

Dangerous Liaisons

Anthropologists and the National Security State

Edited by Laura A. McNamara and Robert A. Rubinstein



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Plowing the Human Terrain

Toward Global Ethnographic Surveillance

R. Brian Ferguson

This chapter is one of a pair in which I am trying to think through some of the foreseeable implications of the Pentagon's new quest for culture. The planned companion piece (Ferguson forthcoming), will go wide, engaging with engagement in its broadest senses. The present work is narrow, focused on the Human Terrain System (HTS), which in time may be seen as a comparatively simple topic. In years to come anthropologists will deal with ethical, moral, and political issues in innumerable professional contexts. Most will come in hues of gray. To cope with those challenges, it is important to have a sense where the slippery slope goes off a cliff, where professional ethics can be transgressed. That point, I will argue, is reached with the HTS.¹

I accept that those who advocate or sign up for the HTS have good intentions. They hope to use ethnographic understanding to save lives and lessen the destruction of war. I will argue that the information they gather in the field also can be used to help identify enemies for "kinetic" targeting, the application of military force. That is why participation in Human Terrain Teams crosses the ethical line. Anthropologists must not help militaries figure out whom to kill. More than that, the HTS folds into a projected worldwide monitoring of indigenous peoples for security threats by the Department of Defense (DoD). Anthropologists should not do that either.

to present what the population wants and expects, how it will react, and at all times promote nonlethal options. [A. Silverman 2009:1]

This vision of "war without blood" (West 2009:6) appeals to humanitarian sentiments. That goal is conspicuously absent in articles written for military audiences. In those writings the point is that anthropology can help our side fight smarter and *prevail*. For example, an architect of HTS wrote, before the system was formulated,

Successful counterinsurgency depends on attaining a holistic, total understanding of local culture....To defeat the insurgency in Iraq, U.S. and coalition forces must recognize and exploit the underlying tribal structure of the country; the power wielded by traditional authority figures; the use of Islam as a political ideology; the competing interests of the Shia, the Sunni, and the Kurds; the psychological effects of totalitarianisms; and the divide between urban and rural, among other things. [M. McFate 2005a:37]

HTS has two faces—one for the military and one for the public. The public relations campaign has been remarkably successful, but available facts do not support this claim of harm reduction

Organization

The original plan for HTTs was for four members commanded by a military team leader:

- Cultural Analyst: Specs: Civilian, MA/PhD, Cultural Anthropologist/Sociologist. Duties: Advise HTT and unit staff, conduct/manage ethnographic/social science research and analysis.
- Regional Studies Analyst: Specs: Civilian, MA/PhD, Area Studies. Fluency in area language. Duties: Provide local area interpretation of compiled human terrain information and run focus groups with locals.
- Human Terrain Research Manager: Specs: Military, W-2 to O-34, MI. Duties: Integrate human terrain research plan with unit intelligence collection plan. Serve as first CI [Combat Intelligence] screen for HT data. Secondary human terrain data advisor.
- Human Terrain Analyst: Specs: Military, E-6 to O-3/4. Any MOS.

Trained debriefer. Duties: Primary human terrain data researcher. [Kipp et al. 2006:13]

As the program developed, changes were made, as reflected in the new *Handbook* (Finney 2008:11–27). The standard size has increased to up to nine members. The title of "regional studies analyst" is gone, and the local cultural and language knowledge they were to bring is folded into the description of "human terrain analyst" (HTA). "Cultural analysts" are now called "social scientists," and there are to be two per team, along with two "research managers."

The HTAs, up to four of them, are the main field agents. Their extensive job description paints each as a veritable Lawrence of Arabia: operating with substantial autonomy, moving from place to place, gathering a volume and quality of information that would be impressive for a trained researcher with years in the field, building alliances, cutting across channels, and generally getting things done. Just half of the HTA's "essential task list" reads:

- Identify specified and implied cultural data requirements.
- Analyze the operated area against cultural data.
- Analyze available sources of local cultural information.
- Assess other characteristics of the battlefield (leaders, population, demographics, social, ethnic, and religion, etc.)
- Develop Human Terrain Information Requirements.
- Determine indicators and specific information requirements for supporting Commander's Critical Information Requirements, Decision Points, and Names Areas [sic] of Interest. [Finney 2008:23–24]

The social scientists themselves seem primarily tasked to attend meetings, frame research strategies to meet command needs, interpret data at higher social science levels, and serve as trusted counselors to the commander.

The duties and products of each HTT are so all-encompassing as to be impossible, a fantasy of what ethnographic attention can provide. This fieldwork miracle is to be accomplished by people who may have little to no social science training, little to no prior experience in the area, and very little time in one location to gather information and make friends. As an HTT research manager at Bagram told a reporter in March 2009, "Time spent on the ground in days, not minutes, is vital to building friendships" (Zumer 2009).

Some of my colleagues expect the HTS will go away because of its many problems: three team members killed in the line of duty, one convicted of manslaughter, one under investigation for espionage, loud whistle-blowing about incompetence in multiple areas, inadequate training, unacceptable scholarly and anthropological standards, unclear and unworkable chains of command, intractable personality collisions from top to bottom, sudden changes in management and training locations, inability to recruit competent social scientists, appointment of unqualified personnel and cronies, an investigative finding of sexual harassment and creating an intolerable work atmosphere, abrupt pay cuts midstream followed by resignation of many civilian employees, and so on (see Bill and Bob's Excellent Afghan Adventure 2009; Forte 2009a, 2009b; Glenn 2007; Isenberg 2009; Nature 2008; Pelton 2008; Piatetsky 2009:3; Price 2009; Weinberger 2008a; see also ongoing postings on Matt Tompkins's blog, *Iraq's Human Terrain*, e.g., Helbig 2008; on *Wired's* "Danger Room" by Nathan Hodge, Noah Schactman, and Sharon Weinberger, e.g., Schactman 2008, 2009; and on *Zero Anthropology* by John Stanton, e.g., Stanton 2008a, 2008b, 2009). On top of those problems, the HTS, and the larger emphasis on counterinsurgency and global "stability operations," face stinging critiques from within the military (Bacevich 2008; Connable 2009; Dunlap 2008; Katel 2008; Ricks 2009).

If this were anything but a Pentagon program, it would be dead by now. Yet the HTS seems locked in as a cornerstone of current DoD doctrine (see Albro 2009), promulgated by David Petraeus and his brain trust and backed by name by Defense Secretary Robert Gates (Connable 2009:63; Gates 2008:3; Jaschik 2008:2). Some \$200 million is sunk into it (Redden 2009:1). The Obama/Gates plan for Afghanistan expands HTS:

[M]ilitary officials say that they have worked hard in recent years to come up with creative programs that can win the population's trust, crucial to any effective counterinsurgency strategy. The human terrain program has become a cornerstone of that effort. A Pentagon study completed this month recommended that the Joint Chiefs of Staff increase the number of such advisors across the military "by factors of three to five," along with a large expansion of cultural training for members of the military. [Stockman and Bender 2009:2]

THE HUMAN TERRAIN SYSTEM

The HTS consists of Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) attached to field combat brigades and Reachback Research Cells (Kipp et al. 2006). The

first HTT was deployed to Afghanistan in February 2007, and five teams were in Iraq by early September 2007. The plan was to embed one HTS team in all twenty-six of the US combat brigades in Afghanistan and Iraq (Rohde 2007:1). In March 2009 the number of teams was on target, with twenty-one in Iraq and six in Afghanistan (Landers 2009b). It is not clear, however, how many of these teams were fully operational or how many anthropologists were involved (Rob Albro, personal communication, February 13, 2009)—and that count was before the pay reduction and turmoil that led to many resignations.

The stated mission of the HTS is "to provide commanders in the field with relevant socio-cultural understanding necessary to meet their operational requirements" (Human Terrain System 2008a:3). To quote one of many similar passages in the *Human Terrain Team Handbook*:

The HTT will research, interpret, archive, and provide cultural data, information, and knowledge to optimize operational effectiveness by harmonizing courses of action within the cultural context of the environment, and provide the commander with operationally relevant, socio-cultural data, information, knowledge and understanding; and the embedded expertise to integrate that understanding into the commander's planning and decision-making processes. [Finney 2008:35]

Throughout the *Handbook* the HTT is conceptualized as a fully integrated part of the command vision, showing "how the culture influences the battle space" (Finney 2008:16).

Appendix B of the *Counterinsurgency* manual (United States Department of Defense 2006a) gives a general idea of the product expected. One map overlay (B-3) displays the location of ethnicities. Another (B-2) is of "population support," which marks and labels local population clusters and numbers as "supports host nation," "supports insurgents," and "neutrals." The *Handbook* also details information to be collected for other kinds of mapping, including social networks, association matrixes, and event coordination registers (Finney 2008:36–37).

In public statements, defenders of the HTS claim that their goal is to find ways to reduce killing and destruction. For example:

My job in Iraq was to represent the population to promote non-lethal planning and operations. When a mission is conceptualized, when course of action recommendations have to be made, when decisive points are identified for the commander, my job is

The civilians in HTTs receive training, serve in uniform, and are issued weapons (MTC Technologies 2008). The practice of carrying weapons varies (Ephron and Spring 2008:1; Middle East Online 2008; Muirne 2007:36). A sympathetic reporter describes the fieldwork of Audrey Roberts, an anthropologist in Afghanistan, in this way:

When the Salerno Human Terrain Team arrives in a village for interviews, the commotion and the presence of heavily armed soldiers make it highly unlikely that Roberts will be invited for tea. Still, she has an ingratiating smile. Even though they are often nervous about being seen talking to an "American soldier," Afghans quickly open up to Roberts with complaints about the lack of security in their villages....She works the streets of Afghan villages wearing combat boots, a helmet, Army fatigues, and armored vest and ammo clips for the M-16 rifle she carries, though usually her work tools are a notebook and a pen. [Landers 2009b:2]

Another reporter comments about Roberts's team: "At a recent meeting with elders of the Mangal tribe....HTT personnel mingled and chatted to guests through Pashtun interpreters while stressing that they are not conventional military intelligence gatherers. Whether the tribesmen really get the distinction is unclear, but partners in the local government seem receptive" (DPA 2008). The uniforms and guns were among the circumstances noted by the AAA Commission on Anthropology's Engagement with the Security and Intelligence Communities in concluding that HTT members could not guarantee voluntary informed consent by studied populations (American Anthropological Association 2007:31).

Informed consent is the ethical cornerstone of anthropological field research, but "social scientists on HTTs do not submit their research to an institutional review board, as would normally be required for human research" (Weinberger 2008b:584). The HTT *Handbook* declares that an "accompanying document is written outlining how the research will comply with the protection of human research subjects according to 45 CFR 46 to ensure the research falls within accepted ethical guidelines" (Finney 2008:55). It goes on to state, "Our research is performed in the same manner in which academic social scientists conduct their research and is similarly rooted and theory and complete with ethical review boards" (56). To my knowledge, no substantiation has been made public of these claims of ethical guidelines and independent review boards. For that matter, attempts to find the meaning of "45 CFR 46" came up with nothing.

WHAT DO HTS FIELD TEAMS DO?

HTS advocates claim that the system benefits local populations and reduces the violence of war. Does it? They vigorously deny that they provide information that can be used to target people for violent action. Is that so? At present there is very little public information about the actual practice and impact of Human Terrain Teams. The first six HTTs were billed by Montgomery McFate as "proof of concept" that would produce a publicly available report of HTT activities. Responding to a critic's request for evidence that HTTs reduced casualties, in February 2008 she replied:

Professor González laments the lack of independent data to support the claim that HTS assisted in reducing lethal operations.... The qualitative and quantitative data from both Iraq and Afghanistan substantiating this claim will be included in the HTS Assessment Report. Given that HTS is a new project, it is not possible to have mature outcome evaluation data at this stage. Professor González will have to wait until next summer for the completed assessment, just like the DoD. [M. McFate and Fondacaro 2008:27]

That summer, and the next, came and went—no report for Professor González, or for anyone outside the DoD loop.

Advocates of the HTS, and of generally increasing engagement between academia and the military (Jaschik 2008), have pledged openness to outside scrutiny. HTS fails this test: no ethical review information, no research products, no evaluative reports or statistics, no metrics about the operations of HTTs—none of that has been made available. Even the HTT *Handbook* went public through a leak (Price 2008c). Our main source is news reports. Of course, news media access requires the approval of military and HTS administrators or officers. On that biased basis, here is "the news," first for Iraq, then for Afghanistan.

Iraq

Dave Matsuda of the Eighty-second Airborne's Second Brigade Combat Team is described in a Fort Hood newsletter as studying and explaining local tribal organization and hierarchy and counseling on necessary rituals, local scripts, and appropriate symbols. For a wanted poster he suggested an illustration of two open hands, derived from the Koran, instead of a Western scales of justice. Matsuda's executive officer comments, "It's great having them. They add a critical dimension to the fight, one that has been missing up to now" (Pryor 2007).

Marcus Griffin, the anthropologist with the 1-76 Cavalry's Charlie Company, developed indicators of local well-being, such as how the local market is stocked, and interviewed locals about schools and electricity, for example. Prior to joining the HTS his work had been on "Freegans," environmentalists who scour dumpsters, and in Baghdad he rummaged through trash for ideas (Ephron and Spring 2008:2). Griffin's (2007) blog describes other insights from a helicopter overflight: accumulated rubble and flooding by stagnant ponds and sewage probably led to increased stress in the population, and those problems should be addressed.

Another Iraq team with the First Infantry Division's Fourth Infantry Brigade Combat Team was led by Matt Tompkins, fiancé of whistle-blower Zenia Helbig, who was dismissed from HTT training when she joked about jumping sides (Helbig 2008). When an American officer suggested buying two hundred goats for a local sheik, his team recommended finding out first if the sheik wanted goats, or maybe something like work on the power grid (Mulrine 2007:35). When his unit needed to get a local police commander to crack down on subordinates suspected of aiding insurgents, the team suggested appealing to his pride. They pointed out that the subordinates were mocking him, which made him visibly angry (Ephron and Spring 2008:2).

Tensions about the role of this team are evident. When commanding officer Ricky Gibbs returned from a two-week visit home to first meet cultural anthropologist Lisa Verdon and area specialist Fouad Lghzaoui, he wondered how they would operate within the chain of command.

After the team ticks off a few planned projects, for example,

Gibbs has a question: "Who told you to study those things?"

What he most wants to know, he says, is the following: "How do I make [Iraqis] realize that I'm thinking what they're thinking?"

The questions keep coming. "How do I approach them in a way that helps? How do I get into the clique? How can I win the information campaign using the way they think?" Gibbs ends the exchange with a final query: "Are you all going to help?" "We will try," answers Lghzaoui. "Inshallah [God willing]." Verdon winces.

Gibbs looks at his team. "There is no trying," he says. "We're going to do an American inshallah on this one." That means, he says, "We're going to do it." Later Verdon digests the encounter, noting the teams have to be sensitive to the can-do American military culture too. [Mulrine 2007:36]

Gibbs also told the reporter that over time, HTT input was invaluable. For

instance, the team informed him that an image of a snake on some wall posters was a positive rather than a negative symbol, helping him better understand local attitudes. But problems with this team did not go away.

Another reporter noted that the "social scientist on [Tompkins's] team had no relevant field-research experience,...and their de facto translator was a Moroccan who barely spoke English" (Weinberger 2008b:584). Their cultural adviser "was pulled from Iraq only after five months of her military team leader reporting not only her inability to contribute, but her open refusal to acknowledge his authority, support information requests from the supported unit or coordinate with anyone on the team" (Helbig 2008:3). Following Helbig's criticism of the HTS, Tompkins was returned from Iraq and released from the program (Helbig 2008:6).

In a later news article, Tompkins was critical of HTS impact.

Tompkins...said he thought his team provided helpful input to its brigade, but the contribution was more superficial than planners of the program had conceived. "Without the ability to truly immerse yourself in the population, existing knowledge of the culture...is critical.... Lacking that, we were basically an open-source research cell." [Ephron and Spring 2008:2]

(The mention of "knowledge of the culture" refers to the fact that social scientists recruited to HTS often have had no research experience with Middle Eastern cultures.)

Tompkins...says that for every success in Iraq, he has suffered multiple frustrations and failures. And he doesn't believe his team members were uniquely qualified to provide the input they did. Tompkins says many of the officers and grunts he worked with had more-relevant knowledge and experience than the anthropologists, having served in Iraq twice or three times before. "These are dedicated individuals who are often intimately familiar with many of the nuances of the society and culture they are trying to engage with." [Ephron and Spring 2008:2]

This last observation is widely confirmed by others. For instance, Connable (2009:62), a foreign area officer, comments on reports of HTS successes:

These examples demonstrate common sense in a COIN [counterinsurgency] environment, not breakthroughs. Hundreds of Army and Marine staffs that accepted culture as a significant

element of terrain have been doing these things on a daily basis across Afghanistan and Iraq for years without HTS support. [See also Sepp 2007:218]

The best described Iraqi HTT is IZ6. Adam Silverman (2009), a non-anthropologist HTT social scientist, says his job was to represent and empower the local population and promote nonlethal options by the Second Brigade Combat Team/First Armored Division. His team, he says, was “able to directly or indirectly conceptualize and influence virtually all of our brigade’s problem sets and provide nonlethal options to resolve them” (A. Silverman 2009)—quite a claim. The only example he gives is this: “I provided information that presented a set of nonlethal options for resolving a problem regarding a local mosque.” His team did a lot of research, producing reports that “provide very important insight and findings regarding Iraqi tribal behavior, Iraqi politics, religion, rule of law, as well as the stabilization and reconstruction that is being undertaken” (A. Silverman 2009). Their findings were shared across the military spectrum and with the embassy and State Department (A. Silverman 2009).

A master’s thesis at the Naval Postgraduate School (Schaner 2008: 49–67) uses Silverman’s HTT as a case study based on interviews with the “IZ6 lead Social Scientist” (Silverman is not identified by name). This unit operated in a rural area south and east of Baghdad that was “comparatively stable” and an “ideal area for agricultural development and revitalization” (Schaner 2008:49–50). Two of the three IZ6 activities described have the character of postconflict stability operations. In one case brigade planning had prioritized the revival of local fish farming, and the HTT, working with military Civil Affairs teams, developed information about water infrastructure, local ideas of what worked in the past and could work in the future, and which laborers to hire to improve local ties. In the other case, in response to land disputes involving displaced persons in the area, the HTT created a plan for an arbitration system attuned to local values and law. Both sound like worthwhile projects, but the world is awash with failed plans for promoting prosperity and justice. No information is provided about implementation or results of these plans. Results are what matter, as the third HTT case demonstrates.

The most illuminating illustration of how an HTT can work in a conflict situation came about accidentally. The team leader was attending a “municipality development conference,” and in one session where other US military personnel were not present (my emphasis throughout),

a senior Shia tribal Sheikh started shouting and was subsequently escorted out by a senior Sunni tribal Sheikh. A translator explained to the IZ6 Team Leader that the tribal Sheikh was shouting about how things are never done right, never completed, and how things are never improved. However, the tribal Sheikh’s comments in front of his peers directly contradicted what the Social Scientist heard the tribal Sheikh say to his American associates in a different forum. An Iraqi conference participant revealed that the tribal Sheikh’s apparently contradictory behavior had root in a great amount of confusion that exists among Iraqis over what America is trying to accomplish in Iraq. The Iraqi conference participant elaborated on this reasoning by further explaining that most Iraqis do not understand how a nation like the United States could invade a country like Iraq, and then turn around and rebuild it. In the eyes of Iraqis and in Iraqi culture, these are two contradictory and confusing endeavors that generate mistrust and confusion, and sit at the root of the tribal Sheikh’s contradictory behavior. [Schaner 2008: 59]... [This] unique instance in which the HTT Team Leader observed a candid outburst of a prominent Shia tribal leader in a setting with no American military leaders present...was somewhat startling and indicated that perhaps Iraqi-American relationships still needed improvement with respect to this segment of society. [59, 60]... IZ6 enables the BCT [Brigade Combat Team] to better bridge into the population by first identifying the true perceptions of local citizens and leaders. Having this kind of knowledge allows for an improved quality of interaction between the BCT and the civilian population. This in turn helps the BCT refine all functions it performs with respect to the population (e.g., security, counterinsurgency, and reconstruction). [62]

A straightforward interpretation of these events is that local Iraqis see US development efforts as incompetent failures, that they still see the army as occupiers, and that they tell the conquerors what they want to hear. The HTT analysis, instead, portrays this as an expression of “Iraqi culture,” which renders locals “confused” and prone to “contradictory behavior.” This accidental revelation was “startling” to the HTT social scientist—who identifies himself as the representative of the local population to the US military. Good thing he was privy to this meeting, or else the brigade might not have learned that its relationship with local peoples still needed some tweaking. As it was, a report of the “Sheikh outburst” was submitted, and

the BCT staff used it to draft new "assessment and updating population engagement practices" (Schaner 2008:60). "[B]etter practices can be implemented that address the principal concerns and confusions claimed to be endemic within Iraqi citizens" (61). What practices, exactly, are not clear. They are to be discovered by trial and error. Other more targeted implications are obvious.

Sheikh X is identified by the HTT as very angry at the Americans and duplicitous. "IZ6 greatly contributed to enhancing awareness and insight into the truth about what a senior local Shia tribal Sheikh actually believed versus what he conveyed to his American associates. Given that this particular tribal Sheikh is a senior leader in his community, such beliefs most likely reflect the sentiments of his constituents" (Schaner 2008:59). If there were a new wave of IED killings in the area, would not this identification of Sheikh X as duplicitous and angry at the United States put him and his followers under increased suspicion? At the Society for Applied Anthropology meetings that preceded this volume, Adam Silverman adamantly asserted that his work provided no information that could be used to identify potential enemies, but "the truth" about Sheikh X is precisely that kind of information.

Montgomery McFate, lead spokesperson for the HTS, gave a reporter one example of how an Iraq HTT reduced local violence. The case involved a young man detained by the military because they found what they thought was

jihadist literature and an illegal weapon. These detentions... can easily escalate into major conflicts with the local community. But in one recent case, researchers helped defuse a potential conflict. Analysts working for a "human-terrain team" informed a US commander that the "jihadist" literature... was ordinary religious teaching material, and the weapon—a rifle scope—was for a pellet gun that beekeepers in the area use for shooting birds. The suspect was promptly released, and his family ended up helping US forces by revealing the location of a large improvised explosive device. [Weinberger 2008a:583]

Told to another reporter, this story got better—much better.

[A]fter an HTT officer identified the prisoner as harmless and the commanding captain was ready to release him, the HTT officer explained that the local Iraqis would consider the release insulting unless it was done in accordance with their culture.

FLOWING THE HUMAN TERRAIN

McFate said that after the captain released the prisoner in what the townspeople considered a respectful manner, the local sheikh was so impressed that he volunteered to drive out Al Qaeda himself, and also informed the American military of the location of several weapon caches and improvised explosives. [Swire 2008]

Sharon Weinberger (2008a) checked McFate's tale with the commander of that HTT. He confirmed that the team helped defuse the situation—without any mention of any subsequent benefits—but clarified that no anthropologist was involved. The recommendation to release came from himself and "an Iraqi-American analyst. There wasn't even a social scientist on the team at the time" (Weinberger 2008a:584). This example illustrates why many anthropologists are skeptical of unsubstantiated claims by HTS advocates. And as Weinberger (2008a:483) herself asks about McFate's story, what if the HTT had determined that the young man really did have jihadist literature?

Afghanistan

The first HTS team in Afghanistan, with the Eighty-second Airborne's Fourth Brigade, received a great deal of publicity centering on Tracy St. Benoit, a non-PhD anthropologist and a former combat aviator (Featherstone 2008:62–63; Gulfnews.com 2009; Rohde 2007). Not knowing what to do with these strange ducks (members of the HTT), brigade commander Col. Martin Schweitzer installed them as part of intelligence analysis. The team improvised. They built rapport with Afghan workers on the base and speeded up repair of the base mosque. They advised on medium and content for a broadcast message against people becoming suicide bombers. They opened up communication with women; they counseled soldiers on body language. They explained to the commander the Pashtun code of ethics. "That's when we started understanding Pashnunwali," [Schweitzer] said. "The minute (the HTT) plugged in their computers." The team held meetings in dozens of villages to better understand Taliban influence, and found it was not based on ideology, but on lack of income and security" (Featherstone 2008: 62–63). St. Benoit identified a long-standing dispute over timber rights that divided the large Zadran tribe and interpreted Taliban actions as efforts to play off this division. She suggested actions to help bring the Zadrans together, such as building a school to be used by different factions and convoking *shuras* (local assemblies) to discuss problems (Rohde 2007). A reporter (Featherstone 2008:66) accompanied a non-HTS Provincial

Reconstruction Team (PRT) mission to a village St. Benoit had not visited because it was thought to be "stable." The local doctor complained to the soldiers of Pakistani Taliban infiltrating the area and said that they needed killing, not reconciliation. On the mission's return, St. Benoit provided her perspective to Featherstone (emphasis added):

"But that sounds like a thoroughly entrenched Taliban presence," Tracy said. "It had all the metrics.... It was too bad," she said. The PRT had missed an opportunity to gather critical information. Had she been there, *she would have interviewed the doctor at length about the evolution of the Taliban threat.... It was quite possible that the doctor was allowing the Taliban to use his clinic....* Otherwise they would have killed him a long time ago. She asked me if I'd noticed anything on the ground outside the clinic. "Rocks, that's about it." "Any needles?" I...recalled that a soldier had told me to stay away from some discarded syringes. "That's significant," Tracy said. *It was a clear sign that the Taliban had been there.... Soldiers were too preoccupied with providing security to notice such patterns, she added, which is why they needed an HTT to guide them.* [Featherstone 2008:66]

Consider this report against the denials that HTTs gather tactical information about enemies.

One of St. Benoit's contributions was reported first in the *New York Times* (Rohde 2007), but the anecdote is often repeated—up to the Secretary of Defense (Jaschik 2008). In one incursion into a valley in Paktia Province, "Tracy identified an unusually high concentration of widows in one village," Colonel Woods said. Their lack of income created financial pressure on sons to provide for their families, she determined, a burden that could drive the young men to join well-paid insurgents. Citing Tracy's advice, American officers developed a job training program for the widows (Rohde 2007:3). That makes good press, though the notion that a job training program for widows by a temporary occupying military force will change their living circumstances seems highly unrealistic. What is not noted in the anecdote's repetition is that St. Benoit has thus identified widows' sons as potential insurgents, a point that could become part of standard profiling techniques in insurgent areas. Will that help their mothers?

In another illustration of the utility of a "woman's perspective," St. Benoit's questionnaires revealed that mullahs in "the more conservative tribes" preached against contraception. "And so one of the things that

came out of this was an evolving metric for Taliban influence,' Tracy said. 'Female contraception. Who would've thought?'" (Featherstone 2008:63). Does this not help identify locations where Taliban are strong?

A "preliminary assessment" of this HTT was completed in August 2007. It was not made public, but glowing highlights are posted on the HTS website, including three particular accomplishments. In one case, a village had been firing rockets at a local base. On HTT advice village elders were brought into a discussion. They claimed it was not them but the Taliban firing and pledged to stop them if the coalition would pay occasional friendly visits to the village and give them a volleyball net. Both were done, and the rockets stopped. In another area, an HTT advised the military to reach out to local mullahs rather than village elders who were supporting the Taliban. That led to an immediate cessation of attacks. In a third, the HTT convinced a company commander that a local village supported the Taliban only because they were being coerced. They convened a shura, after which villagers agreed to the construction of a road and employment of local youth as auxiliary police to keep the Taliban out (Human Terrain System 2008a; see also Schweitzer 2008). These examples sound way too good to be true, or at least, enduring.

The *New York Times* story (Rohde 2007) first reported Colonel Schweitzer's seemingly compelling point, also often repeated, that this first HTT led to a 60 to 70 percent reduction in kinetic actions by the military. However, as Noah Schactman (2007) reported, "Even some HTT members have a hard time believing that figure. And [HTS administrator] Fondacaro cautions that the 4th Brigade's area of operations was relatively calm, and therefore well suited to social-science research. But the local commander insists that 53 of 83 districts now support the local government...up from just 19." David Price, failing to find evidence for this claim, contacted Colonel Schweitzer directly. The colonel replied that this claimed reduction was his own "loose estimate" (Price 2009:5; Weinberger 2008a:584). Advocates of the HTS say it reduces kinetic actions against local peoples. These dubious two-year-old claims about the first Afghanistan HTT are the only *specific* examples of kinetics reduction made public to date.

St. Benoit was the first HTT anthropologist in Afghanistan. More recently, Audrey Roberts, a non-PhD anthropologist, worked with one of the six HTTs in Afghanistan by early 2009. Her team learned that local tribal groups were trying to settle a dispute among themselves, documented Taliban attacks on local officials, reported widespread disgust about governmental corruption, relayed objections about nighttime raids that violated norms of dignity by exposing women to American soldiers,

explained that economic travails enabled recruitment by well-paying insurgents, and found that local fighters are from several distinct groups—opium traffickers, kidnapping gangs, Al-Qaeda, and both Afghani and Pakistani Taliban. This sounds like worthwhile information for the commander, but the glowing report in the *Dallas Morning News* (Landers 2009b) makes no reference to reducing kinetic operations. Military planners interviewed by the reporter say the information HTTs gather helps them “identify ways to turn the insurgents against each other and to identify groups that might be willing to negotiate” (Landers 2009b). Another reporter quotes Roberts, “We identify the environment that the bad guys operate in, build a foundation for units so they can understand their area” (DPA 2008).

Description of Roberts’s work originally appeared in the *Dallas Morning News* on March 8, 2009. It was picked up by the *Boston Herald* on March 13, and from there went all over the web. There is only one substantive change in the second article, but it is a plainly misleading alteration. The *Herald* ended thus:

The work of the Human Terrain Teams is controversial. The American Anthropology [sic] Association has condemned the work as a corruption of social science because it provides the military with intelligence to use against the insurgency. Roberts said her work was not classified, and was available for any and all military and civilian groups working to support the Afghan government. [Landers 2009b:3]

The original story ended this way:

The work of the Human Terrain Teams is controversial. The American Anthropology Association has condemned the work as a corruption of social science because it provides the military with intelligence to use against the insurgency. Roberts does not worry about what the military does with her information, even if it is fed into the intelligence used by U.S. Special Forces for killing or capturing insurgent leaders. “If it’s going to inform how targeting is done...whether that targeting is bad guys, development or governance...how our information is used is how it’s going to be used,” she said. “All I’m concerned about is pushing our information to as many soldiers as possible. The reality is there are people out there who are looking for bad guys to kill.”

Roberts said. “I’d rather they did not operate in a vacuum.” [Landers 2009a:4]

(The *Boston Herald* posting has been withdrawn from the Internet, so all links to it are down. As of this writing, the only access to the altered story is through a Marine veterans’ site, Leatherneck.com.)

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AND TARGETING

Montgomery McFate is adamant that the teams do not collect military intelligence or participate in targeting attacks. She “vehemently denied that the anthropologists collected intelligence for the military” (Rohde 2007:8). Furthermore, as is posted on the HTS website,

HTTs do not proactively elicit actionable intelligence [note the hedge] from the local civilian population. Team members are legally prohibited from performing active intelligence collection. Only Military Intelligence (MI) Human Intelligence (HUMINT) Collectors can answer specific questions from the brigade’s intelligence unit. Furthermore, brigades do not need HTTs to collect intelligence or assist with targeting, since they already have a large intelligence staff that performs this function for them. The role of the HTTs is to help the troops better understand who is NOT their enemy. [Human Terrain System 2008b]

But how can one better understand who is *not* the enemy without better understanding who is the enemy?

How important is the legal prohibition when the team terrain analyst will “have a military intelligence background,” and the terrain research manager is also specified as having “a military background in tactical intelligence,” with his primary duty being to “integrate human terrain research plan with unit intelligence collection plan” (Kipp et al. 2006:13)? According to the *HTT Handbook*,

while HTT is not an intelligence asset, HTT feedback is incorporated into the S2’s Intelligence Preparation of the Environment to ensure the commander is apprised of all relevant aspects of the operational environment.... [For example, HTT] Link Charts presenting any significant persons of influence who may be affected by the mission should be presented. These link charts should illustrate the relationship of the entity to the

mission and his/her position within society (including ties to key political figures, threat organizations, etc.). [Finney 2008:36-37]

So the mapper of human terrains is directly charged with identifying "significant persons of influence" in a mission area and their connections to "threat organizations."

The *Handbook* includes interview questions that obviously could elicit identification of adversaries of US forces:

Security: Research the security situation. Ask everyone you talk to about the security situation and how it is compared to last year. Find out why it is better or worse than last year. Ask for examples. [Finney 2008:70]

And,

Issues/friction points: Discover if there are prior or existing issues with the Coalition Forces, Local Army, Local Police, other tribes, within in [sic] the tribes, other villages, etc. Discover if there are past incidents with the Coalition for which the residents harbor any malcontent. [Finney 2008:71]

The *Handbook* does say, clearly, that HTT members are not to be involved in the process of deadly targeting:

No Lethal Effects Targeting. The commander has an intelligence section for lethal targeting, what they require is a section that can explain and delineate the non-lethal environment (e.g. tribal relationships and local power structures), as well as the second and third order effects of planned lethal and non-lethal operations. [Finney 2008:82]

Is it conceivable that the commander's MI and staff will *not* make use of the mapping, network analysis, and other data gathered by HTTs in their efforts to identify targets? An experienced foreign area and intelligence officer (and vocal critic of HTS) calls the supposed separation of HTT data from intelligence "broadly inaccurate.... Cultural information is inextricably linked to the intelligence process" (Connable 2009:59). "Reality is that combat intelligence staffs in both Afghanistan and Iraq have received some updated training and are aggressively collecting and analyzing cultural data" (Connable 2009:63). On this point, Lt. Col. Gian Gentile wrote to a supporter of the HTS:

Don't fool yourself. These Human Terrain Teams whether they want to acknowledge it or not...do at some point contribute to the collective knowledge of a commander which allows him to target and kill the enemy in the Civil War in Iraq. I commanded an Armored Reconnaissance Squadron in West Baghdad in 2006. Although I did not have one of these HTTs assigned to me (and I certainly would have liked to), I did have a Civil Affairs Team that was led by a major....I often used his knowledge to help me sort through who was the enemy and who was not and from that understanding that he contributed to I was able to target and sometimes kill the enemy. So stop sugarcoating what these teams do. [González 2009b:36]

Supporters of the HTS often note Colonel Schweitzer's estimate that in his second tour of duty HTTs helped reduce kinetic operations by 60 percent. Not noted is what Schweitzer says he would have done with an HTT on his *first* tour of duty, when he had not yet seen the light of culture: "I would've used it to have a better understanding of the population so I could eliminate them. You can do that with the HTT, but that doesn't win the fight" (Featherstone 2008:64). There it is in black and white—whether HTTs are used for lethal targeting depends on the intentions of the commander. The HTT *Handbook* backs up that conclusion. Teams are encouraged to develop their own plans for research, so they "are not waiting around for someone in the unit to ask us to do something that may be of an intelligence nature that compromises our ethical integrity and claim to being different from what already exists" (Finney 2008:56).

HTS advocates write as if sociocultural advising and data gathering are isolatable from violent military engagement. "HTTs work primarily with units whose function is explicitly non-lethal, such as medical personnel, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, Civil Affairs, etc. When they do work with maneuver units, HTTs improve the units' abilities to carry out non-lethal aspects of their roles" (Human Terrain System 2008b). This is an illusion. The HTT *Handbook* repeatedly emphasizes that the HTTs' work is to be fully integrated into a spectrum of command options. In its final appendix, "Commander Feedback," Col. Todd McCaffrey states: "In summary, the team has become an indispensable asset in helping me understand the complexities of tribal and political relationships and assess the potential results of a variety of lethal and non-lethal actions" (Finney 2008:119). Lethal and nonlethal, both.

Looking at the demand side, military writers are crystal clear that they want "ethnographic intelligence" and cooperative options as part of a unified approach that includes ready application of deadly force. For example, as pre-HTS commander in Iraq Morgan Mann (2007:106) writes:

Understanding tribal organization and leadership is critical to success in rural Iraq.... We must make every effort to understand an area's tribal alignment and disposition in order to focus the appropriate combat, economic, and political power needed to defeat the tribe or change its position regarding the coalition.... Just as we develop a combined obstacle overlay when analyzing terrain and enemy mechanized movement, we must develop an overlay to understand tribal influence in the AO [Area of Operations]. Overlays should display tribe names, boundaries, and dispositions, and indicate which tribes dominate in the AO. Once we understand the tribal relationships in our area, we can leverage our power in the tribal environment. We must collect names, tribal affiliations, photos, and home grid coordinates of all males in the area and meticulously record the information in appropriate computer databases.

Major Mann (2007:105) is clear that knowledge of the human terrain is key for *simultaneously* reducing violent clashes, building alliances, and effectively targeting the enemy:

Because we demonstrated that we would use targeted violence whenever necessary, tribal attacks on Marines decreased and intelligence about the enemy increased. Soon we were able to broker truces with the formerly hostile tribes. Of course, the use of lethal force is not the only means of demonstrating power. There were benefits to cooperating with us or even just remaining neutral.... The Caragoul tribal leadership recognized that coalition forces could and would take decisive action along a power continuum ranging from the use of deadly violence to economic and social incentives.

HTS anthropologists would not be directly involved in targeting attacks, but information they elicit, analyze, and present would be. The Human Intelligence teams that go out to identify targets will be aware of the HTT findings, even if they are prohibited from accessing individual identifications. Say a young man somehow comes to their attention.

Standard HTT research findings could tell them if he lives in X location, he must be a Y; as a member of Y, he will follow the directive of Sheikh Z; Sheikh Z has a blood debt against coalition forces because they killed his brother two years ago; Sheikh Z is a major political adversary of tribes allied with the coalition and has known connections to mullahs suspected of ties to insurrectionists; the individual in question would have few economic options and may need money as provided by insurgents to support his family. Would not all that cultural intelligence help to identify the young man as a likely enemy?

The ethical issues only get more complex. What if "the people we study" were expanded to include the military units within which anthropologists are embedded and with whose personnel they will expectably form close ties? Ethically, could an anthropologist *not* help identify adversaries who want to kill them? What if during a visit to a village a person whispers, "Those two, against the wall... they are just waiting for you to leave. They will kill anyone who works with you"? Does the anthropologist keep that to herself? The situation is impossible. Anthropologists face ethical dilemmas in many field situations, including whether or not to intervene in a situation to save a life. With HTTs this sort of quandary is built into the very nature of the job, and saving one life may imply taking another. Problems do not stop in the field.

Who Else Will Get Human Terrain Data?

Information gathered by HTTs is forwarded to Reachback Research Cells in the United States. A stated goal of the Reachback system is to enable the "sharing" of information gathered by HTTs.

In addition to the capabilities the HTS offers to brigade commanders and other decision makers in given areas of operation, the data it compiles will be available for the training, modeling, and simulation communities to better support deploying forces in their mission rehearsal exercise scenario development. Other U.S. Government agencies will also have access to the central database. And finally, to facilitate economic development and security, the compiled databases will eventually be turned over to the new governments of Iraq and Afghanistan. [Kipp et al. 2006:14]

The "other U.S. Government agencies" that are intended to have access to HTS data are not specified, but surely include intelligence agencies. The

Defense Science Board Task Force, in its vision for a thoroughly culturized DoD, emphasizes centralization and availability of all sources of cultural information, including from the HTS (Defense Science Board 2009: xvii-xix).

Then what? One answer to "Human Terrain Data—What Should We Do With It?"—in an article of that name—is to use it to develop ever more sophisticated computer models (González 2008b:25; B. Silverman 2007). Commitment to this is on a scale similar to the HTS itself. DoD projections allocate \$124 million dollars to "Human Social Culture Behavior Modeling" and other "social science modeling over the next six years" (Bhattacharjee 2007). This effort is to be integrated with high-tech gadgets for getting at the truth, such as "automated sentiment, intention, deception detection" and "geo-spatial dynamic network analysis and the combination of neuro-cognitive models and dynamic network analysis in the area of influence, attitudes, and beliefs" (Defense Science Board 2009:xvii).

In this military/intelligence fantasy, knowing eyes on the ground will track the smallest details, analyze, compare, try out practical applications, and pass results up to higher levels. There hypotheses will be tested, algorithms refined, and then sent back down for implementation by forces in the field. Doctrine will become an organic being, evolving to maximize US domination in areas of security interest by whatever approach works best. And what good is a fantasy of domination, unless it is *global* domination?

FUTURE EXTENSIONS

This DoD security vision looks beyond current conflict situations to mapping key information about local peoples in *potential* "trouble spots" all over the world. Plans to send HTTs to "the Pacific" and Africa are in process (MTC Technologies 2008). A reporter asked HTS program manager Steve Fondacaro if it was not already too late to send HTTs to Iraq and Afghanistan:

[H]e was optimistic that his program would not only survive the outcome of these wars but thrive. There was no shortage of conflict in the world. Wars were brewing in Somalia, Nigeria, Indonesia, South America, the Philippines. "All these areas are getting ready to blow up, just like this, just like Iraq," Fondacaro said. In this world afire, Human Terrain Teams would be on the ground far ahead of military forces. Every hot spot would have a tailor-made HTT cell at its center, feeding a constant stream of analysis to policymakers and generals. "Here we have the military in the lead, in Afghanistan," Fondacaro said. "In

Mindanao, the social scientists would be in the lead." [Featherstone 2008:68]

AFRICOM, the new unified military command for the continent, is the first non-war zone target for HTS advocates. A recent job posting from Archimedes Global Inc. looks to staff a "Socio-Cultural Cell" and a "Social Science Research Center" for AFRICOM, with more to follow. Gen. William Ward, head of AFRICOM, emphasized the importance of cultural anthropologists and recruited them himself at the UK Royal United Services Institute. They are not, however, advertising for "human terrain analysts," making a reporter wonder, "Is there some re-branding at work here? Or might the two projects work side-by-side" (Hodge 2009)?

The HTS will be only one part of the effort to "map human terrains" globally, and anthropology is only one of many disciplines that will be involved. "Social scientist" slots in HTTs can be filled by people from comparative religion, political science, sociology, psychology, regional studies, and so on. The current controversy over the American Geographical Society's Bowman Expedition, funded by DoD to map land use in the potential "trouble spot" of Oaxaca, suggests that the discipline of geography may face a greater quandary than anthropology (Herlihy et al. 2008; Mychalajko and Ryan 2009; Sedillo 2009). In the giant computational system of Pentagon fantasy, all social/behavioral data and theory will feed into one total, actionable understanding.

For a chilling look at Pentagon thinking along global lines, consider "Networks: Terra Incognita and the Case for Ethnographic Intelligence" (Renzi 2006a; see also Renzi 2006b). This is not proposed as an extension of the HTS—Renzi is notably vague about the means. The ends, however, are to maximize the Pentagon's panopticon of global indigenous surveillance.

The proliferation of empowered networks makes "ethnographic intelligence" (EI) more important to the United States than ever before....I propose that we [look at] amassing EI, the type of intelligence that is key to setting policy for *terra incognita*.... With the United States no longer facing a relatively simple, monolithic enemy, our national interests are found in a confusing cauldron of different locales and societies.... Today, we have little insight into which cultures or networks may soon become threats to our national interests. For this reason, America must seek to understand and develop EI on a global scale, *before* it is surprised by another unknown or dimly understood society or network....

[A] low-key, constant interest in overt ethnographic matters would show that the United States cares and is indeed watching. Perhaps this constant attention would serve to subtly constrict the amount of safe-haven space available for dark networks. The overt information gathered by military ethnographers could complement the covert work done by the CIA (and vice versa)....Ethnographic intelligence can empower the daily fight against dark networks, and it can help formulate contingency plans that are based on a truly accurate portrayal of the most essential terrain—the human mind. United States policymakers must not commit us ever again to terra incognita. The Nation must invest in specialized people who can pay “constant attention” to “indigenous forms of association and mobilization,” so that we can see and map the human terrain. [Renzi 2006a:16–22]

Will this global ethnographic surveillance enhance global targeting ability? John Wilcox, the assistant deputy undersecretary of defense, presented a PowerPoint slide at a meeting of the Precision Strike Winter Roundtable. This organization focuses on high-tech weapons systems to eliminate targets around the world at very short notice. The slide began with “Need to ‘Map the Human Terrain Across the Kill Chain’—*Enables the Entire Kill Chain for GWOT*” (Wilcox 2007). GWOT, of course, is the Global War on Terror. The Kill Chain is a linked sequence of operations: Plan, Find, Fix, Track, Target, Engage, Assess. Montgomery McFate responded that Undersecretary Wilcox “is in no way connected with HTS” (González 2008b:22, 25; S. McFate 2008:27). That is the point. What HTS produces will be used by other people outside and above it.

Everything discussed in this chapter is about just one aspect of our coming security engagement. Anthropology will be a theoretically large, if numerically small, node in several dimensions of strategic planning and operations. The sort of ethnographic intelligence needed for counterinsurgency will be just as essential for stability operations (Center for Technology and National Security Policy 2008), civilian surges (Binnendijk and Cronin 2008; DeYoung 2009; Jelinek 2009), or a new foreign combat advisor corps (Nagi 2007), just as anthropology will be key for the multidisciplinary strategic research community to be created by the Minerva program of social science funding. “Culture” is pivotal in the Pentagon’s grand strategy for the future (United States Joint Forces Command 2008: 46–50). This broader engagement will be the subject of a subsequent paper (Ferguson forthcoming).

HTS AND THE FUTURE OF SECURITY ENGAGEMENT

As anthropological engagement with security organizations and agencies broadens and deepens, the ethical, political, and personal challenges to anthropologists will become more and more complex. The question of participation in the Human Terrain System is valuable because now, early on in the process of engagement, we can consider basic issues in a fairly discrete and defined way. This chapter has compiled the available evidence to address the polarized claims from both sides of the controversy. Do Human Terrain Teams provide guidance that leads to a reduction of kinetic activities by US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, and so save lives? Do Human Terrain Teams provide information that can be used by US forces to target adversaries for kinetic actions?

Two years after the publicized claim that the first Afghanistan HTT reduced kinetics by 60 percent, that claim has not been substantiated or replicated. Nor has any other credible evidence appeared showing how social science input helped to avoid violence. On the other hand, evidence that HTT information can be used for kinetic targeting is abundant and consistent. Data collected by HTTs will be fully integrated into tactical planning at all levels. It may be used to develop cooperative strategies to win hearts and minds, but it can also be used in deciding who needs to be taken out. To repeat the HTS mission statement, its goal is “to provide commanders in the field with relevant socio-cultural understanding necessary to meet their operational requirements.” This is a package deal. I sympathize with HTS advocates who want to improve respect and communication between sides, to make US forces more responsive to local needs and perceptions, and to develop cooperation and alliance in place of combat. But whatever their intentions, HTS members will not decide how their findings will be utilized. If anthropologists provide information to employers who may use the information to kill, that crosses our ethical line in the sand.

Beyond ethics, there are the larger political issues that start with HTS field operations but go far beyond that. As planned, the information gathered will go freely to other US government agencies, and at some time in the future, to local governments, to use however they deem fit. In the future—starting now—the Pentagon vision is for ethnographic intelligence to be processed globally against potential unconventional “threats to U.S. security.” Advocates of the HTS claim that all over the world, anthropology can help the US military exert control over local populations with less killing and destruction. The appeal of that vision is in less killing. The danger is that it comes with more effective control by the US military.

R. BRIAN FERGUSON

An anthropologized Department of Defense might well mean less blundering around, less shooting and bombing. A well-run imperium always finds ways to reduce the bloodshed. Increased power means decreased use of force. If HTS works as its proponents say it does, it could be an important tool in strengthening US hegemony. However chimerical the vision of global ethnographic surveillance may be, the capacity the HTS is helping to build cannot be seen as being in the interests of the indigenous peoples of the world—the people to whom anthropology is most responsible—unless their interests coincide with incorporation into a neoliberal US empire.

Note

1. After completing this chapter, I read two new books focused on HTS and related topics, *American Counterinsurgency* (Gonzalez 2009a) and *The Counter-Counterinsurgency Manual* (Network of Concerned Anthropologists 2009). Points that I make here overlap considerably with those writings, and interested readers should consult both for additional information and ideas.