counterparts has helped me in a positive way, not negatively. That also has depended on my experience of how I was using my understanding of that culture.”

He candidly described identity projection in a multilateral context (when three or more often-dissimilar nations are involved).

I observed [individuals projecting their identities into the environment] in different situations, especially during multi-cultural, multi-national meetings. A lot of those interactions had negative outcomes. A person that has collaborated much with different cultures tends to make sure that he has not offended anybody or has used words that sometimes could be unacceptable.

Recall the example of the executive. He self-identified in a manner that blocked communication. This example is similar. It is almost as if the individuals he describes each are saying, “I am so important and you need to listen solely to me.” Then imagine a group of ten or fifteen such individuals from different nations acting with this attitude. If this type of self-identification has occurred, it is an indicator that the self-monitoring discussed in the previous section on adaptation did not. In this situation it is difficult, if not impossible for effective intercultural communication to occur.
Identification of others’ roles is equally as self-identity, if not moreso. Sensemaking theory postulates that identity and identification affect interactions in the environment. Foreign Area officers have frequent interactions with partners within the security cooperation environment. The Tampa-based Foreign Area Officer’s comments provided a good summary of the importance of identification of the other person.

A person’s identity is not the issue, especially when you're talking to people who are type A personalities, or who are there for a reason. They've been selected for a reason before they go there.

The identification of the other side, that is usually lacking 90 percent of the time. Having an ability to have empathy, or to understand the other person’s position is very important. I've heard the following statement countless times, "Why don't they just understand why this is important? Why can't they just understand we did this, or why can't they understand this is something that they need?"

That is the part that's missing. For somebody who is put in that position to have such a lack of self-awareness of how they're being perceived, is staggering sometimes, because that is where a lot of the problems come from.

He offered a method he found to be successful to focus on commonalities rather than differences.

I love working with other cultures. It's fun to find a common ground. It's always a new challenge. There has to be a commonality between you, no matter who you're talking with.

We come from different backgrounds, even here in the United States, you and I, whoever, we come from different families, different backgrounds. That could be
sometimes just as divisive and culturally different as me going to a third-world country where they live in a shack. I mean there's no difference. We have to be able to come to them and find there's something in common to begin with. We then need something between us so we have a commonality that we can build on moving forward. That is critical. For someone to be successful, they have to be able to find those commonalities.

In preceding dialogues, participants stated identification may improve or reduce intercultural communication. Ties emerged between identification and personal adaptation, the first theme discussed. Expatriates and partner nation counterparts who self-monitored and modified their behaviors would better accommodate their counterparts. Successfully self-identifying and identifying others positions, combined with behavior modifications to account for others’ viewpoints, would increase intercultural communication. Conversely, if individuals were to self-identify while focusing only on their own interests, they would decrease or even block intercultural communication.

**What’s the Problem, Anyway? (Problem Setting)**

As introduced in the literature review, "Sensemaking involves problem setting – constructing the problem from materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling and uncertain." The study participants described intercultural communication as a phenomenon that fits this description very closely. One of the female Middle Eastern interpreters discussed this,

_Some of the Western organizations when they came to the Middle East hadn't defined the problem and they thought they knew what it was. They started working on issues and then realized that the different context and culture created problems diverse to_
their expectations. They had to go back some steps to define the problem again, to understand the problem in this context and then try to solve it.

She spoke of a problem she had when assisting a foreign company in solving some of their intercultural communication challenges.

*One of the situations I supported involved a large cement company built on a very massive piece of land. This factory was owned by a French company and managed by different nationalities. They had constant problems with the local community. They thought they solved the problem with the mayor and with the municipality but they have never talked to the people of that local community. The problem was going on for years. Nobody could solve the problem. I asked the CEO of that company in the press conference, “When have you invited the leaders of the community to work with you on a solution?” He said, “We never thought of that but I think we will do that at some point.”* This illustrated my point -- they had to talk to the people rather than to the government.

Previous discussions on identity emphasized family, tribes and community. The “different nationalities” that managed the French company had coordinated with the mayor and with the municipality to establish their operation. They had not engaged the local community leaders. It had never occurred to them. They considered the suggestion.

The project officer from the U.S. National Capital Region echoed discussions about taking care of the collective, rather than the individual. She stated she weaved these considerations into her talking points when she spoke with Middle Eastern regional partners.

*I've learned how to kind of rephrase things. It’s about protecting the country and the citizenry. For the most part in this region, they don't worry about their own personal well-being. I have tied it to the pride of being able to protect their country, protect their*
follow citizens or families. That drove it home to them as opposed to saying, “You need to do this so you can be safe.” We've had that everywhere from at the strategic level, trying to tie key capabilities together down to the tactical level where we've tried to encourage using a checklist to conduct training.

The senior Middle Eastern Military Officer discussed during the previous section on identification, that some multilateral events’ projected self-importance. The Tampa-based Foreign Area Officer discussed similar issues with strong-willed and influential individuals who work within this intercultural mission space for short times. He described the interaction below; it was evident that little self-monitoring occurred, resulting in erroneous self-identification (and/or poor identification of the other party). This exacerbated and clouded the problem, which effectively blocked intercultural communication.

So being a lead in managing security cooperation for the last 20 years now, I have become comfortable with the culture. I have had other commanders that came in and out. They spent six months out of their 20, 30-year career working on this problem set. They would go into a high-level senior strategic level meeting with a partner that they knew nothing about. Their interaction was built on misconception, or previously U.S. only interactions

I saw clashes all the time. I recall two of them sitting down in a room together. They were senior leaders representing both countries, and nothing was accomplished. They couldn't get past the fact that they were being perceived as rude to each other.

They couldn't even identify the problem. One side would be saying to the other, "This is the problem", in that native language, and the other side wasn’t even comprehending it because it was brought up in the wrong way. It clearly was an issue
when we had two sides, or even one side, that had a complete lack of understanding of the problem.

Another challenge the Tampa-based Foreign Area Officer spoke of when he was discussing problem setting was how the cultures analyze these difficult problems in different ways. Key elements of his discussion included differences in perceptions of time and comparative strategic visions. He discussed the difficulty partner nation representatives had when they took information back to their senior leaders.

We will define a problem based on what we need right now, on the U.S. side. We live in the ‘here and now.’ The Middle East cultures are focused on their past, as well as preserving that past for their future as well.

Their perception, identifying and clarifying that the problem is a completely different mindset from our own. We are very linear in that sense. We don't look back on the U.S. side to figure out what has happened three weeks ago. We just look at where we are now, and how to get to the next step in front of us to move forward from there.

Some of Middle Easterners are more culturally aware and have an understanding of that. But then they also have to go back and report to the rest of their government, who don't have that same mindset. They need someone who can put it in the right words, so that their leadership can understand that in their mindset. They have to translate our linear way of thinking to their nonlinear way. That makes it a better relationship.

The Middle Eastern senior military officer postulated that when misunderstandings do occur during intercultural interactions/communications, there is a need to address them. Lines and labels must be established to better define the puzzling, troublesome and uncertain problems.

“Sometimes people have not been aware about the culture of our country. I have tried to cope
with this behavior. When this has been repeated more than one time, I tried to advise the person. If I didn’t do that, it would have negatively affected collaboration or interaction.”

The problem setting discussions reiterated the importance of Westerners properly identifying themselves and identification of others within the context of the Middle Eastern environment. Many Western societies focus on the individual while Middle Eastern societies focus on the collective. Failure to understand these differences would complicate problem setting (or define the problem in inaccurate terms or context). This would reduce intercultural communication effectiveness. Understanding and scripting dialogue that would appeal to collective mentality would better define the problem, improve intercultural communication.

Creating and Enacting

Previous literature revealed sense making theory is enactive of sensible environments, and structure must be created/enacted. Study participants indicated this was a very challenging aspect, due to the sometimes significantly different perspectives of the involved players. One of the linguists emphasized that words can create both positive and negative outcomes. She provided one example that is used as a teaching point in the Arabic linguist career field.

"We have an example from interpreters back in the 60s or the 70s. The translator of the Palestinian president caused an international incident when he translated some of the words wrong where it led to a misunderstanding for decades. Perhaps the speaker himself was not smart or wise in using the words but what he meant was not the words themselves. Having enough experience in that area in the linguistic world could make the interpreter understand the meanings behind the words not just the words themselves. Many could translate words. Interpretation is different, because there is a teeny tiny
human factor in the mind of an interpreter to analyze, assist, and then choose the right meaning of what's being said.

The South Arabian Peninsula-heritage U.S. Navy Officer was fluent in Arabic. He expressed his caution about using the Arabic language with his Arabic counterparts on the staff

I have seen language being offensive without being intended to be. If you don't speak the Moroccan dialect, you would say things that could be very offensive to them. If you don't adhere to certain sensitivities with the Egyptians, when they're dressing like Israelis, you may offend them. I try to avoid speaking Arabic to the Senior National Representatives. When it comes to very sensitive topics, I use English. It's the language that commands. I know how to speak like a staff officer. I remind myself, I learned how to be a staff officer in English, not in Arabic. I avoid Arabic at all costs, essentially why, if things get too complicated.

The Navy Officer’s comments mentioned the Moroccan dialect of the Arabic language and manners of dress of Egyptians. These are just a couple of differences that exist across the Middle East and North Africa region. Despite his Arabic heritage, he was clear that as a military officer representing the U.S., his speaking English would establish the best parameters for problems within the sensemaking construct. This would increase his communication effectiveness. He feared that his foreign counterparts would take his responses out of context and further complicate the parameters of the problem if he used Arabic.

A perhaps more humorous account from the cultural advisor indicated yet again how inaccurate translation can further create misunderstandings.

There's this incident that happened in front of me back in Iraq. A U.S. colonel was being farewelled. He was with his counterparts having a farewell party. He had a
local linguist. The colonel said to his counterparts, "Hopefully, one day I'll come back as a tourist." The translator translated it as "Hopefully, one day I'll come back as a terrorist." Both sides laughed because the Iraqis thought it was funny for the American to say he would come back as a terrorist, and the colonel thought they liked his joke and they laughed. That highlights the importance the verbiage or words you are using. It can completely lead in a different direction.

Words create. This was a common thread in participant discussions within this theme. The differences that exist between Western and Arabic languages, combined with their different dialects, may cause misunderstandings and establish inaccurate problem parameters. This would reduce intercultural communication effectiveness. Slowing the tempo of conversations and using experienced interpreters would mitigate this challenge.

**Retrospection and Reflection**

Retrospection or reflection on past events is a contributing factor within sensemaking theory. This implies individuals would review their personal and organizational best practices and failures prior to going into the environment. Many participants discussed the importance of reflection and how it contributed to their successes in intercultural communication. One of our Tampa civil servants had this to say,

*I think you're always going to look back on past events. What went well and perhaps what didn't go so well? You have to be sensitive to say you know this is what worked in country X so it will obviously work here in country Y. Especially in the Middle East with some of the sensitivities between those countries.*

This colleague was referring to, in his country X/country Y example, how a Western country may have bilateral ties with two regional countries that may not get along with each other. When
desiring to apply something in country Y that worked in country X, the Western nation delegate must be careful in how he/she discusses that with country Y. He/she must not reveal the identity of country X. Doing so would cause a very distinct negative reaction. This implies a period of reflection prior to going into the meeting, to ensure no missteps are taken.

Another participant, who works acquisition actions with partners, emphasized her retrospection focused upon developing greater efficiencies within the teams she worked with. She mentioned cultural considerations not only of the interactions with the partner nations, but also with other U.S. interagency stakeholders in her retrospection. She highlighted that the other U.S. agencies might have different missions or desired outcomes from her own, and she needed to take these into account in her engagement paths.

*I kept a checklist of some of the lessons learned. I had different partners come on board and worked with various colleagues from different US inter-agencies or within the host country. I tried to get the buy in from the personnel that we were already working with. It did help to look to the past to see what could be done more efficiently and easier.*

The Tampa-based Foreign Area Officer introduced another aspect when he discussed his retrospection. He emphasized his desire for external review, in this case from his supervisor. This valuable feedback could just as easily come from peers or subordinates.

*I am getting ready to depart out of here for the next job. A technique that has served me has been to go to my boss, and say, "I'm not really looking for a pat on the back, but what have I done wrong and what could I do to improve that?" I have found that to have an understanding, I might not have cared to change what I was doing. But to have an understanding of how other people perceived me has been invaluable. That gave me more choices to adapt myself to situations moving forward.*
He cited situations when he interacted with partner nation individuals who partook in activities commonly viewed as immoral or illegal. He stated his strategy to handle this was to compartment those characteristics within his mind. He could then focus on the collective goals that must be achieved rather than the behavior that he disapproved of. He would not be able to look forward to accomplishing the goals they had in common if he kept his attention on the negative aspects that he could not relate to.

*There are some cultures where they treat little children in ways that is considered very inappropriate behavior. How they treat children in both a sexual manner ...That is never okay in most societies. You have to have an understanding there's a cultural norm there that you're fighting, not a personal norm of a person. Within their culture, they're taught that. It's ingrained in what they're brought up with. You have to put that in a box and understand that about that person, you then look for a common goal with them.*

*A normal person would look at that person and say they are a bad person doing evil things. You put it in the context of they're trying to fight, defend their family and their honor. They're doing what they've been taught is correct for them. How can we find a middle ground with that?*

*When you have a common goal of trying to fight a common enemy, you build it off of that relationship. Those other things, as long as they do not interact or interfere with what you're doing or they don't cause harm or damage to what's going on as well, then that can stay outside that box, where it needs to be.*

*It's not necessarily reconciling those differences, it's just understanding those differences and evaluating whether or not they affect what you're doing. In order to accomplish the mission, if you can put up with those, you can move forward.*
Our Middle Eastern senior military officer focused on realizing one’s past mistakes during conversations with partners. He also discussed thinking through the necessary corrective actions so that one does not repeat those mistakes.

_Sometimes you think you are saying or using the right words, or doing the right behavior. Things you already said and behavior that you've already done, you can't get back. Mistakes and missteps are part of how you gain your experience for dealing with a multicultural or multinational partners. The more experience you get, the less mistakes you're going to make. You have to adapt what you have done. If there are negatives or mistakes that you have done, you have to adjust yourself and make sure those are not repeated again._

The forward-based Foreign Area Officer provided a more “total person” emphasis. He talked about the job-related reflection as well as personal and family aspects. He stated that if the personal house is not in order, that will also influence professional aspects.

_Doing some actual reflection and looking within yourself – I think that is important. People do get caught up and they don't have the ability to stop, focus on themselves. Am I actually, not just professionally, but personally and in my family, able to connect? People definitely get caught up, very focused and a lot of things fall by the wayside, whether that's professional relationships, your family and those types of things. Something that I value a lot. I try to manage. I try to keep track of what is important in all the different pockets of my life. I try to make an effort to spend it wisely. But it doesn't necessarily mean I'm going to always spend it on work._

In the military when small unit patrols conduct dismounted patrols (on foot, rather than in vehicles), they sometimes pause their operations and instruct the troops to, “Take a knee and
drink water and face outward.” By taking a knee and facing outward, they are less visible to enemy forces while remaining alert and focused. The water they drink rehydrates and refreshes them, providing them more energy to complete their mission. Similarly, participants mentioned that retrospection and reflection were useful when spent time away from activities they were trying to improve. They stated these actions could reset their ideas and they saw value in collaborating with others such as peers and family. All participants indicated reflection and retrospection had a positive impact on intercultural communication effectiveness.

**Socializing the Problem**

Sensemaking theory postulates that, “*Participants must socialize complex problems rather than keeping things at an individual level. Narrative accounts are often very helpful, because they reveal competing and complementing viewpoints and can develop into plausible stories that get preserved, retained and shared*” (Weick, 1995, pp. 17-62). Study participants described the importance of socializing problems in the intercultural context. One of the Middle East-based Arabic linguists highlighted the competitive nature of this socialization below:

*There are usually different or dissenting opinions, but some people tend to convince or persuade other people and explain or provide reasoning behind their opinion. They elaborate more in order to clarify the whole picture for the rest of the representatives or the person in the meeting. Some people might stand out for their opinions. Others choose to change their opinions due to the reasoning provided by the other parties. They exchange information and then they reach a consensus, where everybody agrees on a decision.*
The consensus described above requires deep insight, through retrospection prior to the interaction occurring. One of the U.S. participants stated this might be “more of an art than a science.”

I have viewed this and again [where narratives may competing or complimenting in nature]. I think it's a little more of an art than a science, when the sender and the communicator have differing points of view. I think where you try to focus is where those two different points intersect. That's where the common goals can be found and perhaps those common goals tie to what your desired end state is.

He emphasized it is essential to capture a written record of the resulting agreement(s) or narrative(s), so misunderstandings would be minimized later on. “You've got to document in the countries we work with – everything in meeting minutes or it's not captured at all. Maybe there's some things that are captured mentally on the part of the two parties, but not something that, you know if you've got to get it in the minutes or it didn't happen.”

Another challenge to socialization within the intercultural environment between different nations’ militaries is the ongoing nature of the events. Nothing ever stops. The South Arabian Peninsula-heritage U.S. Navy Officer that works with Coalition officers spoke about the challenges of considering all viewpoints or perspectives in the time-constrained environments that militaries often find themselves in. “When you socialize a problem it's looking and listening to different perspectives. It's really important, and it's really hard, especially in our organization where it's all fast, fast, fast, to make some decision. One person says, “We have to get this done.” Another person may think, “OK, more analysis, more looking into it, a little bit more delay.” That's something that sometimes we don't want to do.
Time constraints impose challenges. Different cultures interpret narratives in various ways as they are being socialized in the time constrained environment, exacerbating the problem. The differing interpretations can cause other problems. He echoed the need for common understanding and restatement of the problem.

I have been in strategic level government to government briefings, or in the exchange between two senior leaders. I have heard both sides of the conversation and had an understanding. When I saw the readouts from both sides, they were two completely different stories. One country went back and said, "The other side said this, let's move forward, we're set to go." The other side looked at it and said, "We are completely at a standstill. We have nothing going on right now, and we're waiting for the other side to come back with some more clarification."

It caused a further divide and greater issues between the two. Unless there was a common understanding and a restatement in multiple different ways, that is what the outcome would be.

Another point that was brought up was the social aspect within socializing. The forward-based Foreign Area Officer stated this was an important consideration when working with Middle Eastern societies within the military context. He suggested spending more time outside the workplace with partner nation colleagues, to add more dimension to their relationships.

If you do nothing except call a guy up every time something pops or you need to get an Request for Information (RFI) answered or you need to talk to them about whatever the mission is, they're going to start to notice. In Arab culture they think, “Hey, this person only calls me when they need something.” At some point, it can be five percent of your
relationship with them, you have to spend some actual social and not work-related time.

You have to do it, right?

He elaborated on this, stating the need to weave personal interest in others’ welfare into conversations in the workplace. This attentiveness would show genuine care beyond the workplace and open additional dialogues.

_We Americans seem to gloss over our daily greetings a lot. I've regularly noticed it with my American colleagues or counterparts. They'll start a morning conversation. They haven't seen you for two days and they'll say, "Hey Dom, I need this and whatever." They go right into something. I reply, "Hello. Good morning. How are you doing?"

Currently living in the Arab world, I'm sensitive to it because if someone tries to give me a call out of the blue go right into a conversation, I'll usually stop them and say, "How are you doing? What's been going on?" It catches people off-guard sometimes but I think it's important. I don't think it's right to jump in any conversation without checking on them, asking about their family or remembering something about that person like, "Hey, I know your kids were doing Tae Kwon Do and you were telling me about it. How's that going?"

That simple question of “How is your kid's Tae Kwon Do classes going?” means the world to that person. It is not just because they're Arab or because they love greetings. It's because its connected to what they want to hear about themselves. Everyone like the sound of their name. They like knowing that someone cares and remembers something about them, right? It makes them feel good. In the Arab world and in the Arabic language, they are hyper-sensitive to that. You have to get it right. The social piece is huge. Certainly, the greatest compliment that I've currently had in here is
that they told me, "Hey Dom, you've been here seven months, eight months whatever it might be, but it feels like it's been years."

Most military intercultural interactions do not occur with the duration and frequency that this previous Foreign Area Officer describes. They are less persistent, and military personnel often change assignments or even geographical responsibilities. U.S. military personnel change assignments every one to three years. Middle Eastern societies prefer long term relationships. When U.S. military personnel rotate jobs to new geographical areas in as short as a year’s time, trust and openness do not develop as much. The social engagement is less, and that can detract from intercultural communication effectiveness. Notwithstanding, the DOD cultural advisor emphasized the value of all attempts for this social engagement.

Most of the decision making does not happen in offices. It happens over dinner. It happens over hookah. It happens in diwaniyahs when they're or they're drinking coffee. It happens in the evenings and the afternoons. You can talk about work during the day, but do not expect the interactions to be as friendly and as open as if they were in a social setting.

I have leveraged this for years. Every time I have had a set of problems that I'm left with at the end of the day, I just leave it to the afternoon or the evening. I take my counterparts to drinks or smoke hookah or have dinner or something like that. Whatever we spent eight hours in the office discussing can be resolved in five minutes talking over hookah. Just telling them what needs to be ...not telling them what needs to be done. This is the issue and you need this solution, and sometimes they come up with their own solutions as well. It's just more a relaxed environment.
The Middle Eastern senior military officer stipulated the importance of socializing, both in the work and in the non-work environments. More time interacting between cultures offers more understanding of the other cultures’ viewpoint. This increases the ease of the interactions.

_I always say socializing will help positively for making things easier and more comfortable for both counterparts. The more socializing, the more you understand the culture, the more you feel free to open up and to discuss. You have to get outside the scope of work and to understand other cultures by socializing. Interacting in a social environment with your counterparts will positively affect collaboration._

Study participants expressed that intercultural environments involving Western and Middle Eastern players benefited problem socialization. The full range of options would not be able to be considered if selected individuals were to keep the issues to themselves. Additionally, they expressed that personal social interactions complemented productivity and increased communications effectiveness.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

This study explored how U.S. DOD employees perceived their intercultural effectiveness and shortcomings during their Western to Middle Eastern, state-to-state interactions. Through interviews of U.S. DOD employees, other nations’ military leaders and contracted linguists, the study explored not only the U.S. DOD employee perspectives, but also those of their Middle Eastern counterparts. The phenomenological study reviewed three major factors that influence intercultural communication within this environment including:

1. Expatriate Adaptation
2. Power Distance
3. Sensemaking Theory

The initially proposed concept model (Figure 1) is shown in a modified format in Figure 12 below. Participant interviews revealed some additional details about the contributing factors of effective intercultural communication.

The study participants described more categories for internal and external adaptation. Internal adaptation factors were renamed as personal factors and further categorized as:

1. Personal Adaptation – those behavioral changes that occur as a result of self-monitoring.
2. Language Comprehension – the ability to understand words or phrases of the different culture that one is interacting with. This varied from understanding a few words to conversational skills.

3. Awkward Moments – those moments that made a person cringe. When individuals reflected upon those experiences at a later time, they may have realized that learning occurred.

![Initial Concept Model with Annotations – Author Created](image)

**Figure 12. Initial Concept Model with Annotations – Author Created**

Similarly, the participants recognized additional external expatriate adaptation factors in their operating environment. The factors were comprised of:

1. Geographic Location – the location(s) where the intercultural interaction(s) occurred.

2. Frequency of Intercultural Interactions – how often interactions occurred.
3. Developing Openness and Trust – as interactions continue, individuals from
dissimilar cultures gradually trusted each other more.

4. Prominence of Interactions – the level of importance of the individuals with which
the interaction occurred.

5. Military and Civilian Interactions – a comparison and contrast of efficiency and
effectiveness between military or civilian interlocutors.

These shifts are shown in Figure 13 below. Additional subfactors provided more granularity to
the adaptation aspect of the study. Revised subfactors were also more familiar terms of reference
for the participants.

Sensemaking in the initial concept model started with seven (7) categories. Study
participants didn’t have many comments about “Ongoing Activities” or “Plausibility”.
Additionally, “Wasta” the Arabic Social Network was not discussed very much. This resulted in
removing them from the model. The removed subfactors “Ongoing Activities,” “Plausibility,”
and “Wasta” are dashed lines in Figure 14. The following five (5) categories continued to be
examined within the sensemaking construct.

1. Identity – personal and organizational roles within the context of the situation.

2. Problem Setting – constructing problems from troubling, uncertain situations.

3. Creating – extracting cues at snapshots in time to establish parameters, boundaries to
better define the problem.

4. Restrospection – thinking about the past and what has worked before, considering if
past actions may apply to the current situation(s).

5. Socializing – discussing the problems with others to try and develop more
comprehensive solutions.
Figure 13. Concept Model Adjustment – Adaptation Factors Expansion – Author Created

Figure 14. Concept Map Adjustment – Sensemaking Factors/Wasta Reduction – Author Created
Power Distance subfactors initially included high and low-power distance. The focus was placed more on the contrast between the two (2) factors, rather than the factors themselves during the thematic analysis of interviews (Figure 15).

![Diagram showing high and low power distance with decisions deferred to higher or powered down]

**Figure 15. Concept Model Adjustment – Power Distance Factors Reduction – Author**

The changes were assembled, resulting in the revised concept map previously shown in Figure 11 located on page 42.

All factors in the model contributed to intercultural communication effectiveness. This research indicated that self-monitoring, leading to behavior changes at the personal adaptation stage was particularly prominent. This appeared to be similar to the foundation if compared with building a house. This would affect the quality and longevity of the house if the foundation materials selected and construction methods used were not to acceptable standards. This metaphor is useful because some of the differences between Western and Middle Eastern cultures are measurable. Individuals on both sides of this dyad must recognize cultural differences and be willing to change. This would establish essential preconditions (the foundation) from which other positive changes (the building of the house on the foundation) could occur. A summary of those areas is noted below:
1. **Openness and Trust within the Operating Environment**— When self-monitoring and behavior positively take other cultures into account, this indicates their ability to self-monitor and modify their behaviors to meet with the host culture’s approval. In many cases, they observed the host culture reciprocating. Openness and trust often result in improved intercultural communication.

2. **Power Distance**— Westerners working with high-power distance cultures should first be aware of the power distance differences between the two cultures. When self-monitoring has occurred, participants will have modified their behaviors, resulting in improved intercultural communication effectiveness. Failure by participants to adapt their behaviors would diminish their intercultural communication effectiveness.

3. **Identification within Sensemaking Theory**— Individuals must identify others and themselves within the context of the situation. When they successfully modify their behavior to account for others’ viewpoints, they increase their intercultural communication effectiveness. Self-monitoring during personal adaptation is essential for them to recognize their need to change their behavior.

4. **Problem Setting within Sensemaking Theory**— When identification is not properly done due to the lack of self-monitoring, the problem may not be ‘properly set.’ This research indicated limited or blocked intercultural communication as the typical result when self-monitoring was neglected.

The role of self-monitoring as a pre-condition for other factors did not diminish their roles.

When properly done it provided an optimal foundation from which to build greater intercultural communication effectiveness to occur.
The limitation of this study was the absence of participants currently residing in countries throughout the Middle East. The intent was to interview five to six additional Middle East regional military officers. This was not possible. There were challenges in the staffing of the officers’ participation through their nations’ command chains. This was consistent within the high-power distance construct discussed by the study’s participants with respect to this geographical region.

**Future Research**

As a result of this study, future research projects may include the following:

1. Broaden the scope of study to include more Middle Eastern participants from different countries throughout the region. Expand to include other cultures (such as East Asia, South America, Africa, or different parts of Europe). Adding more cultural diversity (scope) to this body of research may further emphasize the necessity of considering intercultural communication effectiveness factors with the larger more generalized participation.

2. Develop and deploy a survey to verify the factors chosen for this project offer the most impact on intercultural communication effectiveness. This may require more literature review to consider other constructs that may apply to the intercultural communication effectiveness phenomenon. In particular, Hall’s seminal work, *Beyond Culture* discussed high and low context cultures (Hall, 1976). It offers some interesting intersections and extensions to Hofstede’s power distance (Hofstede, 1983). Surveys, due to their intended larger participatory audience, offer opportunities to generate hypotheses and statistically analyze data to prove or disprove them.
3. Conduct mixed method research. As discussed in the previous extension, surveys offer opportunities to quantitatively analyze data to further define and refine how factors contribute to intercultural communication effectiveness. The refined contributing factors could then be investigated through interviews or case studies. The mixed method would offer more robust sample size through use of the surveys, while offering deeper narratives of the surviving factors from the qualitative methods.

**Conclusion**

Humans possess two eyes, two ears and one mouth. Our brains have more mass and size than all of those combined. Previous literature and the analyzed empirical evidence in this study, combined with the way our bodies are constructed appears to support self-monitoring and behavioral change. We have more communications receivers than transmitters. Our relatively larger brain size (in comparison to our receivers and transmitters) would further indicate our capacity for analyzing information and making decisions. This capacity allows us to make changes to accommodate foreign cultures.

Participants in intercultural settings have the opportunity to self-monitor, and then make conscious changes to their behaviors to adapt to foreign cultures and improve their intercultural communications effectiveness. The reciprocation by persons from the foreign culture(s) with which they are interacting further improves communication. This in turn has a positive impact on every communication process that follows. Simply stated, the participant should stop, look, listen, think and adapt, and then take right actions to be successful in the intercultural environment.
REFERENCES


Firth, B. M., Chen, G., Kirkman, B. L., & Kim, K. (2014). Newcomers abroad: Expatriate adaptation during early phases of international assignments. *Academy of Management Journal*(1), 280.


APPENDIX A: FACILITATED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Following are the general questions used to interview the participants. This was not all-inclusive, however it provided a starting point. In most cases, the participants took control of the interview and guided the discussions in their respective interviews. This was done in an attempt to reduce bias during the data collection.

- What interactions do you have with other cultures in the course of your work?
- Can you describe cultures you have worked with and describe them in context of the geographic regions of the world?
- How frequent are these interactions?
- Can you describe the prominence, or importance of the positions of the officials that you work with from other cultures?
- Have you noted any uniquely different aspects in military organizational intercultural interactions when comparing them with civilian interlocuters?
- How do you believe the persons from the other culture view you?
- When cultural differences are pronounced, what are the methods you use to overcome those differences? What is your coping strategy? Have you ever ran into differences that proved to be very difficult to reconcile?
- What are the indicators that someone differing from your culture has taken the time to gain a better understanding of your culture prior to meeting with you?
- Have you observed that when someone does take the time to gain more understanding of your culture, that it is helpful in making your interactions more efficient?
- Does knowledge of or attempts to use common phrases the other culture’s language “break the ice?”
- Do you recall any humorous awkward moments during interactions with other cultures. Did those moments result in better understanding between you and the other person?
• When working with intercultural communication, have you observed problem setting occurring?
  o That is – constructing the problem from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling and uncertain…
• A contrast – what is more important, making the decision or defining the question?
• How do you think identity and identification affects interactions in these environments?
  (who people think they are in their context)
  o Have you observed this shape what people enact and how they interpret events?
• Do you find that retrospection or reflecting on past actions is helpful for people who work in this environment?
  o Given the military, NGO, corporate entities you have worked with, have you observed any with more focus than others in this area?
• Do you find the participants creating/enacting – to create structure such as taking undefined space, time and action to draw lines, establish categories and coin labels to create new features of the environment that did not exist before?
• Social – what is the value of socializing complex problems in the multicultural setting, vice keeping things at an individual level. Do you have any examples?
  o Do you find building narrative accounts useful in helping you or others to understand what they think, organize their experiences and control and predict events and reduce complexity in the context of change management in multicultural settings?
  o Do you find there to be competing and complementing narratives, and discussions to sort them out occurring?
  o Do these competing narratives develop into plausible stories that get preserved, retained or shared? Do you find the speakers themselves seeing these narratives to be "both individual and shared...an evolving product of conversations with them and with others".
• Ongoing… Do individuals simultaneously shape and react to the environments they face?
  o Do they project themselves onto this environment and observe the consequences they learn about their identities and the accuracy of their accounts of the world?
- Do individuals deduce their identity from the behavior of others towards them, and also try to influence this behavior, creating a feedback mechanism?

- Focused on and by extracted cues – we tend to focus on products more than process.
  - Have you seen any examples where leaders in this multicultural setting observed key reference points and then were able to better adapt to evolving processes?
  - Have you been able to influence any of these processes?
  - Have you found it useful to extract cues from the context to help you decide on what information is relevant and what explanations are acceptable? Do you observe these qualities in others?
  - Do the extracted cues provide points of reference for linking ideas to broader networks of meaning and are 'simple, familiar structures that are seeds to develop a larger sense of what may be occurring."

- Do you find those you work with in the intercultural environment to favor plausibility (reasonable or probable) over accuracy (being correct or precise) in accounts of events and contexts? If so, why might this be the case? Can you give examples?

- Some societies tend to operate with autonomy (as individuals) and have the expectation that others will also act in a similar manner. Other societies are much more collectivist in nature – they look for guidance from others.
  - Have you seen examples where these two viewpoints collided?
  - How did the participants work through/resolve the issues?
  - Were there any situations where individuals from the two different viewpoints could not get over the differences?
  - Of the military, non-governmental, and corporate (business) leaders that you worked with, did any stand out as being more effective? If so, why?
APPENDIX B: SELECTED MILITARY, GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION DEFINITIONS

Some individuals reading this study may not be familiar with the environments where militaries do intercultural interactions or communications. I will offer some terms of reference and associated definitions that might be helpful in framing the discussion. Having a basic understanding of those definitions will establish context for readers that are not already familiar with the military, government agency and non-government agency discussion points within the interview narratives.

Table 6. Military/Government/Non-Government Organization Definitions/Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Reconnaissance Detachment</td>
<td>The CRD is the basic building block for advanced CBRN support for Special Forces operations. The CRD plans, conducts, and provides CBRN reconnaissance and surveillance support for SOF in support of strategic, operational, and tactical objectives in all environments (permissive, uncertain, and hostile) to support the functional and geographic CCDRs’ intent and objectives. The primary focus of special-operations forces CBRN units within the program of record is serving as exploitation enablers in addition to filling their traditional reconnaissance and decontamination roles. Each special-forces group has an assigned chemical reconnaissance detachment and an organic chemical decontamination detachment. The chemical reconnaissance detachment provides direct and general exploitation support to operational detachments and other special operations forces. The chemical decontamination detachment provides general exploitation support to a special-operations task force. (Carmody, 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Based Violence</td>
<td>As declared in the United Nations General Assembly, 85th plenary meeting, 20 December 1993:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:</td>
<td></td>
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<td>(a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;</td>
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<td>(b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;</td>
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<td>(c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.</td>
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<td>Foreign Area Officer</td>
<td>A Foreign Area Officer (FAO) is a commissioned officer from any of the four branches of the United States armed forces who are regionally-focused experts in political-military operations possessing a unique combination of strategic focus, regional expertise, with political, cultural, sociological, economic, and geographic awareness, and foreign language proficiency in at least one of the dominant languages in their specified region. An FAO will typically serve overseas tours as a defense attaché, a security assistance officer, or as a political-military planner in a service's headquarters, Joint Staff, Major Commands, Unified Combatant Commands, or in agencies of the Department of Defense. They also serve as arms control specialists, country desk officers, liaison officers, and Personal Exchange Program officers to host nations or coalition allies. Roles and responsibilities of FAOs are extensive and varied. They advise senior leaders on political-military operations and relations with other nations, provide cultural expertise to forward-deployed commands conducting military operations, build and maintain long-term relationships with foreign leaders, develop and coordinate security cooperation, execute security assistance programs with host nations, and develop reports on diplomatic, information, military, and economic activities.</td>
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<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<td>Each branch has its own process for developing Foreign Area Officers to address their specific needs</td>
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<td>Foreign Internal Defense</td>
<td>Participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security. Also called <strong>FID</strong> (Gortney, 2010, p. 92)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
<td>“A non-governmental organization (NGO) is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to Governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information. Some are organized around specific issues, such as human rights, environment or health. They provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms and help monitor and implement international agreements. Their relationship with offices and agencies of the United Nations system differs depending on their goals, their venue and the mandate of a particular institution.” <a href="http://www.ngo.org/ngoinfo/define.html">http://www.ngo.org/ngoinfo/define.html</a> (&quot;Definition of ngos,&quot;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
<td>“NATO is an alliance of 29 countries from Europe and North America. It provides a unique link between these two continents, enabling them to consult and cooperate in the field of defence and security, and conduct multinational crisis-management operations together. Security in our daily lives is key to our well-being. NATO’s purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means.” <a href="https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html">https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html</a> (&quot;North atlantic treaty organization welcome page,&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Nation</td>
<td>1. A nation that the United States works with in a specific situation or operation. 2. In security cooperation, a nation with which the Department of Defense conducts security cooperation activities. Also called <strong>PN</strong>. (Gortney, 2010, p. 183)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Security Cooperation</td>
<td>All Department of Defense interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific US security interests, develop allied and friendly</td>
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<td><strong>military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide US forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation. Also called SC.</strong> (Gortney, 2010, pp. 214-215)</td>
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<td>Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (SFOD A)</td>
<td>These are made up of 12 men, each with a separate Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). Each ODA member is cross-trained in other specialties. <a href="http://www.americanspecialops.com/special-forces/odas/">http://www.americanspecialops.com/special-forces/odas/</a> (&quot;American special operations forces,&quot; 2018)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Special Operations</td>
<td>“Operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments and characterized by one or more of the following: time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility, conducted with and/or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise, and/or a high degree of risk.” (Gortney, 2010, p. 223)</td>
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<td>Special Operations Forces</td>
<td>“Those Active and Reserve Component forces of the Services designated by the Secretary of Defense and specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations. Also called SOF.” (Gortney, 2010, p. 224)</td>
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<td>Special Operations Joint Task Force</td>
<td>A modular, tailorable, and scalable special operations task force designed to provide integrated, fully-capable, and enabled joint special operations forces to geographic combatant commanders and joint force commanders. Also called SOJTF. (Gortney, 2010, p. 224)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations</td>
<td>The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945. It is currently made up of 193 Member States. The mission and work of the United Nations are guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter. Due to the powers vested in its Charter and its unique international character, the United Nations can take action on the issues confronting humanity in the 21st century, such as peace and security, climate change, sustainable development, human rights, disarmament, terrorism, humanitarian and health emergencies, gender equality, governance, food production, and more. The UN also provides a forum for its members to express their views in the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, and other bodies and committees. By enabling dialogue between its members, and</td>
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<td>by hosting negotiations, the Organization has become a mechanism for governments to find areas of agreement and solve problems together.</td>
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<td>U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) Mission</td>
<td>To direct and enable military operations and activities with allies and partners to increase regional security and stability in support of enduring U.S. interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) Mission</td>
<td>To provide a lethal Joint Force to defend the security of our country and sustain American influence abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Department of State (DOS) Mission</td>
<td>Leads America’s foreign policy through diplomacy, advocacy, and assistance by advancing the interests of the American people, their safety and economic prosperity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| U.S. Military Officer Rank Equivalents | Major: Vice President, Director, Department Head, Program Director, Senior Consultant  
Lieutenant Colonel/Colonel: Senior Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, (CFO), Senior Vice President, Executive Vice President  
General Officer: CEO, President, Senior Director, Chairman of the Board  |
| U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Mission | USSOCOM synchronizes the planning of Special Operations and provides Special Operations Forces to support persistent, networked and distributed Global Combatant Command operations in order to protect and advance our Nation’s interests.  |

http://www.un.org/en/sections/about-un/overview/ ("About the united nations,")


https://www.defense.gov/ ("U.S. Department of defense home page,")

https://www.state.gov/aboutstate/ ("U.S. Department of state home page,")

January 24, 2018

Douglas Straka
COBA Executive Program
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00033159
Title: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION EFFECTS ON COLLABORATION IN MULTI-STAKEHOLDER, MULTI-CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS

Study Approval Period: 1/24/2018 to 1/24/2019

Dear Mr. Straka:

On 1/24/2018, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Protocol Version #1 1.11.18

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
Adult Consent, Version #7, 1.22.2018.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research...
proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent to Participate in Minimum Risk Research and Authorization to Collect, Use and Share Your Information

Study Title: Intercultural Communication between International Military Organizations
Pro# 00033159

Overview: You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information may be provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being led by Doug Straka, who is a Doctoral Candidate in University of South Florida’s Executive Doctorate in Business Administration Program. This person is called the Principal Investigator. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Paul Spector. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details: This study is being conducted at University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. The purpose of the study is to gain a greater understanding of interactions in multicultural, multi-stakeholder organizational environments involving Western and Middle Eastern military organizations. Gaining a greater understanding of how (and how much) intercultural communication factors help or hinder collaboration between different governments’ military officials will allow those potential collaborators to concentrate on and improve their performance in those areas. Your participation will require one to two interviews lasting a total of 90 minutes of your time.

Participants: You are being asked to take part because you have worked with other national militaries with cultures that are in some way dissimilar to your own.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: We do not know if you will receive any benefit from your participation. There is no cost to participate. You will not be compensated for your participation. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimum risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.
Why are you being asked to take part?
We are asking you to take part in this research study because you have worked with other national militaries with cultures that are in some way dissimilar to your own. We believe your experience will greatly contribute to our understanding of challenges and success in this environment.

Study Procedures:
If you take part in this study, you will be asked to, you will be asked to be available for interviews conducted by the principal investigator. He will do audio recordings of these interviews.

The expected duration of one to two interviews will be 45 minutes, not to exceed a total of 90 minutes of your valuable time.

The location for your interview will be selected by you (currently expected to be at your home or another quiet setting of your choosing).

It is his current expectation to ask questions on your accumulated experiences on challenges, strategies and best practices you have gained as you have coordinated with other nations’ militaries, whose cultures are dissimilar to your own. Some of the general areas that he will explore with you include:

- Your experiences in working with cultures different from your own.
- When cultural differences are pronounced, what are the methods you use to overcome those differences?
- What are the indicators that someone differing from your culture has taken the time to gain a better understanding of your culture prior to meeting with you?
- Have you observed that when someone does take the time to gain more understanding of your culture, that it is helpful in making your interactions more efficient?
- Do you recall any humorous awkward moments during interactions with other cultures. Did those moments result in better understanding between you and the other person?
- Participate in one to two interviews approximately 45 minutes in length at a location of your choosing, such as your home or a quiet neutral setting.
- Audio-taping will be conducted.

In accordance with University of South Florida’s Institutional Review Board requirements, the data will be secured by the primary investigator for 5 years after the final report has been submitted. It will then be shredded, followed by incineration.

Total Number of Participants
A total of 8-20 individuals will participate in the study at all sites.

Risks or Discomfort
This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation
You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.
Costs
It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Privacy and Confidentiality
We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

Your information or samples collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will NOT be used or distributed for future research studies.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Doug Straka at +1-254-319-0291. You may also reach Doug on WhatsApp at 254-319-0291.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, contact the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study
I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____________________________________________  ______________________________
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study            Date

_____________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study
Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Doug Straka has worked as a Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) Program Analyst for the U.S. Department of Defense Enterprise for the past eight years. He has worked closely with nations the U.S. partners with, to develop action plans to increase their abilities to prevent, protect, respond to and mitigate WMDs. Through developing composite teams from U.S. military joint service components and the U.S. government interagency, he has tailored programs that best meet each partner’s needs.

He previously served 20 years in the Army as a Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defense Officer in a variety of operational, institutional and strategic assignments. He earned a Master in Business Administration from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, Florida in 2003.