



**Beer, Bacon and Bullets: Culture in Coalition Warfare from Gallipoli to Iraq**

By Gal Luft

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Reviewed by

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Although the threats facing the international community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (including terrorism, cyber attacks, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction) differ from those of other periods in history, what has not changed since antiquity is the building of coalitions by foreign soldiers and statesmen in an effort to promote and maintain security. Equally longstanding have been misunderstandings and disagreements among people of different cultural backgrounds that have threatened coalition cohesiveness and jeopardized military operations.

In this important work, Gal Luft examines five historical case studies to determine the role of culture in the planning and conduct of coalition operations. He also offers introductory and concluding chapters on culture and war from a broader perspective. Fundamental to this effort, the author asks the questions, “Does culture matter?” and “If so, in what ways?” Among the cultural factors he considers are language, religion, customs, gender roles, education, ethnicity, values, and overall philosophy.

He looks at these factors from various perspectives—those of the society at large, the military as a subset of society, and the individual (that is, military commanders)—to determine how culture impacts the ability of foreign militaries to live and work with one another. The individual level of analysis is particularly relevant, since as the case studies demonstrate, commanders can promote or undermine cross-cultural cooperation in a coalition environment. Luft also correctly points out that while generalizations are necessary to discussions of culture, there is an inherent danger in oversimplifying and/or presenting characteristics of one group as superior to another. Further, he acknowledges that the book focuses heavily on the perceptions of Western militaries toward their counterparts, giving less weight to non-Western (Asian and Muslim) perspectives. This is a noticeable drawback of the book, but one that is understandably difficult to mitigate in light of available resources.

Although scholars have long written on aspects of culture and warfare, this book is unique in both the cases selected and the author’s insight derived from having served in a coalition environment. Luft, currently an executive director of the think tank Analysis of Global Security, previously served in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) where he was deployed for almost 5 years in combat assignments in South Lebanon. He worked daily with Arab soldiers from the South Lebanon Army (SLA) and details that history and experience in chapter six. Dr. Luft’s work also differs from that of scholars such as the late Samuel P. Huntington, who argued in *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996) that cultural fault lines serve as a catalyst for conflict. Luft suggests that cooperation across fault lines is just as likely to occur. The author

notes that “intra-civilization” conflict has often invited foreign intervention and cites U.S. involvement in the Gulf War (1990–1991) as one such example (p. xiv). As illustrated by the Gulf War, in cases where foreign intervention is involved, mediating cultural differences becomes even more important to the success of the operation.

The book offers a variety of case studies and perspectives from which to consider culture and coalition warfare. In addition to providing valuable historical studies, the chapters highlight individual cultural challenges faced by the actors involved in the various coalitions. Chapter two describes the relationship between Germans and their Ottoman Turkish counterparts during World War I. The author notes how the two sides communicated in French—ironically, the language of their enemy. He also discusses Germany’s support for Turkish jihad and its unintended consequences.

Chapter three reviews British-Japanese cooperation in the context of their World War I alliance. This chapter focuses on their joint efforts to win the Battle of Tsingtau, a frequently ignored yet important battle for control of a small German colony in China. Their success marked the first defeat of Germany in World War I. Success did not come without obstacles, however, in the coalition relationship. For example, the two sides had different views on casualties and capitulation. That said, previous cross-cultural cooperation between Britain and Japan in part contributed to the successful engagement.

Chapter four examines U.S.-Chinese relations during World War II. The chapter highlights cultural, strategic, and logistical incompatibilities that hampered productive relations, as well as illustrating the consequences of distrust between leadership. For

the Chinese, “saving face” was a deeply entrenched cultural imperative that had significant consequences for the coalition in time of war. Chapter five examines U.S. and Saudi cooperation in the Persian Gulf War. Cultural issues such as religion, gender roles, and tradition complicated coalition relations as well as impacting the rights of U.S. Soldiers temporarily based on Saudi soil.

Finally, chapter six examines the relationship between the IDF and the SLA from 1985 to 2000. This chapter differs from the other cases described in the book in that cooperation extended over more than 15 years, the SLA was comprised of multiple groups—all defined as Arabs, but with differences in religion and ethnicity—and the cooperation was between a state and a nonstate actor. The chapter details successes and missteps in the long-term coalition that ultimately ended in 2000.

Overall, this book is a valuable resource for soldiers, scholars, policymakers, and civilians who want to better understand the significance of culture in planning and executing coalition operations. The lessons offered will become increasingly important as coalition operations become the norm. Since 2001, more than 45 countries have contributed to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization–led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. In such coalitions, managing and mitigating cross-cultural tensions are key to the success of joint operations. The lessons learned can enhance not only the U.S. ability to work with partners in coalitions, but also other areas of security cooperation such as building partner institutional capacity to support and maintain coalition engagement. **JFQ**

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