

# Cultural values, human rights and peacekeeping tasks

## Some anthropological considerations

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### The questions

The key questions the organisers of the seminar 'Future Operations – Civil-Military Cooperation and Press and Information Policy as Elements of an Effects-Based Approach to Operations'<sup>1</sup> had put before the speakers, were whether human rights should be universally respected, whether there is indeed a 'clash of civilisations', and: what are the appropriate ways for foreign military to interact with local civilian populations?

These questions are of fundamental importance, since they have wide-ranging implications for the implementation of peacekeeping tasks in societies worldwide. I aim to address these questions not from a legal, political or military, but from a social-anthropological point of view. In doing so I shall take into account what we know

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– on the basis of empirical research in many societies in the world – about the particular values that different societies hold to be fundamental and about the ways in which these values determine both these societies' own ways of acting and their judgment of the actions of members of other societies.

When understood in reference to values, the question

*are there really global standards of human rights or do we have to accept regional differences*

may be reformulated as follows:

*are there global values shared by people worldwide, that is, irrespective of the particular society to which these people belong? And if this is not the case, should we then accept the values of other societies, even if these do not agree with ours?*

### Cultural values

Values are moral ideas about what is good and desirable human action. Such ideas are very abstract. Often people are unable to formulate precisely in words the values they consider fundamental in their lives. But we can

infer their values from the ways they act and morally judge their own actions and those of others.

In daily life one is not continuously aware of one's basic values. Nevertheless they are the basis of all human interaction. For although values are deeply rooted in the moral consciousness of each person and steer his or her actions and judgments, they have neither been invented by, nor are they specific for, an individual person. On the contrary, values are necessarily shared by the members of a given society.

Without shared values no society could properly function. The socialisation of children anchors these values in their minds. It teaches them how to behave in various situations and how to morally judge such forms of behaviour. And above all, it teaches them that such forms of action and moral judgment are the only proper ones and that they should not be questioned. As a result, value judgments to a large extent are self-evident.

The differences between societies therefore manifest themselves as differences between the particular values, which morally steer and socially control the actions of the members of these societies. Social anthropologists



### Dutch military on patrol in Al Khidr, Iraq

(Foto SFIR 5, G. van Es; collectie NIMH)

call such systems of values and the ways they direct concrete social action ‘culture’. Culture manifests itself in the particular, socially shared rules of conduct and in the moral foundations of those rules.

In this perspective, the term ‘global values’ is misleading, for neither are children all over the world socialised in the same way, nor is there a so-called global society in the sense of a single, universally shared system of values. On the contrary, cultural differences not merely refer to differences concerning languages, dress codes, food habits and so on, but foremost to differences between value systems. Cultures differ with regard to the values that determine *their* understanding of what is legitimate, socially approved and morally justified action.

#### Moral superiority

Although particular values steer the social life in any given society, each society applies its own values to other societies as well. This is a universal phenomenon: each society tends to morally judge other societies in terms of its own values. This stems from the self-evident nature of values. Although each society – be this a ‘Western’ or a ‘non-Western’ one – is aware of the fact that other societies have different values, it cannot accept that these other values would be morally supe-

rior – would be ‘better’ than its own. For if a society would do so it would call into question the self-evident moral justification of its own rules of conduct.

Such processes occur when different, ‘strange’ values are imposed upon the lives of people by political, economic or military force – whether by their own political leadership or by foreign states. It generates a social condition of anomy, of value-disorientation, the results of which may range from the breakdown of the social order and high suicide rates to endemic violence and extreme brutality.

Twentieth-century history abounds with cases in which such processes have been in evidence. I am referring not only to the catastrophic results of state-imposed values of strange origin (as in Maoist China or in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge regime, for instance) but also to some of the newly founded states in Africa, where earlier colonial interventions had left the societies’ traditional value systems in a state of post-colonial disruption. The rejection – for political or economic reasons – of a society’s own values, enforcing their rapid replacement by presumably more advanced ones, more often than not has led to considerable physical and mental damage.

This, I think, is a crucial issue. The self-evident moral superiority of a society’s own values over those of other societies is a basic pre-condition for that society to function – even if from another society’s point of view these values do not conform to theirs or even are unacceptable. The fact that this lesson may be hard to accept in Western societies merely shows that they, too, necessarily consider their own value systems to be morally superior to those of other societies. Since the notion of ‘universal human rights’ originates in these Western value systems it is worthwhile to consider these more closely.

#### Fundamental Western values

Western societies by and large share some fundamental values that are the foundation of their legal and political principles. The principles immediately relevant to our discussion are

- popular sovereignty: the people as a whole, through parliamentary elections, delegate sovereignty to the state; the state is charged by the people with defending its territory and providing for infrastructure, education and tax-financed social security;
- the separation of state and religion: politics and public administration should not be judged against particular religious values but against those that are laid down in its constitution and laws. Political power should not be based on religious authority;
- the equality of all citizens before the law: all members of society must be equally protected by law and be given the same opportunities in life, irrespective of their gender, their family status, their ethnic origin or their religious beliefs;

- the physical and mental inviolability of the individual person. The state, as the exclusive holder of the right to wield violence, must respect and protect these inalienable personal rights;
- the individual freedom of conscience and the right to express this in media, the arts, in politics, in religion and in science.

These principles all reflect, in one way or another, a set of fundamental Western values. These are the inalienable rights of each individual citizen to – even against the judgment of his social surroundings – pursue his own way in life, to form his own moral judgments and freely express these in words and actions, and to be protected from physical and mental violence.

Because of the paramount value Western societies attribute to these rights of the individual, social anthropologists have characterised such core values as ‘individualism’ (Dumont 1986). This does not mean members of Western societies value egoism very highly, but that, when they think about what is good and fair, they focus such thoughts not on particular social groups to which their members belong, but on the individual as the point of reference. It is as individuals that ‘all men and women have been created equal’ and it is the individual who is entitled to freedom of conscience.

### Universal human rights

Western societies have declared these values to be universally applicable. In doing so they act as any other society in the world: they consider the moral superiority of its paramount values over those of other societies as a self-evident and incontestable fact. The difference, however, is that the political, economic and ideological dominance of the West in the post-colonial era (in colonial times human rights were hardly universally respected)

has led to the inclusion of its paramount values in the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights*, supported in this by a – mostly Western-educated – political elite in non-Western states (United Nations 1948).

The West thereby declared its own values to be universally applicable as the foundation of a global political order. Whenever other societies do

ones as we shall see – and observing that these societies do not conform to them, they may de-value the West as morally corrupt, obsessed with money or religiously degenerate (Buruma & Margalit 2004).

### **Complexity of mutual judgments**

The complexity of such mutual value judgments is readily evident when one considers that the non-Western



**US Air Force sergeant Donna Shelton (right) speaks with a Ugandan woman at the Muslim health clinic in Soroti, 2006**

(Foto US Air Force, J.E. Lasky; collectie NIMH)

not act according to these values, it is political consensus in the West to de-value them, that is, to consider them less civilised, less advanced, less modern and so on.

Let me repeat that such value judgments of other societies – social anthropologists call them ‘cultural-centric’ – are normal in the sense that they are a necessary function of *any* cultural value system. But precisely because they are normal, it need not surprise us that other, non-Western societies may not accept some of these Western individualistic values. On the contrary, morally judging Western societies against *their* own paramount values – often very different from the individualistic Western

rejection of dominant Western values in fact conforms to some Western values as well, not in the least to those that are part of the Western Judeo-Christian tradition. The Christian value of sharing one’s wealth with the poor, for example, is ill at ease with the individual pursuit of profit in a capitalist market economy, and a whole series of Christian dogmas contradict the positivist laws of nature taught in schools and the secular values sanctioned by law. This is another issue that deserves careful attention. Let me briefly illustrate this.

The Mohammed caricatures published by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* (September 2005) or the recent university lecture by Pope Benedict



xvi (September 2006) on the superiority of Christianity over Islam have provoked an intense and partly violent response in the Muslim world. It appears that the violence was fueled by radical minorities in Muslim countries and was not condoned by the majority. But what interests me is the fact that Western politicians and journalists in turn rejected these international Islamic responses, arguing they called into question some of the West's own basic values. What then, are these basic values?

In the West religious values, also those of Islam, are not rejected in principle.

On the contrary, the Western separation of state and religion as well as the state's responsibility to protect the individual's freedom of conscience and speech imply that the state must offer freedom of religion to *all* of its citi-

zens. As said earlier, individualism and equality are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, nowadays millions of Muslim citizens are enabled to practice their religion in mosques all over Europe and the United States, and in the wake of the fundamentalist-Muslim terror attacks in New York, Madrid and London Western state leaders have urged their citizens to respect their Muslim co-citizens.

The point is rather that in the West other values may contradict this respect for Islam, or for religion in general. In this case, such a value is each individual's right to express himself freely, whether this right is claimed by a Danish newspaper or by the Pope in an academic lecture. The West perceived the reactions in the Muslim world as an unacceptable rejection of this particular right. In other words, two aspects of individualism as a

Western core value, that is, the freedom of and respect for religion, on the one hand, and freedom of speech, on the other, seem to contradict each other.

### Contradicting values

All societies in the world – each with their own particular value system – face such problems of contradicting values. The solution always follows the same pattern. It consists, firstly, of declaring some values as more important – *of higher value* – than others, and secondly, of specifying the most important value in different contexts of social life. For example, in most Western societies people are entitled to declare religious ideas proven false by scientific research, or even ridicule them in a theatre play or a novel, but they are not allowed to do so inside a church or a mosque.

The reactions in the Muslim world to the Mohammed caricatures and the Pope's statements displayed a similar pattern. The protests did not imply an overall rejection of *all* values of Western societies. Not only non-Western societies nowadays are eager to adopt modern Western achievements in science, technology and finance, in the past it were non-Western societies (notably China, India and the Muslim world) whose own scientific discoveries in mathematics, astronomy and medicine made those in Europe possible in the first place (Needham 1969).

However, further scientific and technological progress could only be made because European scientists from the seventeenth century onwards began to question the dogmas taught by the church about the divine order of nature (the case of Galileo Galilei is but one example), thus initiating a process of radically dissociating science and technology from religion (Dijksterhuis 1961).

But in spite of the thoroughly secular nature of this scientific thought, rejecting what the Bible, the Koran or any other religious book teaches about the universe and nature, non-Western so-



**Michigan Army National Guard sergeant Carole Pitsch (left) and reporter Olivia Kobiskey role-play as Iraqi civilians**  
(Foto Michigan Army National Guard, J. Downen, Jr.; collectie NIMH)

cieties neither reject the products of this scientific thought, nor do they challenge the Western values – such as the freedom of scientific thought – on which all modern science is based. After all, in Islamic states such as Iran, Indonesia or Saudi-Arabia universities of high scientific standard, attended by male and female students alike, flourish.

Many Muslim societies do challenge, however, the ways in which the West values individual scientific freedom in comparison to other values – such as those laid down in Islamic texts. In other words, they reject a specific Western *hierarchy of values*. They reject the idea that individual freedom of conscience and scientific thought should be valued higher than the tenets of Islamic teachings.<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, the present controversy in some US states about whether to teach biological evolution theory or Biblical creation myth in high schools demonstrates that this is not an exclusively Islamic phenomenon.

This example may show that difference between cultures does not imply that values of the one are totally absent in the value system of the other. Leaving aside societies that are in total disruption, to my knowledge there is no society where protection against violence, hospitality towards strangers, compassion with the suffering, love of one's family, but also the ambition to acquire honour and public reputation are *not* valued. The question is not whether other societies value such actions, but rather how such values are ranked in relation to other values, that is, the place they occupy in their value system as a whole.

### Ranking values

This question is of basic importance. The higher a certain value is ranked in a given society, the more profoundly it will influence people's actions in various contexts of social life and the more likely this value will be considered absolutely self-evident and indisputable. Such paramount values will be applied to interactions between *all* people, whether they belong to their own society or to strange societies – as members of peacekeeping forces, for instance.

Western societies attribute a very high – some would argue, the highest – value to the inviolability of human rights. Because it is considered self-evident and universally applicable it is not only laid down in the constitutions of individual states, but also asserted in United Nations declarations and sanctioned by international law. Yet in this case, too, this is not the only value that steers social action in the West. Thus political debate in the United States and the European Union centres on the question whether human rights should be subordinated to the protection of the national territory against terrorist attacks, or whether the infringement of such rights in non-Western societies that partake in a global market should make us refrain from trading with them.

As a member of a Western society I argue that these rights should not be suspended. Still, such debates in the West are illuminating. For precisely on the question whether, *in all circumstances*, the rights of the individual must be valued higher than the interest of the society as a whole, the

contrasts between Western and non-Western value systems are articulated most sharply.

### 'Non-Western' value systems

Let me contrast – in a very general and ideal-typical manner – the value systems of the West, characterised as 'individualist', with the value systems of those societies where peacekeeping tasks are mostly performed. Given the thousands of different cultures in the world it is hazardous, of course, to speak of 'non-Western' societies in general. This is further complicated by the fact that by far the majority of present-day non-Western states are composed of various 'ethnic groups' – each with their own particular values –, one of which usually is politically and economically dominant. Such dominance is exerted by Buddhist Sinhalese over Hindu Tamils in Sri Lanka, by Buddhist Thai over Muslim Malays in Thailand, by Christian Krio over Muslim Mende in Sierra Leone, by Muslim Sudanese over Christian Nuer and Dinka in the Sudan, and so on.

Such multiple-ethnic compositions of many non-Western states – often a heritage from colonial times<sup>3</sup> – is a major source of potential violent conflict. Therefore, if it makes sense at all to speak of a 'clash of civilisations' this is certainly not restricted to the Christian West versus the Muslim non-West.

Yet in spite of this staggering variety of societies and their value systems, some distinctive characteristics recur time and again. In a general way many non-Western value systems may be called *holistic*. This term does not refer to New Age trends or religious fundamentalism, but to the fact that in such societies the rights of the individual person tend to be subordinated to the interests of the society as a whole.

Holistic value systems manifest themselves in many different local institutions and rules of conduct. It is impossible to go into detail here; let me just give a few examples.

2 In an open letter published in response to Pope Benedict's lecture mentioned earlier, thirty-eight Islamic religious leaders from all over the world formulated the Islamic position in this respect as follows: "[...] the dichotomy between "reason" on the one hand and "faith" on the other [as articulated by the Pope] does not exist in precisely the same form in Islamic thought. Rather, Muslims have come to terms with the power and limits of human intelligence in their own way, acknowledging a *hierarchy of knowledge of which reason is a crucial part* [...] the intellectual explorations of Muslims through the ages have maintained a consonance between the truths of the Quranic revelation and the demands of human intelligence, *without sacrificing the one for the other*" (Abd Allah bin Mahfuz bin Bayyah *et al.* 2006:2; emphasis mine JP).

3 Virtually all de-colonised states maintained the territorial borders that had been drawn previously by the European powers irrespective of the 'ethnic' identity of the inhabitants of their colonies.

**US Army soldiers and Egyptian soldiers give donated clothes to Afghan children at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, 2005**

(Foto US Army, J.L. Rodriguez; collectie NIMH)



Whereas the West declares the pursuit of personal economic wealth as an inalienable right of the individual, in societies with holistic value systems such a right is often subordinated to collective interests. This means that solidarity among family, clan or other group members is valued higher than individual richness. This may be expressed in a rejection of the pursuit of private profits, in a prohibition on raising interest on capital, in favouring collective over private property of land, or in the obligatory sharing of profits that in the West is often misunderstood as corruption or nepotism.

**Economic holism**

Such forms of what may be labeled 'economic holism' may not only conflict with the Western principles of market economics (as applied by the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund) but also with those state-implemented development projects that consider private property and market economics the only road to progress and modernisation (cp. Fitzpatrick 2006).

Whenever such expressions of economic holism are highly valued they may lead to an ideological rejection of the West as societies whose members have 'sold their soul' by enriching themselves at the expense of others. To a certain extent this is a caricature, of course, confusing individualism with egoism. It ignores the fact that Western states not only take responsibility for the well-being of their own citizens in the form of tax-financed social security, but also that the West's international solidarity is evident time and again in large-scale humanitarian action, spending, and military peacekeeping efforts.

And yet, the at times disruptive impact of Western corporate enterprise and international finance on the local economies of non-Western societies hardly contributes to correcting such perceptions of the West. And since such local impacts of global economics more often than not are endorsed by self-enriching political elites in the countries themselves, a rejection of the West *and* of one's own political leadership may go hand-in-hand.

When judged against holistic values, the rejection of the disruptive effects of market economics inevitably assumes the form of a moral condemnation of individualism – both of the West and of one's own political class – in favour of an ideology propagating a return to what are perceived as traditional holistic values. Hence such ideologies often advocate a (quasi-)religious purification of the country of the moral decay brought about by the West and by its own political elite.

But these ideologies may appear attractive not in the least because of the beneficial *economic* effects they promise by re-instituting forms of social sharing and collective production. The violent potential of such reform ideologies is well-known. One need only recall al-Qaida's condemnation of the Christian West (the 'crusaders')

and the Saudi-Arabian leadership alike to understand their attractiveness to underprivileged people worldwide.

What is dearly needed, therefore, when operating in such societies, is to show an awareness of and respect for the values, on the basis of which their traditional economies function (cp. Bloch & Parry 1986).

To know of, to facilitate and even to participate in the intricate systems of exchange and barter, which usually characterise local economies, is an effective means to demonstrate such respect. Keeping peace in fact creates the basic pre-condition for such exchange systems – often in shambles due to war – to function once again and thus for the social order to be re-established.

What should not be demonstrated, however, is support for an uncontrolled Western and local-political exploitation of the economic resources in the region. It may not be in the hands of the peacekeeping military to prevent such forms of exploitation. But it might be able to adjust the caricature image of the West as money-obsessed egoists by communicating how their governments, too, value collective responsibility for and solidarity with





**US Marine Corps sergeant David Christoff (left) and an Iraqi soldier search two civilians in Haqlaniyah, Iraq**

(Foto US Marine Corps, J.L. Schaeffer; collectie NIMH)

their own national *and* international communities. This, in fact, is evident from the peacekeeping actions themselves.

If the military would solely be perceived as an agent of economic disruption enforcing a so-called 'opening-up' of markets, it would fail to do so.

**Other forms of social action**

Holistic values manifest themselves in other forms of social action as well. In the West public renown is attributed to people as individuals and to pursue such prominence is each person's inalienable right. Holistic value systems, on the other hand, tend to consider public reputation as an attribute and the property of the group – be it the family, the village, the regional clan, or the people or nation as a whole. This is a distinction with wide-ranging consequences. It implies that the social and political pursuits of the individual should contribute to the renown of his group, and that the protection of the group's reputation is higher valued than that of each of its members as individuals.

Such a collective duty to defend the group's good name, to which each individual member should contribute, also entails that a violation of the reputation of one of its members violates the reputation of the group as a

whole, hence calls for collective retaliation. Western law reflects individualist values in the sense that it only acknowledges individual culpability and liability. The principles of justice of many non-Western societies, on the other hand, are based on notions of collective responsibility and liability.

The ways in which such responsibilities are activated often follow a so-called segmentary pattern. When, for instance, a person is attacked by a member of another people, then his own people as a whole must retaliate. But in case one is attacked by a fellow countryman belonging to another clan, only one's own clan must retaliate, and so on.

In local societies where such holistic notions of justice exist (among Bedouin in Jordan, Berber in Morocco, and in Albania, for instance) elaborate traditional procedures prevent such forms of collective retaliation from turning into massive bloodshed (Al-Sekhaneh 2005, Jamous 1981, Elsie 2001). Such procedures may be conducted by local political leaders (such as sheiks or clan elders) but usually are sanctioned by religious values and enacted by religious officials. As a rule, law and religion are *not* separated – as is the case in the West. In such circumstances the peacekeeping

military would be well advised to solicit the support of religious officials when intervening in violent confrontations.

However, such procedures only function if the opposite party accepts their legitimacy. This is a crucial problem in all states containing populations of different cultural identities and value systems. Indonesia, Sierra Leone and of course Iraq are recent cases where such traditional legal procedures have failed to settle violent disputes and national state law is ineffective to do so instead.

The segmentary structure of such collective forms of liability and responsibility may have an immediate impact on the ways of encountering peacekeeping forces. Since the latter are perceived as strangers who are not members of any of the sections of the society, serious transgressions of local law committed by a member of the military will, in principle, ultimately call for retaliation by the local society as a whole.

As a result, even when different sections may be on enemy terms with each other, they will simultaneously join forces to oppose the foreign intruders. It is important to emphasise, however, that in societies where segmentary structures and notions of collective responsibility and reputation prevail, hospitality towards strangers usually is highly valued as well. Yet the stranger is only entitled to such hospitality – in some cases even to asylum – if he respects the rules of conduct that are based on such values as collective reputation and responsibility. This puts the stranger in the difficult situation of needing to know in

advance what these values are before being entitled to the hospitality and protection of the society with which he or she interacts.

In Middle Eastern and North African societies – but also in many parts of Asia and the Pacific – the core concept in this context is that of *honour*. Again, honour does not primarily adhere to the individual person – although ‘People of Honour’ do exist and are the first to approach in any circumstance. On the contrary, honour adheres to the social group and its collective material and immaterial goods. Hence the theft of moveable and immovable property but also slander and gossip and, worst of all, the humiliation of married or unmarried women – by entering the female domain of the house, for instance – all damage the public reputation of, and therefore dishonour, the group as a whole.

The shame that such acts generate may be deemed a fate worse than death. The violent retaliations such acts provoke can often only be averted if the offender – a criminal in the eyes of the people – is willing to submit himself to the local procedures of redressing the wrong-doings. Such traditional procedures rarely involve corporal punishment – let alone the death penalty – but usually consist of the payment of fines and of being submitted to ritual purifications.

Whereas almost everywhere such traditional forms of justice have at least nominally been replaced by or subordinated to state law and its legal institutions, a breakdown of the state – which requires military peacekeeping in the first place – may lead to a revival of these principles of collective responsibility at local levels. As said, these principles reflect holistic values very different from the individualistic Western ones. Therefore, a collective retaliation of an act of theft or of a ‘mere flirting with a girl’ by holding the other members of the perpetrator’s group – his whole army unit for example – collectively responsible

may seem totally disproportionate from a Western point of view. Yet such a judgment merely reiterates the basic differences between the paramount values at issue, and insisting upon one’s own values does not contribute to an effective defusing of violent tensions.

Of course, neither the government of the state where the peacekeeping military is stationed nor the military’s own governments would have a member of their army unit handed over to be tried by the group offended. Local authorities would refuse to do so because it would call into question the authority of their state, foreign governments because they will not deliver their citizens to such so-called ‘tribal’ forms of justice.

Yet I am convinced that a lot of bloodshed would be avoided if such policies were to be re-considered. If one were to show one’s respect for such local procedures and for the socio-religious values on which these are based – by agreeing to pay the fines imposed upon the offender, for example – it would be a significant contribution to gaining the respect and cooperation from the people.

In any case, it is of vital importance for the effective and peaceful performance of one’s tasks to be well-informed beforehand about the local codes of conduct, precisely because such codes and the consequences of transgressing them are not at all self-evident. Furthermore, particularly in those situations in which national state law is no longer considered legitimate and the state’s legal institutions no longer function properly, one is well-advised to inform oneself about the possibility to re-activate traditional procedures of settling disputes and violent retaliations, since these may be the only institutional means left to prevent collective violence on a large scale to erupt and endure.

The mobilisation in June 2002 of the Grand Council (*Loya Jirga*) in Afghanistan – an ancient institutional means

to settle inter-tribal disputes – in order to create a legitimate forum for political reforms, is a good example of how this may be achieved. Comparable processes were implemented by the central government of the Republic of Indonesia. To pacify regional secession movements – that were often accompanied by protracted violence – centuries old political institutions such as sultanates and rajadoms, each with their own codes of honour and collective responsibilities, were revived.

Such processes deserve to be closely monitored and their possible implementation at regional and village levels carefully considered, because they may offer a sound alternative to a hasty and ill-considered imposition of Western-style political systems that reflect our, but not their, basic values.

Once again, this may not be the task of military peacekeeping forces. But a familiarity with such traditional procedures of settling disputes will be of a great advantage whenever one is forced to intervene in violent confrontations. Moreover, by demonstrating one’s knowledge of and respect for such institutions and the values they are based upon, one will earn people’s respect in return.

## Conclusion

The way someone perceives the actions of other people is steered by the values of the society in which he or she has been brought up. The military operating in societies other than their own will be perceived according to values that are different from their own, and their peacekeeping actions will be judged accordingly. It is, therefore, of fundamental importance to be informed about the cultural values of the other society. Only by being informed one can anticipate the results of one’s actions and the reactions they may provoke.

Peacekeeping requires communication and an effective communication





**Military of ISAF guard a street in Kabul, Afghanistan, during a visit of the Dutch Minister of Defence, 2002**

(Foto MinDef, DV, Hennie Keeris; collectie NIMH)

requires the use of a common language. If one does not understand what the actions performed by other people *mean*, that is, what values these actions express, one cannot expect that one's own actions will be properly understood, let alone appreciated. To demonstrate, on the other hand, that one does understand the values other people express by means of their actions, and, what is more, that one respects these values – even though they may be very different from one's own – is the most important condition for 'winning the hearts and minds' of the people.

Let me emphasise that to understand other peoples' values does not mean one would have to accept them *as good for oneself*. Respect for other peoples' values does not imply that one should reject one's own. As said earlier, all societies are aware that other societies have different values, and no society expects of others that they deny being different in this regard. On the contrary, respect of one's own values and demonstrating that respect in the way one conducts oneself will earn the respect of others, provided this does not result in an

enforced imposition of one's own values upon other people.

Of course, our values do differ from, and in some respects radically contradict, those of other societies. Yet such radical contradictions occur less often than the prophets of 'a clash of civili-

sations' or some religious fanatics want us to believe.

In terms of values, societies have more in common than what divides them.

It is up to us to discover and cultivate such common ground.

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