



# Social Factors and the Human Domain

Maj. Brian Hildebrand, U.S. Army National Guard

**T**he Army conducts operations through mission command.<sup>1</sup> Both as a warfighting function and a philosophy, leaders use mission command to project military might in order to achieve political and military objectives. Exercised in the context of strategic landpower, mission command helps to create conditions favorable for defeating an enemy or stabilizing a region.<sup>2</sup> Wrought in conjunction with leader development, mission command exploits the potential, knowledge, and experience of each soldier to attain operational and tactical success.<sup>3</sup> Yet, no matter how it is used, mission command is tied to the human domain.

The concept that war is a human endeavor has endured through many epochs.<sup>4</sup> While Clausewitz famously casts, “War is merely the continuation of policy by other means,” there is no denying the fact that at its core, war is human.<sup>5</sup> However, a complete comprehension of the human domain may never be achieved due to complexity stemming from the enigmatic nature of humanity itself. The works of twentieth-century American pragmatist John Dewey provide some insight. Dewey reflects on experience, daily life, the correlation between knowledge and action, and values in order to increase awareness of the human domain. Furthermore, he suggests, “all deliberate, all planned human conduct, personal and collective, seems to be influenced, if not controlled, by estimates of value or worth of ends to be attained.”<sup>6</sup>

Applying this insight to practical employment of mission command, success depends at every echelon on leaders using mission command to affect the human domain. How exactly the Army uses decisive action through

mission command to win relies heavily on the ability of its leaders to integrate techniques for analyzing different aspects of the human domain into the military decision making process (MDMP) to achieve understanding. This article describes one such technique.

## Another Mission Analysis Tool

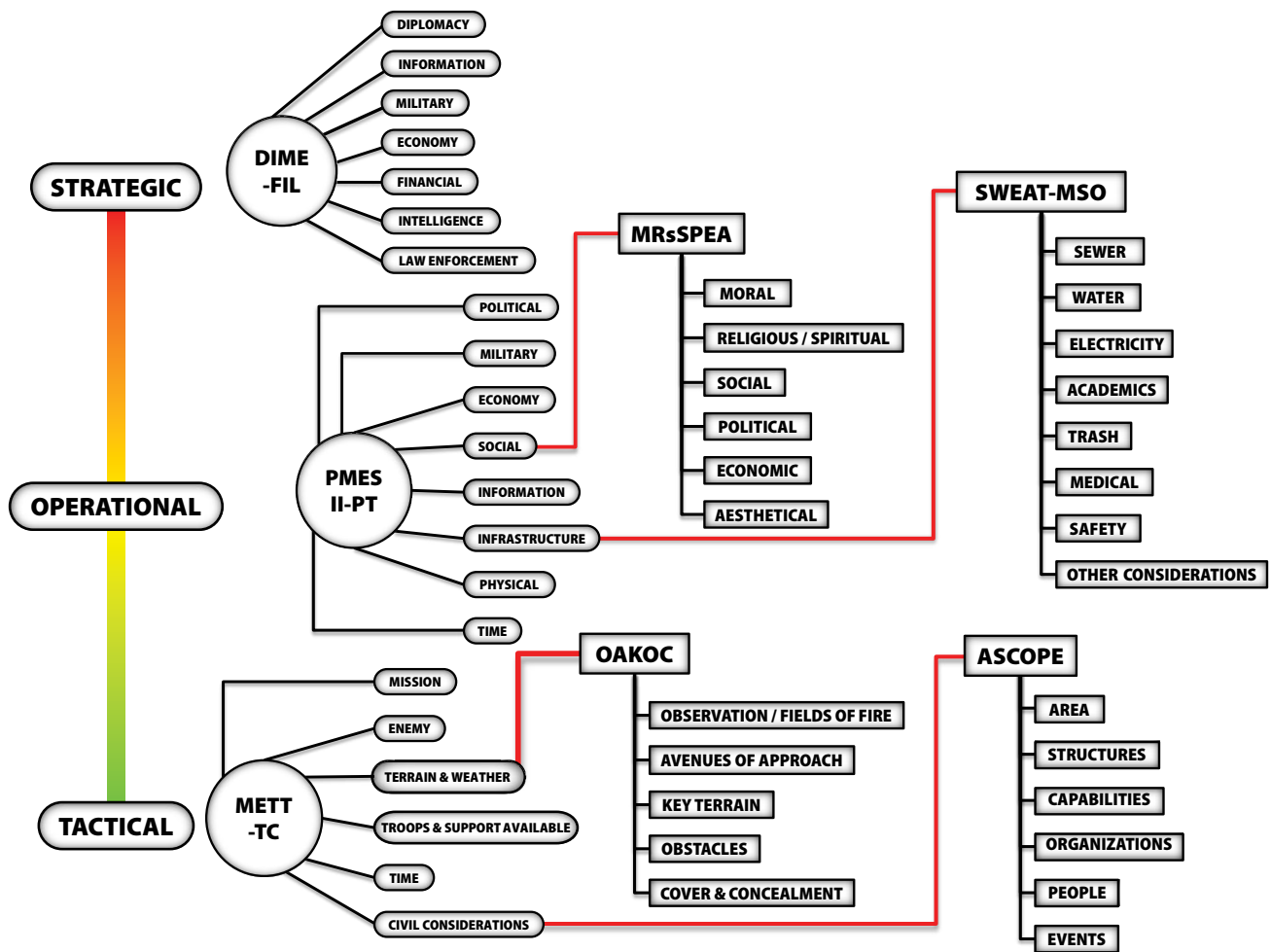
Translating Dewey’s insights into a framework for understanding the human domain is a challenge because values differ from one society to the next, are influenced by culture, and change over time. Yet, leaders and soldiers need something to lend context and coherence to the observations, knowledge, experience, and intuition they have pertaining to the diverse societies in which they perform missions. A common framework, once devised, can be used as part of mission analysis to increase the shared understanding by the organization as a whole.

Why another mission analysis tool? As depicted in figure 1 (page 90), the current mission analysis tools are used for different applications at each level of planning: strategic, operational, and tactical. At the strategic level, planners use DIMEFIL (diplomacy, information, military, economics, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement) to provide an analysis framework. At the operational level, planners use PMESII-PT (political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time). PMESII was first designed by joint planners and introduced in the *Commander’s Handbook for an Effects-Based Approach to Joint Operations* in 2006.<sup>7</sup> The Army later added PT in 2008 when it published FM 3-0, *Operations*.<sup>8</sup> METT-TC (mission, enemy, terrain and

LEFT: Egyptian soldiers on top of an armored vehicle join pro-democracy supporters in prayer during an anti-government rally 25 February 2011 in Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt. Hundreds of Egyptians attended the rally, calling for an end to a long-running state of emergency and demanding that the Egyptian cabinet step down.

(Photo by Peter Andrews, Reuters)





(Figure by Maj. Brian Hildebrand)

**Figure 1. Mission Analysis Tools**

weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations) is the tried-and-true tool for the tactical level planner.

Army scholars have further elaborated on different aspects of these mission-analysis planning tools. For example, Army engineers have created an additional mnemonic tool for analyzing infrastructure derived from PMESII-PT. The now ubiquitous SWEAT-MSO (sewer, water, electric, academics, trash, medical, safety, and other considerations) has been a combat-tested mission analysis tool for operational-level planners. Elsewhere, at the tactical level, leaders often use other mnemonics such as OAKOC (observation and fields of fire, avenues of approach, key terrain, obstacles, and cover and concealment) to improve understanding of terrain and ASCOPE (area, structures, capabilities, organizations, people, and events) to further dissect the civil considerations of

METT-TC. The creation of these mnemonic devices and their usefulness as mission analysis tools testify to the complexity of the operational environment.

The human domain, equally as complex as the operational environment, requires the same thoughtfulness, introspection, and analysis in order to understand it. Creating a mission analysis tool for the human domain does not have to be an elaborate or laborious process. There is truth in the old adage that to know others you must know yourself first. An introspective awareness of beliefs, values, and actions creates a baseline of knowledge, which leaders and soldiers can compare to other societies and derive commonalities. These commonalities can become a framework similar to SWEAT-MSO at the operational level and OAKOC and ASCOPE at the tactical level, and are a subset of factors under the social aspect of the operational factors PMESII-PT. Used as an



(Photo by Suhaib Salem, Reuters)

A protester holds a cross and Koran during a protest demanding that Islamist Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi resign 1 July 2013 at Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt. Morsi had taken steps to rewrite the Egyptian constitution to impose sharia law on the secular government and limit non-Muslim rights in the country. Backed by massive numbers of protestors in the street, Egypt's powerful armed forces later forced Morsi from power and organized a new election that greatly reduced the power of Morsi supporters.

analytical tool during planning to focus on specific elements of the human domain within the operational environment, these specific factors, in a manner of expression, are a subset of the social element of PMESII-PT.

## Social Factors

Akin to other mission analysis tools, social factors are used to build situational understanding. Commanders and staff can analyze and describe an operational environment in terms of a mnemonic that employs six interrelated social factors: moral, religious-spiritual, social, political, economic, and aesthetical (MRsSPEA). Figure 2 (page 93) provides a brief description of each factor.

While developers at the proponent level have yet to codify the social factors as a doctrinal framework, the Army has been working with these social factors under different auspices and through a variety of means. Country briefs, cultural studies, and comprehensive language classes all contribute to a leader's understanding of social factors. Not actually having the MRsSPEA

framework available, much of the understanding gained from these briefs, studies, and classes has heretofore not been applied in systematic and structured way in the MDMP.

These factors employed systematically to organize key considerations with regard to dealing with a society, culture, group, or tribe within the human domain provide information that can be used to develop situational understanding and frame a problem during the initial planning phases, MDMP steps one and two.<sup>9</sup> What does this look like in action? Consider its application to a modern-day deployment to the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula.

## A Framework Application Example

The MRsSPEA framework serves as analytical tool for commanders and staff to get ahead of a threat's decision making cycle by focusing on those elements of the human domain that contribute to its ability to act. As we increase our understanding of the social factors for a particular society, we also increase our understanding of

their behavior and how they will use judgment, intelligence, and character to shape their decisions.

Overall, the MRsSPEA framework emphasizes the importance of the complex set of relationships that link distinctly human characteristics to military potential and outcomes at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.

Whereas PMESII-PT and METT-TC can satisfy a staff's need for an operational and mission analysis of the Sinai Peninsula region of Egypt, MRsSPEA can create vitally needed understanding of the human domain of that region.<sup>10</sup> An example of the systematic analysis that might result by using MRsSPEA is suggested below.<sup>11</sup>

**Moral.** Egypt, with its Muslim and Coptic population, is primarily a conservative, religious society. Egyptians place great emphasis on honor, respect, and family. Honor is very important to interpersonal relationships, and many Egyptians stress hospitality as an outward extension of their family honor. Egyptians are duty bound to treat others with respect and high esteem. Families, which are the core unit in Egyptian society, are the basis for this obligation to treat others fairly. Almost as an aberration of this custom, it is important to note that the Southern Sinai, and Sharm el-Sheikh in particular, has a far more liberal local social culture than most other areas in Egypt due to the liberalizing influence from a large influx of foreign visitors since the signing of the 1978 Camp David accords that led to large scale investment by the Egyptian government to attract tourists.

**Religion-Spiritual.** Despite any liberalizing influence due to foreign presence, religion continues to play an important role in the lives of the inhabitants



(Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

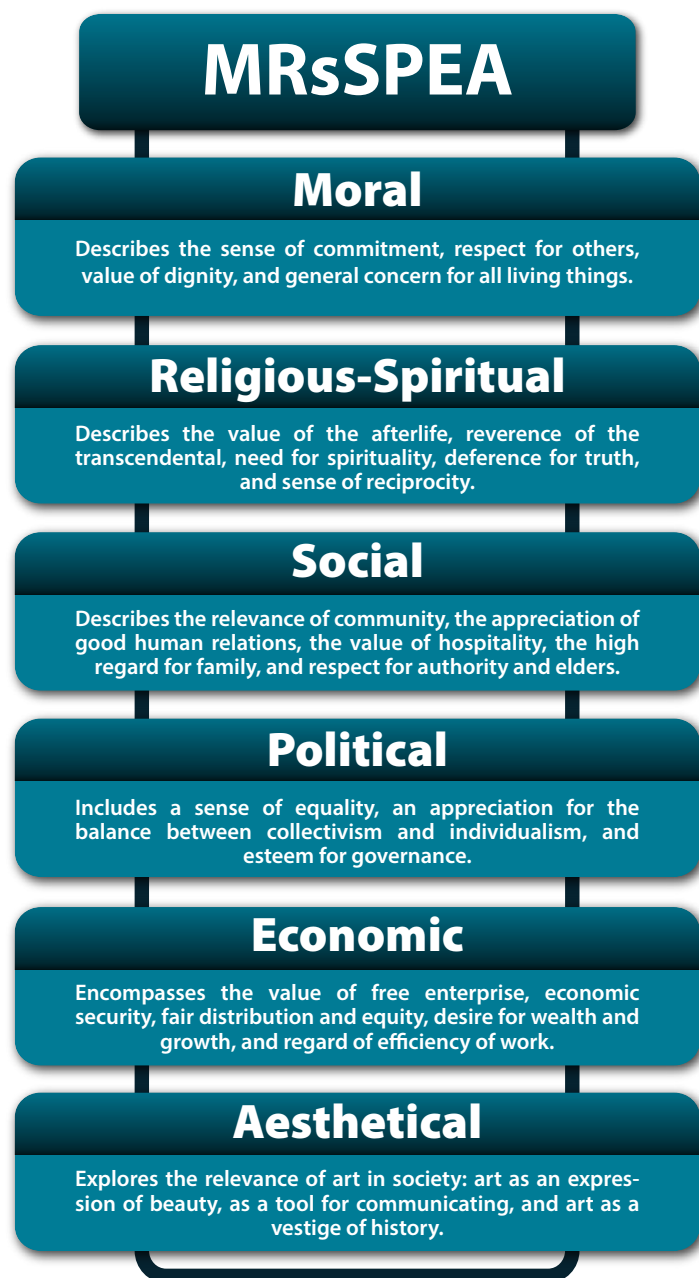
Sharm el-Sheikh (Bay of the Sheikh), sometimes called the City of Peace due to the large number of international peace conferences that have been held there, is situated on the southeastern tip of the Sinai Peninsula on a coastal strip along the Red Sea. Featuring scuba diving and archeological tours, it has become a significant center for tourism in Egypt and has attracted many Western chain businesses. Western influence has had the effect of liberalizing the traditionally conservative Egyptian society in the area.

of the Southern Sinai. The overwhelming majority are Sunni Muslims. However, 10 percent of the total population is Coptic Christian. Leaders in the community express their religiosity in many ways. Local police have prayer areas in civic buildings, and Ramadan is a national event with a high level of participation. Public displays of religious devotion are respected in Egyptian culture. For example, many Egyptians show off a dark callus on the forehead, an imprint from endless hours of prayer, as an outward badge of religious zeal.

**Social.** Wealth and a highly esteemed social status are not synonymous in Egyptian culture. More than any other quality, family background determines an Egyptian's social class and, consequently, his or her access to power and position. One result is that, while there are three social classes (upper, middle, and lower), mobility up the social ladder is very difficult to achieve.

**Political.** The Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) play an important role in the Egyptian government. The EAF role extends well beyond typical military functions related to security. In addition to traditional security roles, EAF officers also serve in all agencies of the government in many different capacities. For





(Figure by Arin Burgess, *Military Review*)

**Figure 2. Social Factors**

example, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi is a former commanding general in the EAF.

In terms of governance, the Arab Republic of Egypt (ARE) has a democratic-republican system of government with executive, legislative, and judiciary branches. After the 25 January 2013 revolution that deposed Mohamed Morsi, Egypt focused on redefining its foreign policy priorities and rebuilding its economy. Egypt's aim to become a regional power has impelled it to host

three different economic summits and the Arab League Conference in 2015.

**Economic.** The Egyptian economy is the second largest in the Arab world after Saudi Arabia, but struggles nevertheless to support the growing population. While economic opportunities are far more limited in the Northern Sinai, tourism in the Southern Sinai is driving the need for infrastructure development, such as new roads, water pump stations, and electricity plants. Nearly all of the business for these developments goes to local companies. Outsiders may view this as nepotism, but culturally Egyptians prefer to do business with those they know intimately and respect. As a result, new business relationships do not just happen overnight. Quite the contrary, Egyptians feel impelled to take the time they deem necessary to cultivate personal relationships and fully assess the reliability of prospective business partners before doing business.

**Aesthetical.** While there are few museums located in the Southern Sinai, Sharm el-Sheikh has many important landmarks, statues, and buildings that express important Egyptian ideals, especially peace. Of note, there are three major mosques and a Coptic church. All are tourist destinations due to their architectural beauty and displays of religious artwork. Additionally, the influence of ancient Egyptian culture is pervasive through modern society in the form of art and architecture. Lastly, Ras Mohammed National Park, the first national park in Egypt, is a protected marine and terrestrial nature area located in Sharm el-Sheikh.

## Applying Mission Command

Having created understanding in terms of the operational, mission, and social factors, the next step is to apply mission command. Commanders drive the operations process in order to create shared understanding. As Andrew Whitford argues, "It is the job of commanders and leaders to consider a variety of viewpoints about the world to build the understanding and empathy necessary to accomplish their mission."<sup>12</sup> Social factors will affect not only how the



(Image courtesy of Hossam el-Hamrawy, Flickr)

Guests dance with newlyweds at a Nubian wedding celebration in the affluent Zamalek District of Cairo, Egypt, on 20 October 2011. Egyptian society in general is family centered.



(Image courtesy of Zoltan Matrahazi, <http://www.discoversinai.net>)

Bedouins from the Jabaleya tribe gather in a garden under a traditional Bedouin tent 11 March 2009 during a Bedouin event to bless the garden near the town of St. Catherine, south Sinai, Egypt. Though the Bedouin tribes today are settled in small villages, they are still largely animal herders by trade and periodically migrate with their animals out of their settlements, following traditional routes to grazing areas as rainfall permits. The most effective military and government officials administering the Sinai are those who have studied Bedouin law and tradition, and have taken the time to develop relationships with the Bedouin tribal leaders.



commander visualizes an appropriate end state, but also how he plans to achieve it.

The effect of social factors on the commander's visualization is especially apparent during stability operations. Revisiting the previous example of a unit deployed to the Sinai, the commander would use mission command and social factors to execute a peacekeeping

mission. The problem set requires that the commander use the subtler tools of power projection such as security cooperation, promoting economic infrastructure development, and cooperating with local governance, in addition to achieving the assigned mission to observe, verify, and report. Understanding the social factors of Egypt, the commander and staff can successfully navigate high-level meetings with Egyptian officials. Take, for example, a collaborative security meeting between the Multinational Force and Observers and Egyptian leaders.

## A Mission Command Vignette

In advance of this meeting, the commander has dialogue with the staff, specifically the force protection officer and the liaison officer. In this dialogue, he establishes his objectives for the meeting, clearly states his intent, and details his expectations for the end state. In this case, the commander describes a concept to the force protection officer and the liaison officer that will establish security protocols that benefit the force and prepare it for potential crisis response scenarios.

Having the commander's intent and end state, the force protection officer and the liaison officer build the agenda for the meeting. While the agenda includes a variety of security concerns, both long-standing and newly formed, the staff uses the MRsPEA framework



(Image courtesy of the office of the Egyptian president)

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi shakes hands with a member of the Egyptian Armed Forces during a 4 July 2015 visit to North Sinai, Egypt.

along with other inputs to build a strategy for the security meeting. Before deciding when the meeting would take place, planners consider the religiosity of Egyptian society. Meetings will have to be scheduled around prayer times. An understanding of moral aspects of Egyptian society cues the staff into the importance of honor and hospitality. The ranks for both parties of the meeting must be equivalent in some sense. Commanders would meet with commanders, and deputies with deputies. Additionally, the host of the meeting would provide for the needs of their guests. In Egyptian circles, the most basic provisions are tea and tobacco. The economic dimension to the meeting is not just about business. Egyptians feel the need to create personal relationships with those they intend to do business with. Hence, before the business finally concludes, the participants will leave with a personal connection and broadened network. Using these inputs with mission command, the commander and staff are prepared to conduct the meeting.

In this case, the commander works to achieve his security objectives in a fashion akin to the basics of maneuver warfare: focus on objectives, bypass resistance, and reinforce successes. This means building consensus by leveraging past agreements as precedents of successful transactions. Additionally, the commander is careful to avoid potential



disagreements, treating them like pockets of resistance to be tackled at the end, and circling back only to engage after sufficient momentum is achieved. All of this takes place against the backdrop of the MRsSPEA framework. During the execution of the meeting, the commander is mindful of the social factors because without them he jeopardizes the successful attainment of the objectives.

## Conclusion

While the MRsSPEA framework is an analytical tool for drawing attention to the social factors of the

human domain, like the other mnemonic devices (SWEAT-MSO, OAKOC, and ASCOPE), it is only as good as its inputs. Society and the roles that individuals play in it change constantly. Hence, every attempt to harness MRsSPEA as a tool for increasing shared understanding and facilitating mission command depends on having the most up-to-date information about the particular aspects of the human domain. Ultimately, as a subset of PMESII-PT, MRsSPEA offers commanders and staff a better way to apply mission command in order to realize decisive action in any operational environment and win. ■

### Biography

Maj. Brian Hildebrand, a full-time member of the Texas Army National Guard, is the executive officer of 1st Battalion, 133rd Field Artillery Regiment, in Houston, Texas. He holds a BA from the University of Saint Thomas and an MS from Norwich University. He has deployed twice in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and he recently returned from deployment to Egypt as part of 1-112 Cavalry Squadron USBAT 60, Multinational Forces and Observer Mission.

## Notes

1. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], May 2012).

2. Raymond T. Odierno, James F. Amos, and William H. McRaven, *Strategic Landpower: Winning the Clash of Wills*, Strategic Landpower Task Force White Paper, 2013, 5, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/Front-PageContent/Docs/Strategic%20Landpower%20White%20Paper.pdf>.

3. Andrew Whitford, "The Path to Mission Command," *Military Review* 95(3) (May–June 2015): 40, accessed 8 March 2016, [http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview\\_20150630\\_art011.pdf](http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20150630_art011.pdf).

4. Mark Herbert, "The Human Domain: The Army's Necessary Push to Toward Squishiness," *Military Review* 94(5) (September–October 2014): 81–87, accessed 8 March 2016, [http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview\\_20141031\\_art014.pdf](http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20141031_art014.pdf).

5. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 28.

6. John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* (1939; repr., New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), 2.

7. Joint Warfighting Center, *Commander's Handbook for an Effects-Based Approach to Joint Operations* (Suffolk, VA:

U.S. Joint Forces Command Joint Warfighting Center, February 2006).

8. Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, February 2008). This manual has been superseded by ADRP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*.

9. Army Doctrine Publication 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, May 2012), 8. Step 1 of the military decision making process is "Receipt of mission," and step 2 is "Mission analysis."

10. ADRP 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, May 2012), 1-7. The acronym PMESII-PT stands for political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, information, physical environment, and time. METT-TC stands for mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations. Respectively, the terms in each acronym describe operational and mission factors used during analysis by commanders and staffs to gain situational understanding.

11. Information used in the example regarding Egypt is taken from "Egypt—Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette," Kwantessential website, accessed 20 January 2016, <http://www.kwantessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/egypt-country-profile.html>.

12. Whitford, "The Path to Mission Command," 42.