

Time to Get Real in Sociocultural Behavioral Research and Engineering:
The Rubber is Hitting the Road Across the DOD

U.S. Armed Forces have long understood the operational value of understanding the mindset of opposing forces and securing the cooperation and support of local populations. However, the U.S. is now expected to engage foreign populations more routinely, at all operational phases, and across a broader range of mission types than ever before. Success requires being able to anticipate how factors such as culture, society, group identity, religion, and ideology influence the behavior of foes and others in foreign populations. This new reality demands a broader, deeper capability, realized at tactical, operational, and strategic levels, and founded on the social and behavioral sciences:

Since 2008, the HSCB Modeling Program has helped support realization of this vision by funding innovative and rigorous applied research, advanced technology development, and prototypes. That research has helped build the sociocultural behavior science base, but has also been applied to current operations. The Program has also provided thought leadership and helped to bring greater coherence to the many programs and initiatives underway, in part through its *Focus* series of national conferences, which have involved over 600 participants each of the last two years.

Some of the Program's most exciting work is where the rubber hits the road in support of the nation's Combatant Commands (COCOMs). The Program now has technology transition agreements in process or completed with all appropriate geographic commands and the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). These agreements will enable transition of research designed to address core US challenges, including strengthening international and regional security, monitoring instability, and countering violent extremism. A prime example of this applied research is the World-Integrated Crisis Early Warning System. W-ICEWS has been developed to provide COCOMs and other operational entities with the ability to better anticipate where instability is imminent, in time to take effective action as appropriate.

Significant progress has been made toward building DoD capability for understanding sociocultural behavior, and there has been delivery of solutions to military end users. However, there is much work to be done. To ensure that R&E investments reflect the U.S. military's strategic priorities and leading operational challenges, the HSCB Program developed the Sociocultural Behavior Capability Areas framework. It calls for building warfighter capabilities to ***Understand*** sociocultural behavior, ***Detect*** relevant sociocultural signals, ***Forecast*** through persistent sensing of the environment, and ***Mitigate*** with measurable COA grounded in the social and behavioral sciences. The framework and recommendations regarding R&E priorities are presented in the document *Sociocultural Behavior Research and Engineering in the Department of Defense Context*. <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a549230.pdf>

Ultimately, the test of the knowledge products, technologies, and models produced through DoD sociocultural behavior R&E will be how they contribute to development of the future force, giving analysts, warfighters, and leaders more time and opportunity to do what they do best: out-think and out-innovate adversaries by bringing all instruments of power to bear.