DSTO CULTURAL COMPATIBILITY STUDY

Summary of Key Findings (Correct as at 22 June 2012)

Background

Since 06 May 2007 there have been 57 ANSF initiated attacks on their ISAF counterparts resulting in 130 Coalition Forces killed and 140 wounded. While the threat of ANSF attacks remains relatively small given the overall numbers of partnered units, their high-profile nature, effect on public opinion within troop contributing nations and potential for generating distrust between the partner forces suggest that they constitute a strategic threat to the mission.

Of the 57 incidents, three have involved Australian Forces, each originating from different Kandaks (2, 3 and 6 KDKs) within the 4th Brigade of 205 Corps. Consistent with Coalition experiences, it is assessed that these events are unrelated to each another and that at least two of the incidents were the result of personal grievances.

Prior to the Cultural Compatibility Study there had been no systematic study of the relationship between Australian and Afghan Forces in Uruzgan which might yield knowledge of the possible drivers for ANSF-initiated attacks on Australian forces. Accordingly, HQJOC requested DSTO social scientists undertake the study to assess Australian and Afghan Forces' perceptions of one another and identify specific to instances of cultural friction in Uruzgan.

Method

Over the period from Feb to Apr 2012 DSTO deployed a study team to Afghanistan to collect data from members of the Australian Task Force and their Afghan partners with the purpose of identifying, more fully understanding and mitigating against the socio-cultural, interpersonal and operational friction points that may inhibit effective mentoring and inadvertently lead to further ANSF-initiated attacks.

The study obtained a 59% sample capture of the Australian forces through surveys and 18% through rank-stratified focus groups. A number of interviews with key personnel were conducted and used as verifying data to the overall analysis. 265 members of the Afghan National Army currently operating alongside Australian Forces in Uruzgan were also interviewed or participated in rank-stratified focus groups. Samples were obtained from across the full spectrum of infantry kandaks of the brigade as well as the Headquarters and Garrison Support Unit.

Results

In addition to positive experiences of friendship, the study yielded a series of friction points between the Australian Task Force and their Afghan counterparts. These are found to be underpinned by feelings of humiliation, disrespect and mistrust.

Understanding ANA Grievances

Frequency and severity ratings from the ANA interviews and focus groups identify grievances underpinned by feelings of **humiliation** and the drive to restore **honour** as the most significant proximal cause of violence. These incidents appear to elicit a more intense emotive reaction suggesting that a significant percentage of attacks are driven by 'acts of rage' rather than a carefully planned or calculated process. In these instances, a reliance on intelligence gathering is unlikely to mitigate the risk. Instead implementation of cross-cultural competency training will be more effective in arming ADF personnel with the knowledge to recognise specific culturally offensive behaviours and mitigate against possible future incidents of violence.

Other grievance states that generated expressions of hostility (and may be considered proximal causes of violence) are underpinned by experiences of ADF behaviours that are perceived to be **disrespectful** of the ANA, Afghan culture, religion or women.

Rage & Revenge

In Afghan culture it is considered dishonourable not to respond to personal slights with reciprocation.[1] Where an aggrieved individual does not have the opportunity to seek revenge against the perpetrator it is acceptable to do so against that person's qawm (solidarity group). As a consequence, it is possible that individuals within the Australian Task Force may be targeted opportunistically as a result of prior grievances against Australian Forces or other ISAF members. In these instances the key inhibitor against violence is the prior establishment of bonds of friendship which transforms the ADF member from 'stranger' to 'brother'.

"Me against my brother; My brother and me against my cousin; Me, my brother, and my cousin against the stranger".

Although not characterised as giving rise to possible triggering events, ANA participants consistently voiced grievances associated with a perception that Australian Forces are either fearful of or do not **trust** their ANA counterparts. Examples ranged from public accusations of theft to a lack of involvement in operational planning and decision making and the intrusiveness of recent force protection measures.

Similarly, several grievance states were found to be underpinned by unmet expectations of **friendship**. The transition process has seen reduced levels of partnering and a shift to an operational support model – with small mobile mentoring teams having intermittent presence. This has been combined with decreasing access to ISAF enablers. The new mentoring model has been interpreted as a violation of the friendship established by previous Mentoring Task Forces which was based on notions of ***hospitality*** (shared tea and meals) and ***reciprocity*** (expectations of Australian support and assistance in the provision of stores, maintenance and access to enablers).

[1] The Pashtun notion of *badal* (roughly translated as 'justice') covers the requirement for revenge and the restoration of honour.

Consistency of Findings

The key findings were found to be consistent across each surveyed location and do not appear to be unique to individual Kandaks, thus ruling out micro culture or specific incidents as a causal factor. Instances of humiliation, in particular, were found in close to half of the focus groups conducted with examples of ANA members feeling humiliated in front of the local population or their peers serving as the most significant grievance. Variability was limited to the depth of the associated emotions and the severity of the intended reactions at the time of the event with participants from 4 and 5 Kandak located in Tarin Kowt recalling narratives with more moderate reactions than those located in FOB/ PB Mirawais, Wali, and Hadrian. A number of 'near-miss' incidents between the two Forces were recounted.

The Role of Base Deisgn

An analysis of several patrol bases was conducted for the purpose of assessing the impacts of the physical environment on the relationship between the two Forces. This data was triangulated with grievances raised from the Afghan Forces Green Force and suggested that both fully segregated and fully integrated bases provided the most opportunities for grievance, whereas co-located bases that provided for some level of personal space yielded the least hostility.

Recommendations

Given the role that incidents of cultural friction played in generating grievance, mistrust and potential attacks the study recommended that significant attention be given to the areas of mentor selection, in-theatre cultural guidance and pre-deployment cultural training. Subsequent studies to assess the impact of these measures as well as understanding potential friction points between Australian Special Forces and the ANP are scheduled for later in the year. These will provide much needed situational awareness of the environment during a time when the Australian Task Force is scheduled to withdraw from the outlying patrol bases and further reduce the number of partnered operations.