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**Insight Into Foreign Thoughtworlds  
for National Security Decision Makers**

J. W. Barnett

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### PREFACE

This paper is the product of a research project funded internally by the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA). Originally conceived as an exploration of ways to improve the effectiveness of so-called “shaping” activities conducted in support of U.S. national security objectives, the study came to focus on the more general topic of how to achieve improved understanding of the perspectives, motivations, and, more generally, thought of people in other societies and cultures. Since 11 September 2001 it has become even more clear that improvements in such understanding are essential to U.S. national security. This work follows and builds on themes developed by the author in a series of inquiries and writings that began in 1992 in the context of directing a program in Global Security at Rocky Mountain Institute.

The author would like to thank the readers of the draft paper for their comments and criticisms, with apologies that some suggestions were not adopted in the final text. MG David Baratto, USA (Ret.); Mr. William J. Barlow; Dr. Charles W. Cook; and RADM Grant A. Sharp, USN (Ret.) all contributed thoughtful and incisive comments. Dr. William J. Hurley was especially supportive and helpful during several iterations of this work. In 2001, MG Baratto facilitated a series of interviews at the U.S. Army’s Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, NC, where LTG Doug Brown, MG William Boykin, BG Frank Toney, COL Al Aycock, COL Mike Kershner, COL Eugene Thompson, COL Kevin Keenan, COL James Treadwell, Dr. Robert Jenks, and other staff were generous with their time. Many thanks also to Dr. Kevin Avruch, Dr. Robert L. Bovey, Ms. Sunjin Choi, Ms. Lisa Howard Grabman, the Rev. Glenn Hoburg, Mr. Charles H. Lyman, Ms. Patricia G. Phillips, Mr. John F. Sandoz, Mr. Edward F. Smith, Mr. James L. Wilson, Ms. Anne Wolf and Dr. Caroline F. Ziemke for discussion and comments related to their areas of expertise and experience. The support of Mr. Philip L. Major for this project is greatly appreciated.

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## SUMMARY

Present national security concerns invite critical attention to the way the United States deploys its unparalleled political, economic, and military power. A strategy of using superior national power to compel desired outcomes—common in recent decades—is poorly suited to many present challenges, notably in the strategic war against terror, a number of taxing regional crises, and in countering a global wave of anti-U.S. sentiment.

There are alternative strategies that, instead of seeking to compel or force, actively engage foreign partners or adversaries in a way that recognizes their interests, perspectives, will, and energies and that seek to effectively communicate, influence, channel extant dynamics, or sometimes affect more fundamental changes in thought or action. Such strategies, not without their own limitations, should now receive relatively more consideration and emphasis in U.S. national security affairs because they may better address many current challenges that are, at best, ineffectively addressed by efforts to compel.

We note among these alternative strategies a distinct reliance on a nuanced understanding of how people in other societies think—their thoughtworlds—that is more demanding than that required to compel. Such a degree of understanding has not been commonly reflected in U.S. national security affairs, and is not prominent in U.S. society generally. A well-focused effort is needed to organize a suitable knowledge base of foreign thought and to make consideration of the insights it enables a standard feature of national security decision making.

The study of foreign thoughtworlds can best be approached through comparative, inherently multi-disciplinary study based on understanding others *on their own terms*. U.S. society proves to be rich with the resources needed to implement this approach: the perspectives of indigenous thought, available through direct international communication or through émigré communities; the expertise resident in diverse fields of academic and less formally organized study; and the experience of practitioners involved in a host of international and domestic activities, some less obviously relevant to U.S. national security affairs. Leveraged in an organized, sustained manner, these resources can

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provide pragmatic insights for the formulation and assessment of national security strategy, policy, plans, and actions.

Operationalizing insights into foreign thoughtworlds will require considerable leadership commitment to achieve a few key objectives, especially raising decision makers' awareness of the need for, and benefits of, such insights; establishing a dedicated institution to serve as a national focal point; and integrating consideration of such insights into the institutional processes that support national security decision making.



## I. NATIONAL POWER, GLOBAL COMMITMENTS

The United States justifiably claims political, economic, and especially military power unparalleled not only in the modern world, but in history. We have generally deployed our power with similarly unique restraint, very often in aid of others. We find ourselves, then, in unexpected circumstances: engaged in protracted battle with a network of vicious irregulars committed to the destruction of our (and all of Western) civilization; drawn into a number of regional crises—some seemingly intractable—that dissipate our attention and energies as their intensity cycles; and encountering a global wave of negative sentiment, even from erstwhile allies who are often reluctant to join in what would seem to be common cause. Our immense power has come to appear limited in its ability to guarantee our national security.

In the disorienting early days after 11 September 2001, our experience had some resonance with that of Tolstoy's young Count Rostov in his first battlefield engagement, his horse shot from beneath him and facing advancing enemy troops:

He stared at the approaching Frenchmen, and though only a moment before he had been galloping ahead to reach these men and cut them down, their proximity now seemed to him so awful that he could not believe his eyes. "Who are they? Why are they running? Can they be coming to me? Really coming to me? And why? To kill me? Me whom everyone loves?"... He stood for more than ten seconds, not moving from the spot, not understanding his position.<sup>1</sup>

We have since had some time to think about our position in what seems in many ways a new world. Our circumstances particularly invite critical attention to the way we deploy our national power: Do present deployments seem well-matched to the international security environment, or could other approaches more effectively support U.S. national security objectives?

This question is addressed below, beginning with a discussion of the possibilities and limitations of one prominent use of U.S. national power: to compel.

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (New York: Signet Classic, New American Library, 1968), p. 237.

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### A. COMPELLANCE IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

U.S. national security objectives aim to preserve a vibrant U.S. society based on individual liberty, a democratic form of government, and a free market economy, and to extend the benefits of this model to other nations. The war against terrorism now has the highest priority, but President Bush's national security strategy also prioritizes regional conflict resolution, promoting development abroad, and building relationships with other powers.<sup>2</sup>

In global pursuit of such a broad set of objectives, one clear option for so powerful a nation as the United States is compellance: to force a leader or regime or nation to accede to U.S. preferences, like it or not, by the implicit or explicit threat—or use—of superior power in political, economic, and/or military forms. Conceptually supported by the established realist model of international relations, this deployment of national power has many essential advantages. First, some threats to national security require it: stopping armed aggression against the United States and its allies, responding to immediate threats of terrorism, stopping the use of weapons of mass destruction. Second, it circumvents the time needed for possibly unproductive negotiations or diplomatic encounters, which can be used as a stalling tactic by adversaries. Compellance may preclude the need for compromises that fall short of the intended result. If overwhelming power is readily available and employable, results may be achieved relatively quickly.

There are, however, some obvious limitations to the use of superior power to compel outcomes. The blunt use of political, economic, or military power is not uniformly effective in achieving the full range of U.S. national security objectives. Of course, compellance is never likely to be effective in support of peaceful objectives: strengthening alliances, promoting prosperity, and the like. But even in conflict, its effectiveness is limited when the level of applied power is restricted by the nature of the adversary or the setting. For example, overwhelming military power is harder to apply against adversaries employing guerilla tactics (especially in urban settings, where there is great U.S. concern for collateral casualties) or organizing themselves after the *al Qaeda* model with its globally mobile fluid membership. There are also applications of

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<sup>2</sup> President George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002.

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economic power, but these may be of relatively little use against a committed adversary: Saddam Hussein's regime (and palace construction) seemed to suffer little from economic sanctions, while the effect on Iraqi children became an international cause.

A second limitation is that compellence often requires continued presence, or its effect may be undone. This is seen today in Iraq and Afghanistan as it was in the Balkans. Particularly if actions are undertaken with few or no allies, a point will be reached in the proliferation of intensive political, economic, and military commitments where U.S. power will become dissipated to the point of ineffectiveness. This consequence brings to mind the ironic slogan used in the past by activists in criticism of a national energy strategy centered on the quick depletion of all known oil reserves: "Strength through Exhaustion."

Finally, frequent recourse to superior power to compel engenders antipathy, and not only among those compelled. Decades ago, the late Mexican author and diplomat Octavio Paz expressed a frustration not limited to Mexican elites:

The United States, smiling or angry, its hand open or clenched, neither sees nor hears us but keeps striding on, and as it does so, enters our lands and crushes us. It is impossible to hold back a giant; it is possible, though far from easy, to make him listen to others; if he listens, that opens the possibility of coexistence. Because of their origins (the Puritan speaks only with God and himself, not with others), and above all because of their power, the North Americans are outstanding in the art of the monologue: they are eloquent and they also know the value of silence. But conversation is not their forté: they do not know how to listen or reply.<sup>3</sup>

As a natural result of envy and resentment of U.S. power, and also because of some ways that power has been deployed in the international arena, the United States is perceived in many quarters as arrogant, uncaring of others' interests, and hypocritical due to perceived inconsistencies between actions and the ideals our nation espouses. And bent on global hegemony: as if Americans' main comfort in life was to await the day when "the United States will be able to impose its pluralist-democratic ideology on a grateful world...."<sup>4</sup> Most Americans may find these kinds of perceptions ill-informed at best, but a climate of

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<sup>3</sup> From "The Other Mexico" by Octavio Paz, in *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings* (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1985), p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> Turn of phrase from a review of Kissinger's book *Diplomacy* by Sir Michael Howard, "The World According to Henry: From Metternich to Me," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 1994, pp. 132-140.

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critical, negative, or hostile world opinion nonetheless aids our adversaries and fuels a dynamic that counters our global leadership. Kissinger observed in mid-2001 that “[t]he matter-of-fact acceptance of our hegemony is wearing off.”<sup>5</sup> This trend is accelerated by the image of arrogance.

Compellance, then, appears as a useful and sometimes essential strategy, but not by itself a wholly effective way to pursue present U.S. national security objectives. Central, for example, to the tactical war on terrorism, it has also sounded as a sometimes dissonant overtone in settings where it is less well suited: in international legal, environmental, and trade negotiations, in relations with less friendly but not explicitly hostile governments, and less overtly even in the conduct of interactions with allies and friends.

### B. COMPLEMENTS TO COMPELLANCE

U.S. power can also be deployed in a number of ways that are based not on compelling or imposing a behavior, but rather on engaging partners or adversaries in a way that recognizes their interests, perspectives, will, and energy, and either finding a way to channel their dynamic in a direction congenial to U.S. interests, or of affecting more fundamental changes in foreign perception, thought, or action. Power deployed in this way is intended to achieve desired results less directly than by coercion; it leverages rather than imposes. Examples of non-compulsive approaches—all standard if less emphasized deployments of national power—include strengthening relationships; building international community; affecting views of the United States held by foreign leaders, elites, or populations, including through public diplomacy; engaging and influencing perceptions that impede regional conflict resolution; negotiating; and encouraging political, economic, or social changes toward adoption of such goals as representative government, economic or legal reform, environmental sustainability,<sup>6</sup> and broader individual liberties, especially when such changes promise to weaken threats against the United States. In military context, alternatives to compellance include psychological operations and deception.

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<sup>5</sup> Cited in Fareed Zakaria, “America’s New Balancing Act,” *Newsweek*, 8/6/2001, Vol. 138, Issue 6.

<sup>6</sup> An approach to this goal is developed in John W. Barnett, “On the Promotion of Sustainability through U.S. Foreign Policy,” unpublished manuscript, May 1998.

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Certain of these alternatives may strike some readers as undesirable or distasteful, since intentional efforts to change others' thoughts or behavior in peacetime interactions may seem to violate the sanctity of individual cultures or personalities. But there is no such thing as a static culture (the North Korean border probably most closely, but imperfectly, approximates an hermetic seal) or personality. People around the world are influenced all the time, to some degree, by a constantly modulating input of images and ideas from other local or foreign people, the media, entertainment, or the internet. In this dynamic situation, the real question is whether the United States is content to deploy its political, economic, and military power without thoughtfully engaging peoples of interest with serious attempts at communication, letting American intentions and positions be interpreted abroad by vocal, hostile locals or inferred by foreign populations from, for example, Gov. Schwarzenegger's old movies or Baywatch reruns.

The complements to compellance have their own limitations: they too are not effective in every circumstance. They may take longer to achieve objectives than compellance (although the results may be longer lasting) so they may not be as effective in situations where time is critical. But in contrast with compellance, they apply more readily to peacetime interactions with friends and adversaries alike; they can, in some cases, ease the demand for constant U.S. presence by engaging the intentions and energies of local people; and they are much more likely to minimize negative sentiment against the United States and to be effective in long-term conflicts, such as the strategic war against terror. It is notable that the limits of compellance—its applicability to a limited range of U.S. national security objectives and types of threats, its ultimate straining of U.S. strategic resources when applied to numerous simultaneous engagements, and the resentment it fuels—seem likely to apply for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the argument is that non-compulsive approaches should now receive relatively more emphasis in U.S. national security affairs because they are suited to many current challenges that are, at best, ineffectively addressed by compellance.

Non-compulsive approaches are related to the theme articulated, under the Clinton administration, by the unfortunately chosen word “shaping.” This word brings to mind a sculptor imposing his design on an unprotesting, inert lump of clay (Pygmalion sculpting Galatea?). In the present report, non-compulsive approaches are instead seen as supportive of international strategy executed, as it were, more as if there were people on

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the other end. Successful implementation of such approaches tends to involve three competencies:

- Interpreting foreign intentions—Understanding the basis for positions and actions, the dynamics driving foreign motivations
- Communicating clearly to foreign audiences—Developing messages respectful of foreign sensibilities that communicate U.S. positions, reasoning, or experience
- Crafting strategies to advance U.S. objectives—Strategic approaches that employ the intellectual access provided by improved interpretation and communication, perhaps leading to the engagement or channeling of existing enthusiasms and energies, or, in some cases, to changes in foreign thoughts or actions brought about by new perceptions or realizations.

Compared with efforts to compel through superior power, these activities share a greater reliance on a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how people in other societies think,<sup>7</sup> a degree of understanding that cannot be said to be commonly reflected in U.S. national security affairs or to be prominent in U.S. society generally.<sup>8</sup>

### C. ENABLING INSIGHTS

Non-compulsive efforts to pursue national security objectives require familiarity with foreign perspectives, motives, attitudes, apprehensions, aspirations, mindsets, and ways of thinking, not only on the level of individual leaders, but also as such features of individual thought are manifested in collectives, e.g., elites, clans, professional affiliations, communities of belief, ethnic groups, and whole cultures or societies. The term *thoughtworld* is used in this paper to describe in summary fashion the complete mental environment, to include language; emotions; character (personality, disposition, tendencies of action); cultural/historical context; memories and life experience; beliefs (religion, ideology, worldview); motivations; and reasoning and other thought processes.

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<sup>7</sup> Effective efforts to compel, of course, also require understanding of foreign thought; some authors have recognized the deficiency in this area implicit in recent technology-focused visions of net-centric warfare or the Joint Vision 20XX statements. The point here is that strategies not relying on compellence demand even greater understanding, and are lagging in sophistication and effectiveness in part due to this deficiency.

<sup>8</sup> The United States is far from alone in this regard; there are some impressive counter-examples, but, in general, nuanced attention to how others think appears to be a rarity worldwide.

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It is important to note that the goal here is to develop helpful insights into foreign thoughtworlds, not to attempt anything so comprehensive as a total understanding of them. As will be illustrated in the following chapters, differences in how people think are so complex and unpredictable that the best that can be hoped for are insights to help interpret foreign statements or positions, cast U.S. messages for foreign ears, or inform approaches toward encouraging desired changes in thought or behavior. Subtle understanding of foreign thoughtworlds is needed for planning, carrying out, and assessing these efforts.

Some may take issue with the charge of national deficiency in this area, pointing out that concern for how others think is a part of daily life for people in many professions, notably those in diplomatic and intelligence services. This is true and, in fact, means that there are many resources—some largely untapped—available to national security decision makers. But the needed depth of insight is not common in the ranks of professional diplomats for reasons that include the geographic diversity of postings that has been an established requisite to promotion even though it limits expertise in particular cultures, as well as the (not baseless) fear of “clientitis” and “going native.” Nor are the insights of interest here within the core assignments of those in the national intelligence community who might seem to be so tasked. Intelligence analysts produce for senior decision makers a certain type of finished intelligence, which is critically important and typically professionally done; but the development of insights such as will be discussed in succeeding chapters is neither their tasking nor their institutional forté. And to be fair, diplomats and intelligence analysts are not usually national security decision makers: the people (often political appointees) filling those ranks, with all respect for their intelligence, drive, and experience, tend to be even further removed from real insight into foreign minds.

The historical record is dense with examples of national security efforts seemingly conducted without much consideration of such insight. A few examples from recent decades include efforts to win hearts and minds in the Vietnamese countryside; the surprising (to the U.S.) Iranian revolution; the even more surprising sequence of events in eastern Europe during the collapse of the Soviet Union; the awkward effort to choose sides in the cultural mêlée during the war in the former Yugoslavia, leading to a decision to actively side with the Albanian faction; the failed efforts to gain French, German, and Turkish support for the war with Iraq, early experience with the Shiites in post-Saddam

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Iraq, and continuing resentment from the same Iraqi people who were expected by some to welcome U.S. liberators with flowers; and, more generally, the negativity directed toward the United States in populations around the world. And the perennial lack of language and cultural expertise every time an incident arises in some less-attended-to corner of the world is also indicative of a national deficiency: recall the recent (ongoing) scramble for Arabic, Pashtu, Urdu, Uzbekh, and Farsi speakers.

Of course, better understanding of how others think will not always lead to a positive realization or to unexpectedly peaceful or cooperative outcomes. In his science fiction/social satire work, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, British author Douglas Adams wrote of a small fish that, when inserted into the ear, enabled immediate understanding of any language. The result: “[The] Babel fish, by effectively removing all barriers to communication between different races and cultures, has caused more and bloodier wars than anything else in the history of creation.”<sup>9</sup> So may insight into foreign thought instead reveal the true intractability of a conflict or an insurmountable gulf in values or intentions, situations that may mandate the use of compelling power.

But this is the main point: insight into foreign thoughtworlds is not proposed as a cure-all, but instead as a unique, rich—but presently underemphasized—complement to the other input informing U.S. national security strategy, policy, plans, and actions. It will not lead to always getting other countries “right,” but should help us get them “wrong” less often. And at best, if it can be properly operationalized in support of U.S. decision makers, it may lead in some cases to the identification of new approaches to achieving national security objectives, bases for new agreements, or even foundations for conciliation. The following chapters explore the nature of human thoughtworlds, sources of insight into them, and ways to foster the employment of such insights by decision makers to the benefit of U.S. national security.

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas Adams, *The More Than Complete Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, (New York: Wings Books, 1989), p. 42.



## II. THE UNIMAGINABLE DIVERSITY OF HUMAN THOUGHTWORLDS

Our intuition and imagination are poor guides to figuring out how other people think. This is because of the amazing, unpredictable diversity of human thought and also because our own assessments of others are limited by difficult-to-eliminate filters. This diversity is demonstrated below with several examples and is followed by the identification of several filters commonly active in contemporary Americans.

### A. THE CHINESE ENCYCLOPEDIA AND OTHER EXAMPLES

In a “certain Chinese encyclopedia” it is written that “animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel hair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.”<sup>1</sup>

Whether the encyclopedia ever really existed or was a creation of Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, it is a striking example of the human possibilities of even such a potentially mundane activity as grouping animals. French author Michel Foucault comments on the passage: “In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing that is demonstrated in the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.”<sup>2</sup>

In fact, it would seem that the most important, revealing differences aren’t ones that strike us as interesting or quaint or a little strange. They’re the things that revolt, shock, or anger us, that we find outrageous or unbelievable, untenable as thoughts or actions of sane people. They challenge our bedrock beliefs about what is true, right, good, expected, acceptable, forgivable, rational, or honest. The following few examples

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<sup>1</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, quoted by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*, and cited by David Augsburger in *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns* (Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1992), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Augsburger, *op. cit.*

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manifest ways of thinking that range—viewed with typical American sensibilities—from the startlingly different to the nearly, but not quite, familiar (which in some cases can be even more jarring).

### 1. Propriety

The sense of what constitutes proper, acceptable behavior is one of the most frequently encountered differences between people, noticeable even in casual travel. Examples range from physical comportment (don't offer your left hand or show the bottoms of your shoes in an Arab country) to eating habits (belching to express gratitude for a good meal, or not) to body language (when, how much, and how to smile). There are usually differences in accepted behavior between the sexes and also discriminations based on social standing and other factors.

Evidence of differing notions of propriety may be found in private and public settings alike. In public context, for example, we might consider religious gatherings of various sorts (a relaxed family visit to a Hindu temple, the simplicity and silence of a traditional Quaker meeting, men prostrate on prayer rugs at a mosque, the unison chanting of a Buddhist ceremony) or sports events (golf, soccer, a fox hunt, a bull fight). A society's sense of propriety may be deliberately violated as a protest: in 2001, women from Nigeria's ruling party threatened to walk through Lagos naked and then to camp in the same condition for a week because some of their ranks had been arrested in a political demonstration.<sup>3</sup> Seen as a shameful and embarrassing violation of a national taboo against nudity of mature women, one can imagine that such a gesture would be greeted differently in, say, western Europe (witness the recent nude protests against U.S. military action in Iraq) or San Francisco.

### 2. Communication

Communication through speech, writing, body language, images, symbols, or symbolic acts is the intentional flow of ideas between two or more minds via inherently limited channels. It is a very rich area of inquiry and clearly at the heart of international interactions. Arjun Appadurai's remarks about global communication in a political context apply broadly:

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<sup>3</sup> "Nigerian party's women threaten nude protest," Reuters report posted on CNN.com, 19 July 2001.

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...the political narratives that govern communication between elites and followers in different parts of the world involve problems of both a semantic and pragmatic nature: semantic to the extent that words (and their lexical equivalents) require careful translation from context to context in their global movements, and pragmatic to the extent that the use of these words by political actors and their audiences may be subject to very different sets of contextual conventions that mediate their translation into public politics.<sup>4</sup>

The translation of meaning from context to context, whatever the medium, stands as an imposing challenge due not only to differences in the thinking of originator and receiver, but with additional complexity introduced by subtleties of particular languages and styles of expression.

Within the limits of the present work, we will only briefly reference some differences in styles of verbal communication, which can range from direct to elliptical to parabolic as suited to different peoples, purposes, and contents. Contrast a typical linear U.S. exposition of information, say in a corporate briefing, an academic lecture, or a nightly news report, with the Japanese *zen* tradition (shared by the Sufi tradition among others) of leading students to enlightenment using parables whose meaning may not be apprehended intellectually. For example,

Nansen saw the monks of the eastern and western halls fighting over a cat. He seized the cat and told the monks: "If any of you say a good word, you can save the cat." No one answered. So Nansen boldly cut the cat in two pieces. That evening Joshu returned and Nansen told him about this. Joshu removed his sandals and, placing them on his head, walked out. Nansen said: "If you had been there, you could have saved the cat."<sup>5</sup>

Something is being transmitted here, but try putting it into words! Another example of indirect language: the use of the metaphorical Aesopian language (patterned after Aesop's fables) and of poetry by Russians in Soviet times to communicate criticisms of Party leaders and other dangerous messages.

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<sup>4</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Public Worlds, vol. 1, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki (compilers), *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*, Shambhala, 1994.

### 3. Reality

What individuals are willing to accept as a normal part of reality, an important factor across the spectrum of national security affairs, is a complex result of personality, beliefs, cultural environment, and life history. Even people we interact with on a daily basis at home or at work may be operating in a perceived reality greatly divergent from our own. Many years ago the author had a conversation with a young Army officer from Arizona. Talk turned to life on the Navajo reservation where she had grown up. While describing some aspects of everyday life, she spoke matter-of-factly about people transforming into animals, consistent with traditional Navajo belief. Her remarks, describing experience outside the author's own, were an effective reminder that we usually know little about what goes on in the minds even of people around us who we generally accept as "like" us.

Equally striking differences in perceptions and expectations of reality may be found among commonly encountered belief systems, including the religions (e.g., Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism, their variants, and a host of less widespread traditional and syncretic systems); mystical practices (New Age, witchcraft); secular philosophies (e.g., Confucianism, objectivism, *juche*); positivism and empiricism (including science, with its attendant fiduciary acts); agnosticism and atheism; and nihilism. The language of Western philosophy gives us some concepts that are helpful in beginning to compare the essential differences among these systems of belief (ontology, concerning the nature of being; epistemology, concerning the nature and origin of knowledge; and teleology, concerning the purpose of natural phenomena), but there are pragmatic consequences perhaps more relevant to national security affairs. Differences in fundamental beliefs contribute (along with other factors) to such important characteristics of people and societies as social cohesion, industriousness, views of conflict and forgiveness, charity toward others, attachment to material comforts, capacity for suffering, and willingness to die for a given cause.

### 4. Justice

There is a rich diversity of interpretations of justice and its implementation, many quite far from American notions. Strict interpretations of Islamic *shariah*, with stonings and amputations, seem barbaric to most Americans. The Albanian blood feud tradition, based on the Kanun Law developed in oral tradition over many centuries, sanctions

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revenge killings by family members. Traditional Hawaiian culture featured a City of Refuge (*pu`uhonua*), in which transgressors against tribal laws could be ceremonially purified and prepared again for life in the community...if they could make it safely to the gates.

An outrageous recent example of foreign justice was the June 2002 case in Pakistan where a rural tribal council punished a 12-year-old boy for having an affair by ordering the gang rape of his older sister.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, American support for the death penalty is viewed as uncivilized in many European nations.

### 5. Time

Time is conceived and experienced differently in various cultures. Characteristic Swiss precision regarding measuring time and living a temporally ordered life contrasts with the less precision-oriented Mexican norm, where showing up “on time” for a meeting—rather than late—can offend. On a grand scale, consider the cyclical notion of time found in Hindu or Aztec culture, compared with the linearity of the Judeo-Christian cultural scheme, where a directionality of time (toward the anticipated establishment of God’s kingdom on earth) supports a globally unusual concept of progress.

There is also the weight of time past, that is, history, so prominent in many societies—but not in the United States, where an almost ahistorical attitude is more common. People in the Balkans, the eastern Mediterranean countries, and in Islamic societies (to name a few) continue in dynamics of conflict established many centuries ago, in times that pre-date the American historical memory.

### 6. Identity and Social Groups

There is a stark difference between the individualism and nationalism dominant in the United States with the social affiliations dominant in many other countries. These might include extended family, clan, or broader ethnic origin, or such geographic divisions as city or region. The American notion of patriotism, that is, having a good part

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<sup>6</sup> “Licensed to Kill: Social Sanction and State Indifference Makes Honor Killings an All Too Frequent Occurrence in Pakistan,” an ABC news report by Leela Jacinto, report posted on ABCNEWS.com, August 5, 2002.

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of individual identity oriented toward a national affiliation unrelated (mostly) to ethnic or extended family ties, is globally rare.

An alternative emphasis is found in traditional Chinese culture, well-known for its emphasis on the family and particularly on the Confucian concept of filial piety (*hsiao*), or “inherent love-and-respect toward parents.”<sup>7</sup> Filial piety actually extends to one’s departed ancestors, as well as living parents. This fundamental virtue extended from the family context into broader social, religious, and political life in China. Tseng Tzu, a disciple of Confucius, said, “Those who lack propriety in private life, loyalty in serving the sovereign, seriousness in discharging official duties, faithfulness in treating friends, or bravery in waging war are all found wanting in filial piety.”<sup>8</sup> Here the proper identification with one’s family and demonstrated attitude toward one’s parents were portrayed as essential to a good and worthy life.

A culture’s norms of identity and social groupings may also influence such national characteristics as stability or economic success. The economist W. Arthur Lewis, a native of the West Indies, considered (along with others) that “the extended family is often an impediment to progress because it gets in the way of national cohesion,”<sup>9</sup> in Lewis’ view, a requirement for economic development.

### 7. Freedom

Americans have an almost proprietary sense about freedom, as interpreted to imply freedom of personal expression, freedom of the press, freedom to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But there are different concepts of freedom in other countries. For example, hear how the poet Alexander Pushkin, highly regarded by Russians as a unique interpreter of the Russian soul, depicted freedom in his 1838 poem *From Pindemonti*:

I have little use for those loudly proclaimed rights  
That sent many a head spinning.  
And I do not regret that gods denied me

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<sup>7</sup> Hsieh Yu-Wei, “Filial Piety and Chinese Society,” in *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, Charles A. Moore, ed. (Honolulu, University of Hawaii: East-West Center Press, 1967), p. 170.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in *Li Chi* (The Book of Rites), cited in Hsieh Yu-Wei *op. cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence E. Harrison, *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind*, Madison Books, Lanham, MD, 1985, p. 21.

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That precious opportunity to dispute taxes  
Or interfere with struggles of rulers.  
I could not care less if the press is free to fool the idiots  
Or if a censor limits the empty talk of the newspaper pages.  
All this talk of rights is but meaningless words.  
I cherish very different rights, the ones that are much better.  
I sorely need another kind of freedom:  
To depend on the rulers or to depend on people –  
What difference does it make? I do not care for either.  
To report to no one, to serve and cater to no one but myself;  
To never compromise my conscience, change my plans, or bend my neck  
For powers-that-be or to get a position.  
To roam here and there as I please, enjoying the beauty of nature,  
Becoming ecstatic from seeing art, appreciating fruits of inspiration –  
Here is what I call happiness, here is what I call rights.<sup>10</sup>

Here is an extremely individualistic view of freedom that even rejects the very kinds of measures established in the United States to preserve individual rights as we think of them.

Although a sound majority of people throughout the world seem to like the idea of doing what they want to do, when they want to do it, significant variations arise when individual desires are aggregated into local cultural infrastructures. Historically, individual rights have simply been afforded less priority in, for example, Asian and Islamic societies. Freedom can instead be considered from group, rather than individual, perspectives.

### 8. Truth

Truth is an inherently difficult concept, tied as it is to subjective experience as well as to sources of knowledge, and therefore liable to a range of interpretation in different localities. The objective “fact” as it is known in contemporary U.S. society is a concept not equally rooted in all societies.

Many regimes have seen truth as an independent variable. For example, there was the Soviet practice of editing history by airbrushing fallen individuals out of photographs (e.g., the discredited prominent revolutionary Bukharin). This sometimes

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<sup>10</sup> Alexander Pushkin, translated by Matthew Maly in his book *Understanding Russia*, independently published in Moscow, 1998.

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took a macabre twist when sloppy censors would leave disembodied hands or other evidences. The Soviet government also strictly controlled science, including research directions and experimental results, particularly, for example, in biology.

In Sufism, considered by some to be a mystical form of Islam, there is a view that finding (ultimate) truth involves discovering that peoples' truth is relative. This point is illustrated in a story about the sage Mulla Nasrudin:

One day Nasrudin was sitting at court. The King was complaining that his subjects were untruthful. "Majesty," said Nasrudin, "there is truth and truth. People must practice real truth before they can use relative truth. They always try the other way around. The result is that they take liberties with their man-made truth, because they know instinctively that it is only an invention."

The King thought that this was too complicated. "A thing must be true or false. I will *make* people tell the truth, and by this practice they will establish the habit of being truthful."

When the city gates were opened the next morning, a gallows had been erected in front of them, presided over by the captain of the royal guard. A herald announced: "Whoever would enter the city must first answer the truth to a question which will be put to him by the captain of the guard."

Nasrudin, who had been waiting outside, stepped forward first. The captain spoke: "Where are you going? Tell the truth—the alternative is death by hanging." "I am going," said Nasrudin, "to be hanged on those gallows." "I don't believe you!" "Very well, then. If I have told a lie, hang me!" "But that would *make* it the truth!" "Exactly," said Nasrudin, "*your* truth."<sup>11</sup>

### 9. Aesthetics and Tastes

Aesthetics and tastes are concerned with subjective perception and reactions to subjects that may include sensory input (color, smell, taste, sound, feel), surroundings, or situations. Many gaffes in intercultural interactions are based on such differences. For example, once when a prominent airline initiated an Asian route, passengers embarking on the maiden flight were unsettled when they received white carnations. This wouldn't

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<sup>11</sup> Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1979), pp. 67-68.



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have been unusual in the U.S., where white might have been perceived as a somewhat lackluster choice, but in Asia the color is associated with death and misfortune.

Societies offer different degrees of cultivation regarding aesthetics. Japanese aesthetics, with such concepts as *sabi*, *wabi*, and *shibui* to express or process complex responses to certain situations and settings, must be at the most nuanced, sophisticated end of the spectrum. But more easily comprehensible examples may be found in tastes for food (e.g., for certain animals or animal parts or even insects; consider the Maasai consumption of cow blood mixed with milk); music (contrast Albanian techno-folk, Tuvan multi-harmonic throat singing, cool jazz, baroque fugues, Indian ragas, and rap); or the preferences evidenced in ornamentation worldwide (how people accent their physical appearance with jewelry or makeup, what clothing they imagine they look good in, as well as artistic ornamentation of furniture, dwellings, and a variety of daily-use possessions).

### 10. Death

A recent on-line article seemed to herald the logical conclusion of trends in popular American attitudes toward death converged with our national ethos of individualism and consumerism.<sup>12</sup> Given a distancing from death that has led, for example, to death more often in clinical settings than at home and memorial services without casket or urn present, Americans are now invited to “put the ‘fun’ back into funeral services.” Art caskets (“Last Hole” for golfers, or “Return to Sender” for jokesters), pop music favorites to set the tone, ashes shot into space or embedded in an underwater eternal reef: death can be viewed as an occasion for celebration, statement, and choice. Witness also the growth in popular support for euthanasia and assisted suicide.

Other nations, in most of which disease and death are a more visible part of life than in the United States, have naturally developed their own unique responses and rituals. In many cultures, not long after death, open caskets are hand-carried to the grave and buried as a communal undertaking. Grief is very openly displayed, not so suppressed as it can be in the United States. Many Asian cultures venerate departed ancestors,

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<sup>12</sup> Jeanie Lerche Davis, “Designer Funerals: the Final Getaway,” WebMD feature on MSN.com, 29 October 2003.

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displaying their likenesses in the home rather like icons. The Mexican festival called the Day of the Dead, with its roots in Aztec times, celebrates the dead, children, and the continuity of life in activities including graveside picnics.<sup>13</sup> A globally notable attitude toward death and the dead is found in the ritual “turning of the bones” of the Malagasy people, a ritual exhumation of recently departed family members’ remains performed at certain intervals after death.

These few examples begin to suggest the diversity of human thoughtworlds. It would be hard enough to approach understanding of such complex and often surprising differences if we did so with open minds. Instead, we carry with us a number of mental filters that complicate the task.

### B. PERCEPTUAL PREDISPOSITIONS

Our ability to imagine how people in other societies think is limited by a number of difficult-to-overcome filters. Here we consider predispositions associated with human nature, U.S. domestic culture, and American views of the world.

#### 1. Human Nature

Five senses; an incurably abstract intellect; a haphazardly selective memory; a set of preconceptions and assumptions so numerous that I can never examine more than a minority of them—never become even conscious of them all. How much of total reality can such an apparatus let through?

- C. S. Lewis<sup>14</sup>

Lewis clearly identifies limits of the human organism as it considers itself and others. Compounding our incomplete awareness of people in other societies is the way we process that which we do perceive. At a fundamental level, as embodied beings we separate ourselves (as individuals or in identification with some group) from others; and we operate differently on either side of that divide. This may be manifested by ignoring others’ existence, vilifying them, or in the extreme by actually relegating them to sub-

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<sup>13</sup> Salvador, R.V., “What Do Mexicans Celebrate on the Day of the Dead?” in *Death and Bereavement in the Americas: Death, Value, and Meaning Series*, Vol. II, Morgan, J.D. and P. Laugani (eds.) (Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing Company, 2003), pp. 75-76. Available online at [www.public.iastate.edu/~rjsalvad/scmfaq/muertos.html](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~rjsalvad/scmfaq/muertos.html).

<sup>14</sup> C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), p. 74.

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human status. This last has aided the pogroms and programs of genocide that fill history books.

Psychological studies on personality, performed on American subjects, have suggested consistent differences between the way individuals interpret their own behavior and the way they interpret that of others. For example, in some studies people tended to explain their own behavior with reference to external, situational factors (i.e., “circumstances made me do that”) while explaining others’ behaviors in terms of internal traits (i.e., “they have an evil nature”). A belief in one’s own uniqueness—perhaps particularly strong in the United States on both individual and national levels—was found to lead to marginalization of situational and other factors, and to constitute a limiting factor both in self-understanding and in understanding others.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Influences of U.S. Domestic Culture

The experience of the local domestic environment also strongly influences our understanding of foreign thinking, and even our basic orientation to learning beyond a superficial level how any other person thinks. In mainstream U.S. society today,<sup>16</sup> and perhaps particularly among elite groups such as the East Coast community dominant in national security affairs, better-than-superficial interactions with others—especially those very different from us—are becoming rarer due to affluence, the pace of life, and the way “free” time is deployed.

The affluence of U.S. society means that people can often afford what they want to have and what they want to do. More importantly, it means that they typically have to rely on each other less, avoiding dependent relationships but diminishing the sense of community. Schedules are saturated, especially in metropolitan areas such as the one centered on Washington, D.C., and often reflect a lot of transit time between activities. Across the range of ages, the combination of contemporary entertainment (e.g.,

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<sup>15</sup> Chris Kleinke, *Self-Perception: The Psychology of Personal Awareness* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1978). See especially Chapter 9: “Self-Perception and the Perception of Others,” pp. 191-220.

<sup>16</sup> Some stimulating perspectives on contemporary U.S. culture are available in Peter Menzel, *Material World* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995); John DeGraaf, David Wann, Thomas H. Naylor, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (San Francisco: Berret-Koehler Publishers, 2001); Lloyd Kahn and Bob Easton (eds.), *Shelter* (Bolin, CA: Shelter Publications, 1973); Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986).

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television—even in public waiting rooms, DVDs, the Walkman, the Gameboy) and communications (cell phones, wireless portable computing with internet access) reinforces spending less time with other people, claims of the virtues of electronically enabled communities of interest notwithstanding.

All of this encourages shallower interactions between people even in the same ethnic group (since we're addressing the national security affairs community, this would be primarily people of western European descent), without even factoring in the physical and economic separations that further impede close interactions among Americans from different ethnic backgrounds.<sup>17</sup> Beyond the level of such works of popular psychology as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, the U.S. cultural climate doesn't appear particularly supportive either of understanding how other people think, or even of much interest in the question.

### 3. Americans View the World

Beyond inherent human tendencies and aspects of our domestic culture that affect our approach to foreign thoughtworlds, as Americans we tend to carry a number of assumptions about the international situation, our place in it, and how others out there think.

Many Americans hold the belief that people in many other societies think like we do and value what we value, that they like Americans and want to be like us. (This sort of mirror-imaging became less prominent after 9-11 but is still applied, perhaps especially to non-Arab peoples.) Extensions of this theme include the idea that the Western scientific way of knowing/understanding reality is universally shared; that technology is viewed and employed the same way everywhere; and that a completely secular model of interstate relations adequately accommodates reality.<sup>18</sup>

Many specific concepts and values are often assumed to be commonly interpreted and used worldwide. Language is seen as a neutral tool: U.S. concepts of peace, justice, freedom, rights, honor, and war are thought to be shared, or at least understood,

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<sup>17</sup> Americans' general preference to be with others similar to themselves is the subject of David Brooks' article "People Like Us" in *Atlantic Monthly*, September 2003, pp. 29-32.

<sup>18</sup> For an informative exploration of religion in international affairs, see Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (eds.), *Religion—The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

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everywhere. Human life is taken to be valued the same way in all societies, and U.S. notions of unlimited progress and modernity are thought to be understood and desired globally.

Finally, there are common views of the possibilities and consequences of the spread of U.S. political, economic, and legal forms abroad. It is frequently assumed that all other societies have a cultural infrastructure suited to the ready adaptation of a U.S.-style democracy, free market economy, and legal system, and that we simply have to catalyze the transformation. Some believe that the reason some countries haven't yet implemented a free market democracy is that the leaders just haven't received enough exposure to American processes, as if a broader educational outreach would bring success. Some hold the view that if all countries were free market democracies, then international war would become rare because of the restraining effect of economic ties and the natural aversion of citizens in a democracy to war.<sup>19</sup> And the cultural purpose and implementation of law is assumed to be the same worldwide.

These myths about the international community hinder understanding of actual foreign thoughtworlds, the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>19</sup> A New Yorker cartoon a number of years ago spoke to this presumption. A zebra being chased by a tiger thinks, "So much for my 'brotherhood-of-striped-animals' idea."

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### III. OPPORTUNITIES FOR INSIGHT

How can we approach the study of human thoughtworlds in a way that, despite the immensity of the challenge posed by the extensive and complex differences among them, as well as our own embedded predispositions, will lead to the identification of insights useful to national security decision makers?

This chapter addresses the question of methodology and identifies a preferred analytic approach. A number of sources useful for developing insights into foreign thought are identified. The concluding section summarizes five case studies that illustrate the kinds of insights available from diverse sources, some largely untapped for national security purposes.

#### A. APPREHENDING FOREIGN THOUGHTWORLDS: ANALYTIC APPROACHES

As we look for models of insight into foreign cultures and thought, a number of outstanding, often groundbreaking, observers and interpreters of foreign cultures come to mind: Alexis de Toqueville (*Democracy in America*<sup>1</sup>), Ruth Benedict (*The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*,<sup>2</sup> *Patterns of Culture*<sup>3</sup>), Gunnar Myrdal (*Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations*<sup>4</sup>), Hajime Nakamura (*Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*<sup>5</sup>), and Hedrick Smith (*The Russians*<sup>6</sup>), to name only a few.

These examples, while suggestive of the general level of understanding we might aspire to, include a mix of eclectic, highly personal approaches and methodologies that would be difficult to replicate. Since our intent is to support the government

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: Mentor Books, 1957).

<sup>4</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations* (New York: Pantheon, 1968).

<sup>5</sup> Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981).

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organizations involved in national security decision making, here we seek to articulate an approach that can be institutionalized. The basic analytic challenge is therefore to identify a methodology that can be employed in response to a particular question of interest from national security decision makers, providing useful insights to inform—along with political, economic, and other inputs—strategy, policy, planning, and actions.

### 1. Survey of Selected Approaches

As an introduction to a discussion of analytic possibilities, three common elementary approaches to thinking about foreign thoughtworlds may be noted. The first is simply to ignore them, a tacit denial of their existence or relevance. Mirror imaging, the assumption that “they’re pretty much like us,” is barely more sophisticated or useful. Real differences begin at least to be acknowledged at the level of crude characterizations, generalizations, or stereotypes.

A number of more serious and thoughtful approaches have been proposed and developed. Many researchers in contexts ranging from international studies to business management have worked to develop sets of dimensions or parameters that capture essential features of differences between people in distinct societies. Geert Hofstede, of Tilburg University in the Netherlands, has proposed five independent dimensions of national cultural differences<sup>7</sup>:

- Power distance, an indicator of inequality in a society from the perspective of the less powerful
- Individualism (versus collectivism), an indicator of individual integration into groups
- Masculinity (versus femininity), an indicator of relative assertiveness and competitiveness
- Uncertainty avoidance, an indicator of tolerance for ambiguity in life
- Long-term orientation (versus short-term), an indicator of temporal outlook that impacts core values.

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<sup>7</sup> See Geert Hofstede’s web page at <http://spitswww.uvt.nl/web/iric/hofstede>. Hofstede’s major work, *Culture's Consequences*, was first published in 1980 and released in rewritten form in 2001 (*Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*, 2nd Edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001).



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Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, business management consultants, examined cultural differences from the perspective of three categories: relations between people, attitudes toward time, and attitudes toward the surrounding environment. Relations between people are viewed in terms of five orientations<sup>8</sup>:

- Universalism versus particularism: Are behaviors more responsive to unique circumstances or to rules and codes?
- Individualism versus communitarianism: Are individuals tightly integrated into groups? Is priority placed on individuals or the group?
- Neutral versus emotional: Are interactions emotional or more reserved?
- Specific versus diffuse: Is an interaction limited to the requirements of a specific function (e.g., a business deal), or does it extend to a broader personal contact?
- Achievement versus ascription: Is a person judged by specific recent accomplishments or by attributed status?

The late Farid Elashmawi, working with Phillip Harris in the business context, compared cultures by examining how representatives prioritize 20 values: group harmony, competition, seniority, cooperation, privacy, openness, equality, formality, risk-taking, reputation, freedom, family security, relationship, self-reliance, time, group consensus, authority, material possession, spiritual enlightenment, and group achievement.<sup>9</sup>

From more of a psychological perspective, Florence Kluckhohn approached the differentiation of cultures by identifying a set of questions based on the common human experience whose answers indicated a value orientation. The questions were: “What is the character of innate human nature? The relation of man to nature? The temporal focus of human life? The modality of human activity? The modality of man’s relationship to other men?”<sup>10</sup> The answers of individuals to these questions were used to identify a dominant value orientation that would characterize a given culture. More recently, an effort to apply the popularly familiar Myers-Briggs personality indicators to the

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<sup>8</sup> Fons Trompenaars and Chalres Hampden-Turner, *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1998). The five dimensions of human interactions are based on the work of American sociologist Talcot Parson.

<sup>9</sup> Farid Elashmawi and Phillip Harris, *Multicultural Management* (Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Alex Inkeles, *National Character: A Psycho-Social Perspective* (New Brunswick (US) and London (UK): Transaction Publishers, 1997), p. 35.

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characterization of strategic (national) personalities was performed by Caroline Ziemke, with assessments developed referencing local history and culture.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, Glen Fisher, with the perspective of a career foreign service officer, suggests that quick-turnaround assessments of foreign mindsets might be focused on questions in five areas<sup>12</sup>: situation and context; knowledge and information base; images; cultural and social determinants; and individual personality and group dynamics.

These examples, suggestive of a broad range of systematic approaches, are based on the idea of developing a universally valid set of categories or questions that can be used to investigate and even, in some cases, semi-quantitatively assess differences in people from various cultures, or between entire societies and cultures. Systematic approaches may help promote familiarity with the fact of certain basic differences among peoples, but even an arbitrarily large number of set categories or questions imposes limitations on this kind of inquiry that obstruct insight and, if acted upon in the national security context, may bring undesirable or even disastrous results. While aiming for universal applicability and a relative simplicity that moderates the intellectual and time demands on decision makers, such approaches cannot provide the insight and fidelity generally needed to effectively support national security decisions. The enterprise of understanding how others think should be made “as simple as possible, but not simpler”<sup>13</sup>; it is no less complex than, for example, playing a sport, treating a sick person, repairing a car, tending a garden, or performing on a musical instrument, none of which can be satisfactorily reduced to a system or checklist.<sup>14</sup> A more comprehensive approach is required for our present purpose.

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Caroline Ziemke, Phillippe Loustaunau, and Amy Alrich, *Strategic Personality and the Effectiveness of Nuclear Deterrence*, IDA Document D-2537, November 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Glen Fisher, *Mindsets* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1988), pp. 72-73. Fisher proposed this checklist as an adjunct to deeper study.

<sup>13</sup> After an aphorism of Einstein.

<sup>14</sup> The Hungarian physical chemist and philosopher Michael Polanyi offers in his works helpful insights into the problems associated with the tendency to systemize and also into the nature of knowledge and the process of acquiring wisdom. An overview of Polanyi's life and work may be found in “Tacit Knowing, Truthful Knowing,” a Mars Hill Audio Report (ca. 2001), Mars Hill Audio, Quinque, VA.

## 2. Proposed Analytic Approach

The methodology recommended here is based on the life work of Prof. Adda Bozeman.<sup>15</sup> Rejecting the notion of a systematized approach to understanding cultures and ways of thinking, she advocated and performed comparative, inherently multi-disciplinary study with the objective of identifying differences between one's own culture and way of thinking, and others'. Key to this comparative approach are a solid self-understanding and an effort to understand others *on their own terms*.<sup>16</sup> The comparative emphasis stems from the difficulty of imagining any universal system or set of metrics up to the task, while the call for multidisciplinary research reflects the inadequacy of describing foreign thinking using the political, economic, and military categories of information typically encountered in the U.S. national security studies context.

Implementation of this methodology begins with the statement of a specific issue, the identification of the foreign person, group, or society of interest, and a clear understanding of one's own principles, values, attitudes, and goals relevant to the interaction. The research may be guided by several high-level questions, developed and addressed by people with expertise in many aspects of the subject society and, usually, with advanced language skills. Comparison with the United States is the sustained theme of the inquiry. While no set of questions can be appropriate to every issue, the conceptual level and tone of such an inquiry are suggested by Bozeman.<sup>17</sup> While arguing the need for a comparative approach, in this case in the context of trying to understand the relation between covert action and foreign policy as these are carried out in diverse societies, she posed dozens of questions intended to elicit information about a nation's foreign affairs and the domestic features that influence them. A few examples illustrate the difference between this approach and one based on a checklist:

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<sup>15</sup> Adda B. Bozeman's works include *Strategic Intelligence and Statecraft* (Washington: Brassey's, 1992); *Politics and Culture in International History* (Second Edition, New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994); *Future of Law in a Multicultural World* (Cambridge: Princeton University Press, 1971); and the article "Time Warp in American Politics," *Society*, July/August 1994, pp. 23-31.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Adda B. Bozeman, *Strategic Intelligence and Statecraft*, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-182 and pp. 87-92. In the language of cultural anthropology, this is an emic, versus etic, emphasis; in Kevin Avruch's book *Culture and Conflict Resolution* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998), see Part III: "Frames for Culture and Conflict Resolution," pp. 57-72.

<sup>17</sup> A. Bozeman, from the essay "Covert Action and Foreign Policy in World Politics," in *Strategic Intelligence and Statecraft*, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

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- Which fundamental beliefs, ideas, and values seem to sustain the society in time?
- Which purposes and meanings are assigned to life?
- What are the sources of the basic beliefs, norms, and commitments? Religion? Ethnic or national customs? Ideology? Pragmatism? Economic acquisitiveness?
- How free and self-directed is the individual?
- Which personality types are trusted and expected?
- Do members of special groups communicate through the use of special politically or socially significant metaphors and symbols?
- Which precepts make up the moral order of a society?
- What do men regard as “law”?
- Which political units or organisms should be recognized for purposes of foreign policy and intelligence assessments?
- What is the prevalent worldview?
- How are relations with other independent societies conceptualized?
- Is war accepted as a norm or way of life, and if so, what do people fight for?
- How do people think about peace?

Note that these questions are intended to set the tone for research, not to limit or define it.

To apply a comparative methodology to the national security decisions of interest here, one might begin by recalling from Chapter I the three types of activities proposed as typical of non-compulsive implementations of national power: interpreting foreign intentions, developing messages for foreign audiences, and crafting strategies to advance U.S. objectives. For these enterprises one can readily see the importance of understanding, for starters, fundamental motivations and aspirations of the society at large, and of its elites and leaders; communication patterns, symbols, and popular modes of information transfer; and the dynamics of influence and change in the society, including identification of external as well as internal drivers. The process of developing accurate and useful insights will naturally lead in quite different directions as it is implemented in the context of the numerous diverse societies important to the conduct of U.S. national security affairs.

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This intellectually challenging work requires considerable and diverse resources, and time. The emphasis on people as resources for carrying out the research prompts a comment about a dominant theme in the contemporary American analytic community: the use of computer-based modeling and simulation, even to simulate minds and predict human actions. As an example, during the development of a computer model intended for defense applications, consideration was given to simulating the actions of enemy commanders by ascribing a four-factor Myers-Briggs personality assessment. There are, of course, many applications for which modeling and simulation are well-suited; in the context of developing insights into foreign thoughtworlds, given the state of present U.S. institutional practices in this regard, they could not be further from helpful. Here a metaphoric reflection on Austrian mathematician Kurt Gödel's theorem may be useful. In its original context, it basically says that "all consistent axiomatic formulations of number theory include undecidable propositions"<sup>18</sup>; considered in the present context, it suggests that the project of trying to simulate peoples' thinking—even more so people from foreign cultures—using a computer model has inherent, fatal limitations. Douglas Hofstadter comments:

"The other metaphorical analogue to Gödel's theorem which I find provocative suggests that ultimately, we cannot understand our own mind/brains...[T]he age-old goal of knowing yourself in some profound way—let us call it "understanding your own psychic structure"—has a ring of plausibility to it. [But] just as we cannot see our faces with our own eyes, is it not inconceivable to expect that we cannot mirror our complete mental structures in the symbols which carry them out? All the limitative theorems of mathematics and the theory of computation suggest that once the ability to represent your own structure has reached a certain critical point, that is the kiss of death: it guarantees that you can never represent yourself totally."<sup>19</sup>

We should be careful not to convince ourselves that we can understand others well enough to predict what they will do, or that we can create a computer model that does. On the other hand, through careful programs of research emphasizing the

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<sup>18</sup> Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, 1979, Basic Books, New York, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas Hofstadter, *op.cit.*, p. 697.

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application of *human* resources, we can surely learn to understand present thinking of other people—and respond to it—much better than we do.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, a word about attitude in approaching other peoples' thoughtworlds: the general desire for "objective" insights notwithstanding, a certain degree of engagement with one's subject is essential. Author and farmer Wendell Berry, discussing the limitations of scientific reductionism, writes:

The uniqueness of an individual creature is inherent, not in its physical or behavioral anomalies, but in its *life*. Its life is not its "life history," the typical cycle of members of its species from conception to reproduction to death. Its life is all that happens to it in its place. Its wholeness is inherent in its life, not in its physiology or biology. This wholeness of creatures and places together is never going to be apparent to an intelligence coldly determined to be empirical or objective. It shows itself to affection and familiarity.<sup>21</sup>

Those considering foreign thoughtworlds cannot always be expected to have affection for all of them, the thoughtworlds of *al Qaeda* members being an obvious example. The point is that an attempt at cold objectivity will not be as fruitful as one that strives for familiarity and that can warm enough to its subject to identify at least some points of appreciation.

### B. SOURCES OF INSIGHT

U.S. society turns out to be rich with sources of insight, and in most cases with ready access, into most societies and cultures in the world, including those dozens of greatest current importance to U.S. national security. We may consider three major types of sources: indigenous, established areas of study, and practitioners.

Indigenous sources include native people or émigrés, and print and broadcast media (official, popular, academic) produced in the society of interest or in émigré communities.

Established areas of study include established academic disciplines as well as the subjects of less formal *ad hoc* communities of interest, professional organizations,

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<sup>20</sup> Distinctions between human intelligence and the potential of the computer are further discussed in Hubert L. Dreyfus, Stuart E. Dreyfus, *Mind Over Machine* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> Wendell Berry, *Life is a Miracle* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000), p. 40.

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enthusiasts, friendship societies, grassroots movements, and the like, many of which produce publications. Areas relevant to a given issue may include:

- History (first and foremost)
- Cultural and area studies (“high” culture, popular culture; global, regional, national, and local areas)
- Anthropology (cultural, developmental)
- Sociology
- Psychology (especially cultural and cross-cultural)
- International relations
- Law
- Political science
- Military and intelligence studies
- Conflict resolution and peace studies
- Economics
- International development (classical, sustainable)
- Globalization
- Environmental and natural resource studies (energy, water, agriculture)
- Philosophy
- The modern/post-modern discourse
- Religion
- Ethics
- Literature
- Literary criticism
- Language and linguistics
- Semiotics
- Aesthetics
- Sports, recreation, entertainment
- Science and technology
- Humor
- Stories, legends, myths
- Art
- Architecture and design
- Business (including international marketing, multicultural management)
- Communication and media studies.

Finally, practitioners here refer to people with experience in foreign contexts, for example in diplomacy, international development, health, intelligence, environmental issues, human rights, conflict resolution, business, science and technology, sports, entertainment, the arts, and religion. Although not always obviously relevant to U.S. national security affairs, such practitioners may offer valuable insights into foreign thoughtworlds, and their experience may also provide pragmatic advice for understanding, communicating with, and strategizing for interactions with people in other societies.

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Concerning the organization of information and insights as they are generated: it is possible to generate a catalog of sources, data, stories, impressions, and so on, using a topical organization scheme perhaps drawing on the areas of study listed above. Alternatives may be more effective, especially given the organic, interwoven nature of human societies. Remaining portions of the nearly 1,000-year record of diplomatic affairs of the Venetian republic may offer helpful organizational examples.<sup>22</sup> As another more contemporary example, a book from the field of architecture, *A Pattern Language*,<sup>23</sup> details a creative way to discuss and plan architectural projects that might be extended to the present purpose. The organization scheme is based on the physical scale of a series of topics, ranging from regions and towns, to neighborhoods, clusters of buildings, buildings, rooms, and finally to construction details. The topics themselves are organically related to one another and are taken to be a living set, open to change by those employing them. The organizational taxonomy is inherently suited to the society of interest, in the case of *A Pattern Language*, reflecting Western life. One can imagine a similar approach for organizing and structuring information about foreign thoughtworlds into a form that maintains important local cultural linkages, but is useable by Americans seeking focused insights for practical applications.

### C. INSIGHTS FROM DIVERSE PRACTICES: FIVE CASE STUDIES

The experience of practitioners engaged in diverse enterprises stands as a rich—and often untapped by those outside the particular field—source of insight into how other people think. In addition to direct insight into interpreting and understanding foreign minds, these practices also often provide details concerning successful (and, equally valuable, unsuccessful) communication methods and of strategies for influencing views or promoting some kind of action or effect. They also give insight into the process of preparation for successful foreign interactions.

As part of the present study, five case studies out of many other worthy possibilities were explored and are summarized below. Even from these few examples, some broad themes applicable to national security objectives are evident. First, in each case, the successful practitioner understands others well enough to engage them on their

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<sup>22</sup> Bozeman, *Politics and Culture in International History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 464-477.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein, *A Pattern Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).



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own terms, without losing a firm grounding in the practitioner's own core values, intention, and goals. Second, human contact, that is the development of some kind of relationship, is key to the search for ways to portray one's own goals in a way that resonates with others' energies and enthusiasms. Finally, there is frequently a paradoxical element of the practitioner's approach: by approaching the other in an unexpected way, stereotypes can be broken and opportunities for new modes of interaction created.

### 1. The Soldier Diplomats

The regular Army trains soldiers to compel adversaries, usually through the use of deadly force, to accede to U.S. wishes. A typical soldier's orientation to another country may consist of a briefing on the way to the battlefield: they may learn fast once on the ground, but generally lack language and cultural training that are helpful in peacetime actions and perhaps even more so in stressing conditions such as immediately after a war.

Army Special Operations Forces, together with special forces of the other Services, seem a contradiction. Our nation's most elite, highly trained warriors, who "achieve operational and tactical superiority through surprise, speed, and violence of action"<sup>24</sup> and are often the first responders in international crises, turn out also to be our military's pre-eminent diplomats. Special operations forces are in demand to serve as liaisons with foreign militaries, building military and political contacts, and to influence situations on the ground in war and peace on the strength of the relationships they build with locals. Beyond employing compelling force, they are called to train foreign military forces, perform civil affairs functions, and conduct psychological operations.

That the skill sets of a superb warrior are consistent with those of an effective diplomat reflects the basic SOF emphasis on people. As the first of four "SOF Truths," or principles, puts it: Humans are more important than hardware. SOF credibility and effectiveness is not based on intellectual posturing, but on a human connection arising from physical presence and the evidence of integrity underlying capability.

This emphasis on people is also reflected in the SOF understanding of how to be effective abroad in the long term. In a series of interviews conducted for this research at

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<sup>24</sup> USSOCOM Special Operations Forces Posture Statement 2003, p. 65.

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the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, NC,<sup>25</sup> one soldier asserted that the key to success in a foreign environment is not sticking a flag in the ground and saying “We’re here!” but instead cultivating relationships that over time will forward the interests of the United States in a more permanent way. Another soldier pointed out that this kind of personal engagement has to be done by people, not by robots or satellites.

How are SOF skills developed? The groundwork is laid with a rigorous training sequence that includes military, political, cultural, and language skills. As intensive as this formal training is, SOF skills really become mature on the job in deployments, through immersion and real experience in living and working in foreign cultures.

The final result of such training and experience are men who, in addition to their warfighting capabilities, can help advance U.S. national security objectives by acting during their deployments in a way that contradicts many foreign stereotypes of Americans, who are sometimes seen abroad as spoiled and weak, primarily driven by lust for money and a desire to dominate the rest of the world, possessed of short attention spans that preclude commitment, and, in any case, uncaring about the ways and especially the people of other cultures.

## **2. Taking Environmentalism to Corporate America**

The cultural gulf between the United States and some other nations may seem monumental, but here are two domestic communities whose members have seemed irreparably hostile: the environmental movement and businesses. Environmentalists have characteristically sought to impose rules and regulations on corporations to prevent further despoiling of the natural environment from, as they see it, business run rampant: polluted air and water, farmland destroyed by chemical agriculture practices, deforestation, accelerated extinction of species, and global warming. Businesses, for their part, have resisted mightily such measures, trashing environmentalists’ naïve idealism and claiming that the economy couldn’t survive the changes needed to produce, for example, cleaner cars, reduced pollution from industrial processes, sustainable forestry or agriculture, or far less solid waste.

For more than 20 years, Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), located in Snowmass, Colorado, has bridged this gap by recasting the environmentalist-business debate into a

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<sup>25</sup> 28 February-1 March 2001.

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discussion of efficiency that can seem reasonable to both sides.<sup>26</sup> As developed by Amory and Hunter Lovins, RMI's approach was informed by Taoist thought, the principles of Jeffersonian democracy, and a belief in the benefits of whole systems thinking. The key importance of this last emphasis is well represented in the following true story, which has served as a kind of founding parable for RMI:

In the early 1950s, the Dayak people in Borneo suffered from malaria. The World Health Organization had a solution: they sprayed large amounts of DDT to kill the mosquitoes that carried the malaria. The mosquitoes died, the malaria declined; so far, so good. But there were side-effects. Among the first was that the roofs of the peoples' houses began to fall down on their heads. It seemed that the DDT was killing a parasitic wasp that had previously controlled thatch-eating caterpillars. Worse, the DDT-poisoned insects were eaten by geckoes, which were eaten by cats. The cats died, the rats flourished, and people were threatened by outbreaks of sylvatic plague and typhus. To cope with these problems, which it had itself created, the World Health Organization was obliged *to parachute 14,000 live cats into Borneo.*<sup>27</sup>

RMI has sought to demonstrate from a system-level perspective that the efficient use of natural resources not only achieves many goals of the environmental movement, but also is great for businesses' bottom line: free market economics is seen not as something to be overcome, but as something to be leveraged. Instead of strident opposition, sabotage, or vilifying the business community, RMI staff have successfully argued the economic benefits of the efficient use of energy and natural resources using approaches, language, and presentation forms tailored to decision makers, appealing to their intelligence, good intentions, and business sense. By taking its arguments around the world to corporate boards, heads of state, members of city councils, and students, RMI has influenced the more efficient use of energy, water, and farmland; the production of fuel-efficient cars, especially the hybrid electric cars that have now entered the U.S. market; and the construction of energy-efficient buildings in the United States and abroad.

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<sup>26</sup> See, for further examples, the Rocky Mountain Institute website at [www.rmi.org](http://www.rmi.org). The author worked at RMI for a time in the early 1990s.

<sup>27</sup> L. Hunter Lovins and Amory Lovins, "How Not to Parachute More Cats" (Snowmass, CO: Rocky Mountain Institute), p. 3.

### 3. Harmony Through Martial Conflict

Martial arts, as they have developed around the world, tend to focus on subjecting an opponent to compelling, usually damaging force. The Japanese martial art aikido (“eye-key-doh”) operates under a different paradigm: at its heart is creating harmony between the attacker and the attacked. Developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, aikido emphasizes calm, centered relaxation and a non-combative attitude toward the attacker (whose aggression is taken as evidence of fundamental imbalance). Leading the attacker’s mind is an essential element of technique. When an attack comes, the aikido response is to blend with its direction and energy, redirect the energy to take the attacker’s balance, and disarm, restrain, and/or throw the attacker—all the while taking care for his or her safety. In many situations, the attacker can’t be distinguished from the defender until someone falls or goes flying. Aikido doesn’t work well with all attacks; a gun at 10 feet would be difficult. But it is very successful with a range of basic armed and empty-handed attacks and also promotes, among its practitioners, a mental outlook helpful in responding to conflict in everyday life.

As an example, imagine that an assailant approaches you and attacks with a straight punch to your stomach. In many traditional martial arts, you might block or deflect the punch, perhaps by sweeping your forearm, then step forward to counterattack with a punch or a kick. One aikido approach to the same attack would be to turn slightly to the side just before the punch connects, even allowing it to graze its intended target. If you have turned to the outside of the attacker, you could now add a bit of energy to the punch, not only letting it continue on its path, but actually encouraging it. This small addition of unexpected energy, however, can be enough to disrupt the attacker’s balance, who until this point has felt the attack was progressing as anticipated. Once in control of the attacker’s balance, you can throw or pin the attacker in a surprising number of ways, many of which needn’t necessarily cause injury. The resolution of the attack is hopeful: while there are many opportunities in the application of techniques to injure, blind, or kill, there is also hope that an attacker who is repeatedly met in this way may change his mind.

Aikido training includes stretching, meditation, and centering exercises, and partner or group practice of techniques, including work with weapons. The ability to respond fluidly to an attacker is promoted not by thinking through the variety of possible attacks and how specifically to move in response to any of them, but by training the body

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to respond instinctively. Awareness of the attacker's intention and energy is heightened by relaxation and a clear mind, unfettered by worry about the attack or pre-occupation with self.

Aikido applies metaphorically to the national security context at hand: it suggests the benefits of exploring how to become so familiar with other peoples' intentions that they can be met and possibly redirected in an efficient and effective way that is supportive of national objectives.

#### 4. Promoting Healthcare in Developing Countries

A frequently encountered approach to providing aid in foreign countries, in healthcare as well as in agriculture and other contexts, is to arrive on the scene with an answer in mind, then try to implement it in some program of education intended to quickly change the way things are done. The work of Lisa Howard-Grabman for the non-governmental organization (NGO) Save the Children exemplifies another approach centered on understanding foreign perspectives and practices.

Howard-Grabman's work is based partly on the Appreciative Inquiry approach,<sup>28</sup> developed in the context of organizational change research by David Cooperrider and associates at Case Western Reserve University, and is also influenced by the ideas of Pablo Freire<sup>29</sup> and Kurt Lewin.<sup>30</sup> Simply put, rather than entering a village and telling the people what, for example, their healthcare problems are and what they need to change to fix them, she instead spends time in the local setting to find out *what already works*. By building on local perceptions, ideas, dynamics, and practices, approaches to helping communities improve the health of their own citizens have been crafted that are demonstrably more effective than trying to apply a one-size-fits-all approach. Save the Children has successfully facilitated improvements in women and children's health care in rural parts of Peru, the Philippines, and in other countries.

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<sup>28</sup> See Sue Annis Hammond, *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, Second Edition (Plano, TX: Thin Book Publishing Company, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> Marxist Brazilian educator and author of works including *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

<sup>30</sup> A prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century European theorist of social psychology who focused, in part, on experiential learning and group dynamics.

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In a book co-authored by Howard-Grabman and Gail Snetro,<sup>31</sup> this approach is detailed and demonstrated with examples from around the world. In Bolivia, community mobilization and the bridging of local class differences were at the center of a successful program in which dozens of poor communities cut newborn mortality by more than half in 3 years; American program managers were cast as facilitators, not educators.<sup>32</sup> In Senegal, examination of how the society worked identified grandmothers as “key decision-makers and very influential in maternal and child health practices”; one NGO leveraged this insight and involved grandmothers in the promotion of health practices.<sup>33</sup> And in Vietnam, workers in the Poverty Alleviation and Nutrition program observed deviances in how some residents in local communities fed their children. This led to the identification of readily available, inexpensive supplements to the normal diet that improved childrens’ health.

Howard-Grabman stresses the importance of community participation in the definition of a successful effort’s goals, and of transparency of the outsiders’ intentions. She writes, “We clearly state from the beginning the goal of any community mobilization effort and we invite participation around that goal. There are important elements of transparency and partnership based on respect for local ownership of the program and the process. Programs that have tried to co-opt local participation by presenting what the outsiders perceive to be a locally favored goal while secretly (or sometimes overtly) manipulating community members toward other unstated and not agreed upon goals often lead to conflict, lack of sustainability of the outcomes desired by the outsiders and ultimately distrust of the outsiders’ motives and methods.”<sup>34</sup>

### 5. Evangelism in Post-Christian New York City

The historical record of religious evangelism, naturally focusing on the primary evangelical religions, Christianity and Islam, is an important source for insights into foreign cultures, approaches to influencing foreign minds, and the pitfalls of cross-

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<sup>31</sup> Lisa Howard-Grabman and Gail Snetro, *How to Mobilize Communities for Health and Social Change*, a Health Communication Partnership Field Guide published by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Communication Programs, Baltimore, Maryland, 2003 (also available online at [www.hcpartnership.com](http://www.hcpartnership.com)).

<sup>32</sup> Howard-Grabman and Snetro, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Howard-Grabman and Snetro, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>34</sup> Lisa Howard Grabman, personal communication, November 2003.

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cultural encounters. For the example of Christian evangelism, there is a long history of portraying the gospel message in local terms, or “contextualizing” it: Matteo Ricci in 17<sup>th</sup> century China<sup>35</sup> or Bishop Lesslie Newbigin in 20<sup>th</sup> century India and Britain<sup>36</sup> come to mind. At present, the Christian message and efforts to spread it are seen in many U.S. urban settings as out of cultural context, irrelevant in a society that emphasizes the free individual pursuit of happiness and the legitimacy of almost any kind of worldview, and often as something to be avoided.

Dr. Timothy Keller, a Presbyterian minister, approached establishing a church in Manhattan with an unusual set of premises.<sup>37</sup> His approach stemmed from the realization that American culture is no longer Christian; that is, people—especially young people—can no longer be assumed to carry a common set of core values inspired by the Christian Bible. In addition to believers in a host of denominations and religious systems, there are in the United States large populations both of secular modern people who hold a basically materialist scientific worldview, and also of relativistic post-modern people who believe that there are no privileged absolutes. In short, Keller saw the need in New York City not for an evangelical church preaching the Christian gospel to a basically Christian society, but for a “missional” church that approaches Manhattanites the same basic way one would approach people in any non-Christian community in the world, i.e., beginning with a process of familiarization with local culture, and leading to a contextual portrayal of the gospel message that assumes no prior knowledge of its concepts, meaning, or consequences.

Emphasizing accessible communication patterns, Keller employs local vernacular. He avoids religious jargon and stylized forms of speech and prayer, and explains Biblical terms perhaps unfamiliar to his listeners. He prefers a joyful irony based on humility over sentimental “inspirational” talk. His sermons are peppered with references to the New York Times and other local media, the latest in the Manhattan arts and theater

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<sup>35</sup> See Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking Press, 1994).

<sup>36</sup> Newbigin’s work is summarized in George R. Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin’s Theology of Cultural Plurality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> This section draws on Dr. Keller’s paper “The Missional Church,” posted online at [www.Redeemer.com](http://www.Redeemer.com), and his article “Preaching to the Secular Mind,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Fall 1995.

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scene, and to works of history, philosophy, and literature. Musical styles include traditional hymns as well as newer music in more modern pop and jazz styles.

Keller also stresses the effectiveness of entering and retelling the local culture's stories with the gospel. As opposed to exhortation and invoking guilt in an attempt to get people to "do what they know they should," he calls for deep familiarity with local culture, its "hopes, dreams, epic narratives, fears." For example, in contemporary urban areas such as Manhattan, many people resonate with themes of freedom, self-creation, authenticity, and justice rather than the theme—more effective in an earlier America—of being a good person. Sermons are oriented to where people are in their culture and place and age, rather than assuming that a single rendition of the gospel is suited to all places and times.

Finally, Keller seeks to create a Christian community that is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. The counter-cultural aspect speaks to the real divergence of Christian community as portrayed in the Bible from contemporary U.S. society in such areas as the role and use of sex, money, and power. A counter-intuitive quality based on a demonstrably sincere enactment of Biblical principles can confound the preconceptions of those investigating the church, who may be jaded from experience with hypocritical "church people." He wants his church to be "more deeply and practically committed to deeds of compassion and social justice than traditional liberal churches, and more deeply and fundamentally committed to evangelism and conversion than traditional fundamentalist churches."

Following this approach, the church Keller pastors has become very successful in reaching Manhattanites and is a recognized model for churches, particularly in urban settings, around the country. His approach to contextualizing his message for the people he wants to serve is a model with broad implications for national security affairs.



## IV. OPERATIONALIZING INSIGHT INTO FOREIGN THOUGHTWORLDS

We now turn to the challenge of making insights into foreign thoughtworlds routinely available to national security decision makers and making their consideration a normal part of strategy and policy development, planning, and actions. This process will require considerable leadership commitment—as well as creative management approaches—to be focused on a few key priorities and should be propelled by advocacy based on a clear picture of how such insights can benefit U.S. national security. We first turn to priority actions.

### A. PRIORITY ACTIONS

In order for serious consideration of foreign thoughtworlds to become prominent in the culture of U.S. national security affairs, the highest priority of attention and resources are required to raise decision makers' awareness, to establish a dedicated institutional resource to provide insights when needed, and to integrate such consideration into existing institutional processes.

#### 1. Raise Decision Maker Awareness

The first priority is to raise decision-maker awareness of the extent of differences in thoughtworlds and their effect on national security affairs and also of the possibilities of requesting and leveraging insights into them. In his work on the resolution of conflicts fueled by ethnic (and other) differences, Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf emphasized “fostering the kind of social agents” who can enable a given objective.<sup>1</sup> This is a broader, likely more effective approach than simply focusing on a curriculum. So rather than immediately proceeding to the usual “toolkit” of bureaucratic education (readings, Powerpoint presentations, seminar series, retreats, continuing education subsidies—

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<sup>1</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), pp. 20-22.

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useful as these may be), we may first benefit from thinking about the characteristics of people who are successful in apprehending and working with foreign thoughtworlds, that is, a description of the kind of awareness we seek to promote. Especially in combination with an appreciation of what makes individual decision makers “tick,” a characterization of the kind of people who can appreciate and employ insights into foreign thinking may inform more effective approaches to raising awareness.

Initial development of such a characterization might be based on work done by the Canadian Foreign Service Institute’s Center for Intercultural Learning. The Center has published a book, *A Profile of the Interculturally Effective Person*,<sup>2</sup> which identifies 9 major and 30 core competencies that were developed to help evaluate training effectiveness for international development advisors. Many of the competencies suggest desirable skills for decision makers concerned with international issues. Example competencies include:

- Self-knowledge: Knowledge of one’s own background, motivations, strengths, and weaknesses.
- An understanding of the concept of culture: An understanding of the concept of culture and the pervasive influence it will have on their life and work....
- Knowledge of [the specific] country and culture: Possess knowledge of the ...country and culture and try constantly to expand that knowledge.
- An attitude of modesty and respect: Demonstrate modesty and respect about their own culture’s answers to problems and a respect for the ways of the local culture, are humble about their knowledge of the local context, and are therefore willing to learn much and consult with locals before coming to conclusions on issues.
- Relationship-building: Possess good relationship-building skills, both social/personal and professional.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, people in decision-making positions will likely possess all of these attributes to some degree. An expanded set of such attributes can be used to inform

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Vulpe, Daniel Kealey, David Protheroe and Doug MacDonald, *A Profile of the Interculturally Effective Person*, Second Edition (Canadian Foreign Service Institute, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Summarized from Vulpe *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-19.

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approaches to raising awareness of the existence and significance of differences in thoughtworlds. Such a characterization might also be considered in personnel selection, or in writing job descriptions that lead to self-selection by the desired type(s) of individual; examples of this latter strategy may be found in recruiting efforts run by the military services, the intelligence agencies, and businesses.

### **2. Establish a Dedicated Institution**

Under White House leadership, a new institute dedicated to the study of foreign thought should be chartered. It should be located in the Washington, D.C., area to facilitate ready access by national security decision makers. The institute should be intellectually independent, stable in order to provide continuity, and independent of the intelligence community. It might best take the form of a Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) but could also be a wholly governmental entity. Funding could be divided among several federal departments and agencies, including the State Department and DoD.

The institute should have a permanent staff that addresses, at a minimum, on the order of 100 different societies and cultures (out of thousands in the world); such a base must be maintained because, as should be clear, this kind of capability cannot be suddenly created or surged. Each should have a core full-time staff of 5-10 people—academics and/or practitioners with diverse backgrounds, strong language skills, in-country experience, and many experienced in national security strategy, policy, planning, and real-world actions. Long-term core staff commitment would be most desirable.

The purpose of the institute would be to serve decision makers as an intellectual resource, not to train workers for the international field (after the imperial British colonial service).<sup>4</sup> It should be able to respond with answers, insights, background briefs, and contributions to specific questions, on time scales suited to decision processes, i.e., not prolonged academic exercises. Two features are key to the institute's responsiveness: being prepared to field a wide range of unexpected questions by maintaining continuous topical inquiries, and augmenting the permanent staff with external contributors who become part of a virtual team. Some of the team's activities might be conducted via a running internet-based chat-room that could be conducted at various levels of security.

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<sup>4</sup> This distinction pointed out by Dr. Alfred Kaufman.

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Such an institute could also stimulate interest and training in foreign languages, a monumental U.S. deficiency that obstructs development of a strong national capability to understand foreign thought. At first perhaps among neighboring high schools, the institute might be a good channel for scholarships and other incentives to encourage young people to be more attentive to foreign languages, and more adventuresome in their choice of languages. Assistance in identifying teachers of rarer languages would be needed. This effort might also leverage connections with the languages of young peoples' ethnic backgrounds (especially rich in the Washington D.C. and other metro areas), although there are always surprising outliers, e.g., someone of western European descent independently interested in, say, Uighur or Amharic.

### **3. Integrate into National Security Processes**

Consideration of foreign thought must also be formally integrated into the existing institutional processes associated with national security affairs, including within the National Security Council; the relevant Congressional committees; and the State, Defense, and Commerce Departments. Designated individuals should cover foreign thought in the development and reviews of national security strategy, policy, plans, and action. In some cases, formal requirements may help ensure that consideration of such input is made a routine part of the decision-making process.

## **B. THE BASIS FOR ADVOCACY**

Decision makers should be made aware of the pragmatic benefits of the priorities articulated above. They should understand the valuable perspective to be added to their deliberations the next time the United States responds to a pop-up crisis in an unfamiliar country; undertakes to convince allied leaders to band with us in a decision potentially unpopular with their constituencies; seeks to establish post-conflict stability, foster national reconciliation, or rebuild or reinvigorate local institutions in another country; wants a nation's population to understand our true respect for the integrity of their culture or religion; is prompted to apologize for mistakes made by our military or government; would like to be seen as the global champion of freedom or a world leader in economic, environmental, or legal arenas; needs to understand the pluses and minuses of backing a given local faction; or seeks to correct foreign audience misconceptions about American motives and intents.

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The basis of advocacy for better understanding foreign thoughtworlds may be summarized as follows:

1. The relative importance to U.S. national security of understanding how people in diverse foreign societies think has increased in recent years. This reflects the post-Cold War necessity of U.S. interactions with a much larger number of distinct—and more assertive—cultures and nations, and, more importantly, the evident limitations of approaching national security objectives with a strategy favoring the use of compelling power in political, economic, or military forms.
2. At the same time, our national capability to provide understanding of foreign thoughtworlds in a form useful to decision makers has failed to be developed to meet this need, due primarily to the fact that attention to how others think cannot be said to have been a consistently prominent interest of American decision makers or a strength of the U.S. population at large.
3. No one-size-fits-all system of understanding, no database of critical information, and no single area of academic expertise can provide sufficient knowledge of foreign ways of thinking to inform effective, non-compulsive, national security policies, strategies, plans, and actions.
4. The need instead is for sustained, inherently comparative, multidisciplinary efforts whose scope and content reflects the reference frames of specific societies or cultures of interest.
5. Fortunately the United States possesses outstanding, if often untapped, access to sources of knowledge about foreign thoughtworlds; these sources are indigenous to foreign societies as well as distributed throughout the U.S. in a multitude of relevant academic disciplines and non-academic practices.
6. Given the clear advantages to our national interests, the U.S. Government should, therefore, take steps to raise decision-maker awareness, establish a dedicated institution to serve as the focal point for national attention, and integrate consideration of insights into foreign thoughtworlds into the processes of national security affairs.

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