



CHAPTER V

Measuring Societal Group Effects on Cohesion

COMMON ATTITUDES, VALUES, AND BELIEFS among members of a unit promote cohesion; in fact, some observers contend that similarity of attitudes contributes to group cohesion more than any other single factor.¹ They also point out that if such similarity does not exist, conflict will often result, especially if the group is held together primarily by outside authority.

Incompatibility of attitudes and values among unit members can be altered through intense resocialization and leadership, but such efforts are usually only partially successful. Cohesion can be achieved far more quickly and to a far greater extent within a unit if a basic similarity has previously existed among soldiers' attitudes, values, and beliefs.²

The population that supplies soldiers to an army also provides at the same time their beliefs and values. Soldiers in small units (primary groups) are drawn from an overall population, or secondary group, which can be defined as the pattern of impersonal relationships within a large organized group.³ A secondary group is too large to function on the intimate face-to-face

basis of the cohesive small group, yet it also supports cultural norms and values, which guide the behavior and decisions of its members. Developing over time, these cultural values can be traced to such factors within the larger group as history, language, and religion.

If soldiers in a small unit are from a relatively homogeneous secondary group, unit cohesion is likely to be enhanced. On the other hand, dissimilar characteristics within a unit, such as language, religion, race, history, and the values that accompany these characteristics, tend to hinder cohesion.

Potential for Nationalism Indicates Degree of Cohesion

Significant research has been accomplished on the relationship between the commonality of cultural characteristics, the phenomenon of nationalism, and the ease with which cohesive armies have been created among nations experiencing nationalism.⁴ Nationalism may be defined as follows:

A belief on the part of a large group of people that they constitute a community called a nation, that is entitled to independent statehood and the willingness of that people to grant their nation their primary terminal loyalty.⁵

A study of nationalism will reveal that the role of cultural values and beliefs is central to its explanation, just as they are to explanations of cohesion in small units. The degree to which a strong commonality of such attitudes, values, and beliefs can be demonstrated between large secondary groups and much smaller primary groups will indicate the ease with which small cohesive military units can be created within a society.⁶ A nation's potential for nationalism and thereby the existence of the basic values and beliefs necessary for cohesive military units may be determined through an investigation of the cultural characteristics of the nation.

Two primary requisites for nationalism are an adequate population and the amount of territory a state controls or aspires to control. There is no recognized minimum number for either factor. Like Israel, modern nation states can be militarily powerful and yet be relatively small in numbers of citizens and square miles of territory. The ultimate survival of a nation depends on the unique circumstances facing it.

Another significant factor contributing to nationalism is a group's sense of a common and unique history and shared values. Generally, a people's history is a source of common values. It will be a force that draws a people together, especially if it includes a significant period of trial such as fighting and winning a revolutionary war or a war in defense of its boundaries. Even more significant is a people's expectation of a common future. Such a history rapidly becomes part of a people's culture. Legends and historical tales become part of every citizen's socialization. The telling and retelling of these experiences by teachers, grandparents, and friends perpetuates a group's history and also passes on cultural values to new generations.

A common language also promotes nationalism; for example, Hebrew. It eases communication among a people for a wide variety of purposes, while also establishing firm boundaries that often distinguish the group from others.

A sense of belonging to a unique ethnic group or race, often with an accompanying religion, also contributes to nationalism. Consider the Iranian resurgence of national pride and unity with its emphasis on the Persian heritage and Islamic religion.

Leadership, too, is an extremely important nationalistic factor. It is essential that the nation is the primary loyalty among the elite of a people. An elite or leadership with loyalties divided between transnational parties, specific geographical regions, or particular ethnic groups or tribes within the larger secondary group is a significant hindrance to the emergence of nationalism and ultimately to cohesion in that nation's army.

The final indication of a group's potential for nationalism is affected by all of the preceding indicators. It is the degree to which the overall population is aware that they are part of a nation and the priority they give that nation.

Just a bare outline of the principal factors affecting a nation's potential for nationalism has been presented here. The detailed work of Emerson, Kohn, and Cottam makes clear the degree to which nationalism is rooted in the basic cultural characteristics of a nation and supports the thesis that common cultural values significantly promote cohesion among members of a small unit.

Effects of Other Societal Factors

The individual soldier's commitment to his political system and to its ideology (such as democracy or communism) and related symbols contributes to cohesion in small units. The issue of why soldiers fight cannot be reduced to one particular reason—neither to small-group explanations nor to broader, fighting-for-a-cause explanations that are based in cultural or ideological causal roots. As Morris Janowitz states, "Obviously, we are dealing with an interaction pattern, but the primary group is essential for the realities of battle. If there is no social cohesion at this level, there is no possibility of secondary symbols accomplishing the task." ⁷

Most analysts agree, however, that compared to the influence of the small group, broad political and cultural values are not nearly as significant in explaining why soldiers fight. Leadership, especially great confidence in the commander at the company level, far outweighs any feelings that question the legitimacy of the war in affecting troop performance in combat.⁸ Nevertheless, cultural factors are useful in explaining soldiers' motivation and, indirectly, for building cohesion in small groups. Charles Moskos suggests, through this concept of "latent ideology," that broad cultural and ideological values can influence a soldier's behavior. These widely shared sentiments do have concrete consequences for combat motivation. The belief system of soldiers "must therefore be taken into account in explaining combat performance." ⁹

Commitment to a sociopolitical system is usually characterized by broad and general statements by a soldier that his governmental system is best. In support of his belief, the soldier points to evidence supporting the inherent superiority of his political system. Examples are the obvious and plentiful material goods of Western capitalism or the classless societies of communism. Such attitudes can further explain a soldier's behavior if they reflect a perceived need to protect the system through actions against another system or ideology (such as anti-communism or anti-imperialism). Secondary group values have their greatest impact on a soldier's motivation when they are internalized by the soldier through the small group that incorporates these broad norms within its day-to-day operating norms. In this instance, the

cultural value loses much of its "empty-slogan" character for the soldier and is linked directly to specific group rules and expectations about his behavior and actions.

The soldier's perception that society sincerely values his contribution and sacrifices for the nation can also motivate him and contribute to unit cohesion. Societies that value soldiers reinforce the romanticism and manly honor often seen in the soldier's life by members of society, especially the youth. This value is perpetuated through tradition and ceremonies honoring the military and, of course, through military victories. Materially, societies that value soldiers provide them priority and special privileges in obtaining the good things a country has, such as special stores and access to scarce goods. Soldiers can be further motivated toward successfully completing their tours of service through programs established by a society that are designed to reward and reintegrate them into society in a manner that recognizes their military service. In addition to symbolic awards, programs for further education and provision of financial aid for such needs as housing have been successfully used in a number of armies.

A people's potential for nationalism is, then, a significant indicator of the degree of cohesion that might be achieved in a nation's armed forces.

A nation's potential for nationalism and ultimately for cohesion in its army is indicated by the degree to which the following are present:

1. a large enough population,
2. sufficient territory,
3. a common and unique history,
4. a common and unique culture,
5. a common language,
6. a common religion,
7. a common race,
8. a nation that is the primary loyalty for the elite,
9. an adequate percentage of the population that

is aware of the nation and give it a primary loyalty.

Additional cultural characteristics that complement nationalism, motivate soldiers, and contribute to unit cohesion are

1. the soldier's belief his nation's political system is best as result of socialization or indoctrination,
2. evidence of the superiority of their system, such as the material well-being of the West or the classless society of communism,
3. a felt need by the soldier to protect the system through actions against another system (such as anti-communism or anti-imperialism),
4. broad cultural values and norms that have been internalized by the soldiers and become operating norms of the small unit,
5. the romanticism and manly honor often seen by youth in the soldier's life through tradition and society,
6. special programs to provide soldiers priority and special privileges for the good things in a society, and
7. programs designed to reward and reintegrate soldiers into society upon the successful completion of their service.