

# Cultural Texture: *Urban Warfare* & *Global Strategic Communication*

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# Overview

- Task
- Approach
- Cultural disparities
- Looking Ahead
  - Strategic global communication
  - The next war

# NDU TASK → Cultural Context

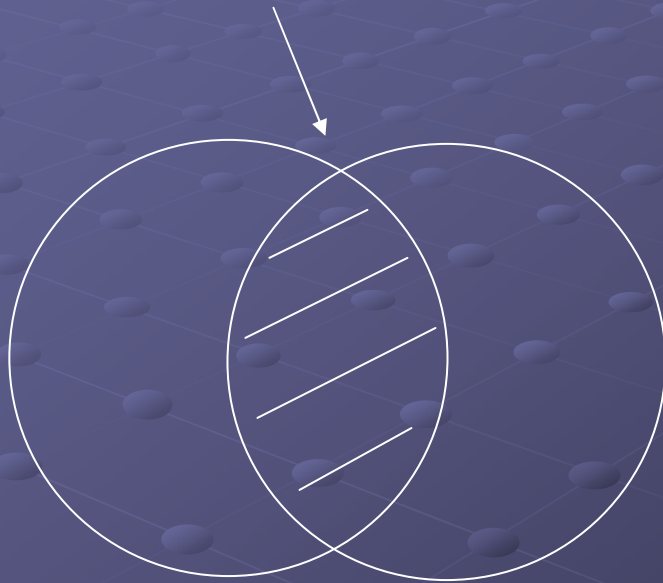
- American → Arab
- US Military → Iraqi civilians

# Analysis – Working Premises

1. Cross-cultural disparities central
2. Negatives  $\geq$  positives
3. Messages  $\rightarrow$  storylines  
 $\rightarrow$  master narratives

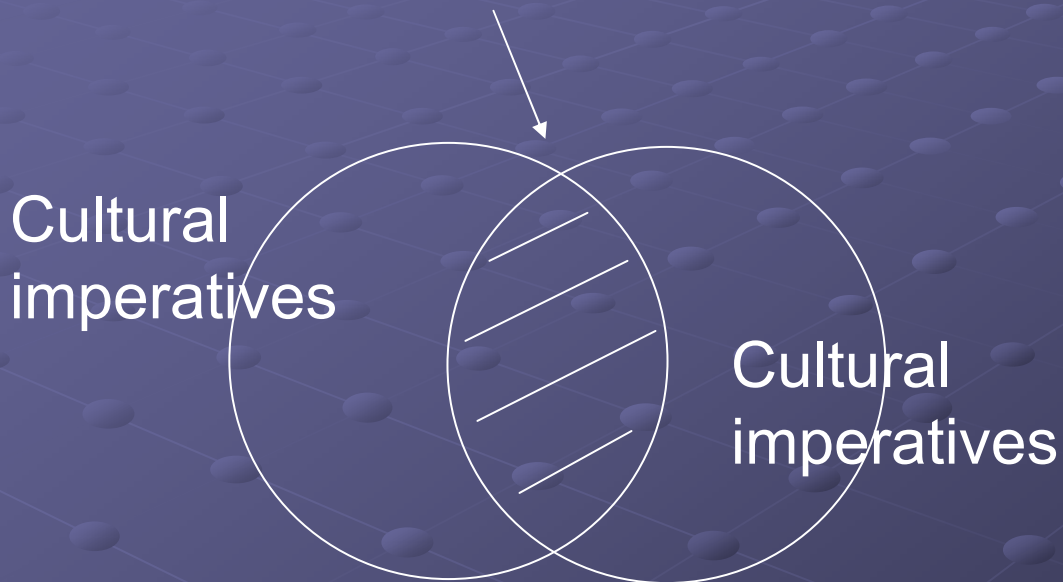
# Communication Context

Shared frame of reference → Understanding



# Cross-cultural – Combat Context

Unshared cultural frames → Tensions



# Media & Messages

Network-centric warfare

Baghdad

Daily Arabic Media Report

Iraqi bloggers

Washington / Monterey

Iraqi press

Al-Jazeera

Night Vision goggles

US / Islamic world

winning & keeping public goodwill

Civic Engagement

Urban warfare

fighting the bad guys

Insurgency / US troops

whole village

Human-centric warfare

# Cultural Disparities – Recurring themes

- Daily Arabic Media Report
- Arab media / bloggers
- Shot, killed, wounded
- People-event specific
- Military scorecard
- Human drama
- Who's winning
- Human toll
- Abstract, impersonal
- High impact / people identify



# Iraqi Civilians → Cultural Imperatives

- Honor, dignity, respect
- Family, sanctity of home
- Collective punishment
- Authority → responsibility

# Cultural Disparity: Why Problem of Hearts & Minds?

## ● US

→ Information problem

- Message, messenger
- Not hearing positives
- Opponents [Al-Jazeera]

## ● Iraqi civilians

→ Relationship problem

- Personal/family honor
- Tactics
- Security

# American Cultural Assumptions

- Communication = Information transfer
- Focus → message
- Currency → ideas
- Problem → absent or incorrect information
- Solution → more or better information
- Agency → persuasion strategy, mass media, advanced technology

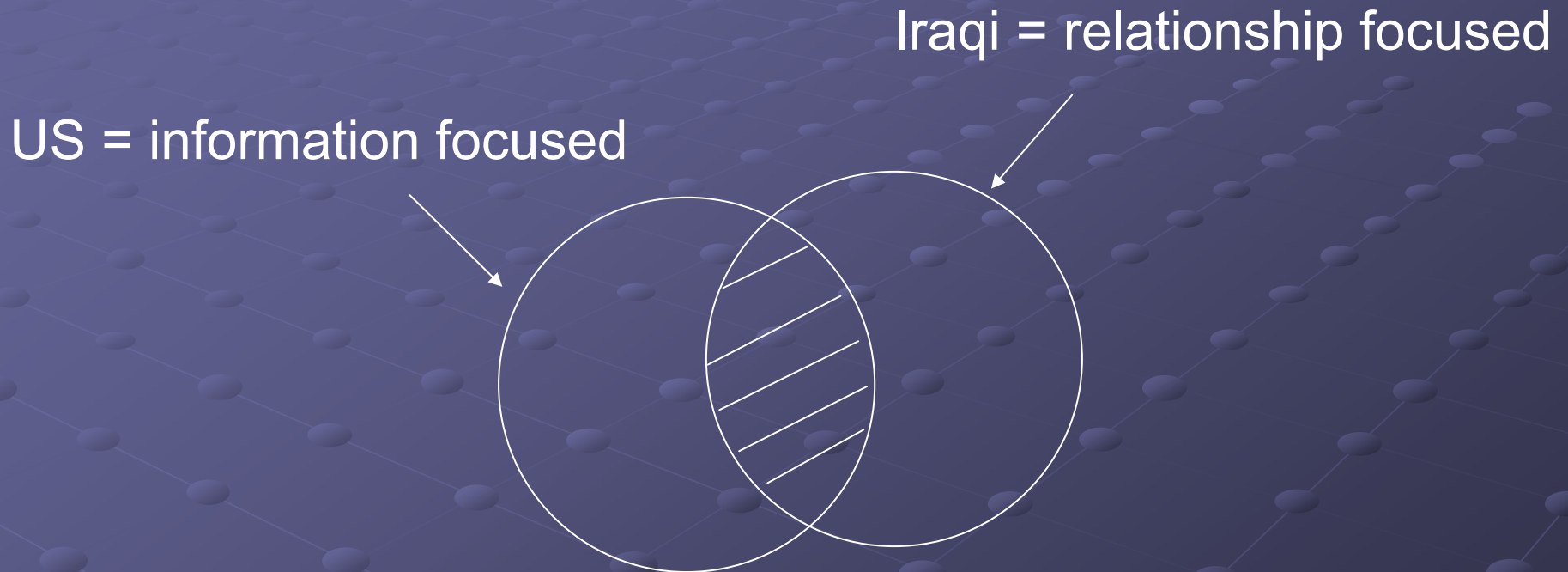
[complaint: information overload]

# Arab Cultural Assumptions

- Communication = Social process
- Focus → relationships
- Currency → connections
- Problem → strained or broken relations
- Solution → mend relations
- Agency → mediator, negotiator

[Complaint: relationship overload]

# Core Cultural Disparity



# Cultural Disparity: How Solve Problem?

Iraqi → Relationship  
problem

- US troops & tactics

US → Information  
solution

- Message
- Messenger

# US → Is it the *message* or the *messenger*?

- America
- Low-context
- Meaning is in the message
- Can separate message & messenger
- Arab
- High-context
- Meaning is in the context
- Cannot separate message & messenger

Iraqi → US troops = message & messenger

# Disparity: Culture Valuables

- US Military
  - Doing oriented
  - “Get the job done”
  - Task focused
  - Expediency
  - Security
- Iraqi Civilians
  - Being oriented
  - Public face: Dignity, honor, respect
  - Relations: family, tribe, home



# Scorecard: Negative $\geq$ Positives

\* Personal humiliation  
= Loss of face, dignity,  
social respect

\* Civic affairs  
\* Information /PR  
campaign  
\* Reconstruction  
projects

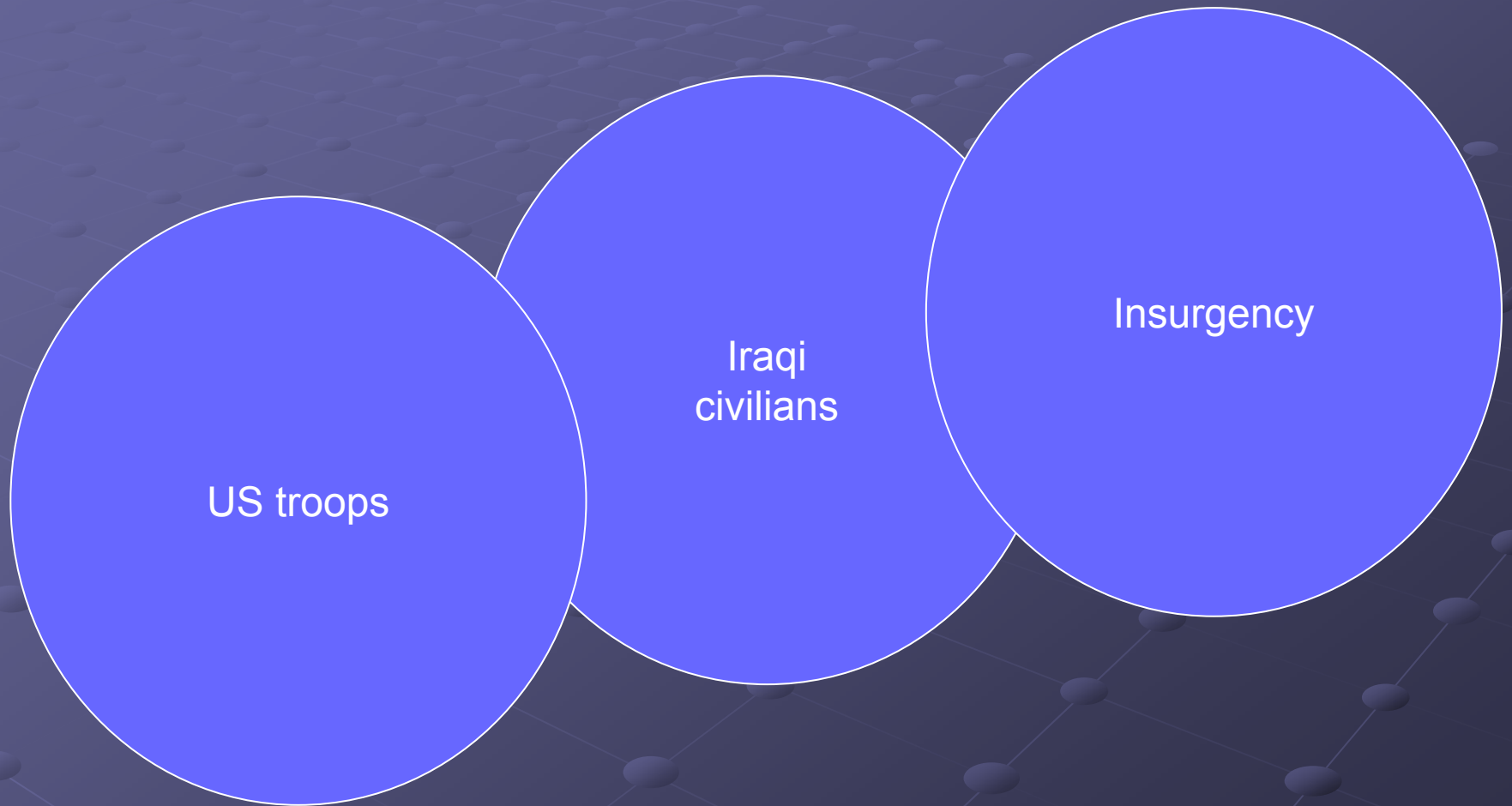
Negatives  $\rightarrow$  High  
personal, social cost

Positives  $\rightarrow$  Impersonal

# Creating Master Narrative

- US troop + local public → Create storyline
- Global publics identify with local public  
→ Storyline gains traction
- Master narrative → anti-Americanism

# Where are the people?



Insurgency trying to keep one  
step ahead of US

# Urban Warfare – Cultural Component

- Night vision goggles → Eyes of village
- Secure the ground → Retain public goodwill
- Command & control → Consult & coordinate
- Tactics, weapons, equipment  
→ Cultural savvy

# Next War: Strategic Global Communication Challenge of Cultural Landmines

- US troops / tactics → Trigger cultural landmines
- Alienate local public → Storyline
- Alienate global publics → Master narrative
- Anti-Americanism / US credibility

# Next War: Challenges

- How can US integrate cultural knowledge into troop training and tactics?
- How can US fight the bad guys without becoming the “bad guys” – villain in the story?

# Looking Ahead: Strategic *Global* Communication

WWII → propaganda

GWOT → relationship-based strategies

- Global cultures
- Global networks



# Thank you.

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