SOCIOCULTURAL EXPERTISE AND THE MILITARY:
Beyond the Controversy

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The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the 4th Psychological Operations Group, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

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PHOTO: A civilian interpreter with a tactical psychological operations team asks a local Iraqi civilian for directions to the nearest fish farm in Haswah, Iraq, 23 March 2008. (DOD, SPC Tiffany Dusterhoft)

OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS, a growing number of military planners and strategists have expressed concern that success in 21st-century warfare increasingly will depend on the U.S. military's ability to acquire and skillfully use sociocultural expertise.[1] Although a small number of units already provide sociocultural research and analysis to military operations (for example the Strategic Studies Detachment of the 4th Psychological Operations [PSYOP] Group [4POG], the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, or the Human Factors Group of the Defense Intelligence Agency), no initiative has been as aggressive or arguably as innovative in its attempt to rapidly deliver sociocultural expertise to the battlefield as has the human terrain system (HTS).[2] With feature stories in major daily newspapers and on nationally broadcast radio programs, HTS has brought renewed attention to the need for sociocultural expertise in military operations and planning and has sparked a considerable degree of debate about the relationship between the social sciences and the military.

The debate about the military's use of sociocultural expertise presents an ideal opportunity to address the role of civilian and military cooperation in security affairs. Such issues have been, however, almost completely absent from the debate so far. Instead, the rhetoric in this debate often rapidly disintegrates into a polarized polemic that is often as unenlightening as it is nasty. My intention in this article is to translate the controversy about the use of sociocultural expertise into terms that military commanders can appreciate, and to differentiate the legitimate methodological considerations that the controversy highlights from those concerns that may be somewhat overstated. Ultimately, I suggest that the best way to acknowledge the challenges raised by the controversy and to tackle the military's sociocultural shortfall may very well be to actively pursue the blurring of boundaries between the spheres of military operations and civilian academic scholarship.

Sociocultural Expertise: What is it, and where does it come from?

To begin to unpack some of the academic anxiety about the military's interest in sociocultural expertise, it would help military commanders first to understand some of the techniques that social science researchers use to learn about other cultures and societies. Press coverage of the controversy surrounding the military's desire for greater sociocultural expertise seems to instinctively use the term "anthropologists" as a stand-in for the more general category of "civilian academics who produce cultural knowledge."

While the shorthand is understandable, it is not entirely accurate.

Numerous academic disciplines lay claim to the production of knowledge about other cultures and societies; today, anthropology is far from having a corner on the market. While disciplines such as anthropology and sociology are still staples of social science education and training, for at least the last 20 years graduate students have earned doctorates from newer, interdisciplinary departments and programs of social and cultural studies. In the academic arena, few today would question that producers of cultural knowledge can also be trained in interdisciplinary fields such as literary studies, communications and media studies, religious studies, rural sociology and geography, or in area studies programs, such as African studies, Middle Eastern studies, or Asian studies.

One of the best methods available to social science researchers to gain cultural knowledge is ethnographic fieldwork—traveling to a site, spending an extended period of time in residence there, and using specific techniques to learn about how people there behave and why.[3] Many people are familiar with the experience of living in a sociocultural milieu distinct from the one in which they grew up or encountering a group of people with a set of norms and behaviors different from their own. Being a tourist or a new member to a group often gives someone the analytic distance necessary to question the unspoken rules of that new community. However, ethnographic fieldwork is not as simple as living abroad or being a stranger. It is rather a deliberate effort to teach yourself to see the world through someone else's eyes. In most cases, that turns out to be a full time job in itself.

By learning the local language and building rapport with key members of the local community, the ethnographic researcher is able to gain entry into that community and to observe how people go about their everyday business in their "natural" habitat. Notes from these observations are typically transcribed into field journals on a daily basis and then coded and analyzed to assess patterns of behavior. Combining this data with formal and informal interviews of key informants and exhaustive reviews of the existing literature on a subject, the researcher is able to assess the underlining meaning of those behaviors and is able ultimately to gain a tacit

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understanding of "what makes that group tick." Unlike being a tourist or simply working in an embassy overseas, fieldwork involves embedding oneself in the local environment and objectifying one's day-to-day experience, usually by writing about it extensively and in great descriptive detail. Without this objectification process, a traveler would likely only filter what he sees and hears through preconceptions that he walked in with. Rather than cultural insight, the outcome would more often be reinforced stereotypes.

What Ethnography Can Bring to the Military

It has been pointed out elsewhere that ethnographic information can be used to discern the fundamental structures into which a society may organize itself and that knowledge of these social structures can be used to plan more effective military responses to unconventional foes—for example, terrorist groups that rely on kinship relationships to sustain their operational networks.[4] However, the ability to perceive and thereby to penetrate the social organization of enemy combatants is not the only insight that military commanders and warfighters can gain from sociocultural research and analysis. Some additional capabilities that the military can gain by reaching out to ethnographic fieldwork include the ability to differentiate the ubiquitous from the abnormal in another sociocultural milieu, an understanding of the role of identity in fueling conflict, and fluency in alternative explanatory frameworks and narratives.

The ability to recognize somebody else's "everyday." Since coming to Fort Bragg in 2005, I have deployed numerous times in my capacity as a sociocultural analyst and research specialist, and each time, I was reminded of just how much of a bubble American ex-pats and Soldiers are in when they are stationed overseas. Having done extensive

fieldwork in Africa as an academic researcher before coming to Fort Bragg, I am well aware of the daily life and experiences that "official Americans" miss by virtue of this status, but those who have never done ethnographic fieldwork often are not even aware of the realities that they are missing out on. When I was conducting fieldwork for my dissertation in Senegal, for example, I was once asked by an economics officer from the U.S. Embassy (who had been living in Senegal considerably longer than I had been at that point) who "all these little kids in the street with the tomato paste cans" were. The kids were supposed to be Quranic school students, but in reality, they were child beggars. In pre-colonial West Africa, itinerant clerics (or *marabouts*) would set up Quaranic schools in a village, taking full charge of the students, or *talibes*, for several months at a time. To earn their keep and to learn humility, the students would go house-to-house carrying calabash bowls begging for food. In the modern era, the system has become an organized, exploitive racket. Kids from rural communities are often sent to the cities to get what their parents think is a Quranic education at the feet of a marabout, but when the children get to the city, instead of learning the Quran from the marabout, the talibes spend most of their day in his service begging for money. Instead of a calabash, today talibes carry the large empty cans of tomato paste so essential to Senegalese cuisine. When the economics officer asked me who these kids were, I was living with a Senegalese host family (rather than in a gated embassy compound, as he was), and at my house and throughout our neighborhood, talibes still visited nightly to collect leftovers from the evening meal. I had learned in less than a week of living in Senegal who the kids were and what they were up to. In fact, talibes were such a standard fixture of daily life in Senegal that it was hard for me to imagine how anyone, especially someone so knowledgeable about the Senegalese economy, could really describe himself as "living in Senegal" and not know who "the kids with the tomato paste cans" were.

To be fair to the diplomat and to other kinds of official personnel who live in an ex-pat bubble when overseas, "official Americans" simply cannot get as far "out of the net" as independent scholars can. Security concerns and the requirement to avoid "going native" currently make it all but impossible to do what the ethnographic researcher is trained to do, which is to immerse him or herself in the life of another culture, to ask knowledgeable insiders questions about what he or she is seeing, and thereby to learn to distinguish the everyday from the unusual in the sociocultural landscape. In my own experience, I have seen many capable special operations Soldiers take on this participant-observer role almost instinctively, but also quickly max-out the training that they received in endeavoring to do so. Today, even their efforts are ad hoc at best. Learning about other cultures and societies while deployed overseas is simply not sufficiently prioritized as a requirement, even within the special operations community, for anything like "participant observation" to have become embedded as standard operating procedure.[5]

An understanding of the role of identity in fueling conflict. Another kind of insight that one can gain from ethnographic fieldwork is the realization that "who people are" is often the least obvious question one can answer about another community. The complications of the identity question usually compound in contexts of conflict. Concepts of race and identity in the Sahel region illustrate the point. For example, in Wolof, which is the lingua franca of Senegal, the word *tubaab* means "French person," but colloquially the term means "white person" more broadly. Membership in the category of tubaab, however, is determined less by skin color (as Americans would probably assume) than by one's behavior, and especially by the use of language. African-American travelers to Senegal are frequently also designated "tubaab" if they do not speak Wolof. In other parts of the Sahel, for example in Mauritania and Mali, the word "Arab" can have a variety of meanings, and only one bears any resemblance to what we usually mean by "Arab." In many cases, being an "Arab" can have more to do with your social status (e.g. your family name is considered to belong to a "warrior class") than it does with the color of your skin, your ethno-racial make-up, or your geo-strategic location. Being "Arab" in this context is performative; different communities at different times have tried to lay claim to "Arab" identity for sociopolitical reasons.[6]

Another example of a highly contested identity in the Sahel is the category *Tuareg*. Tuareg people are considered Berber peoples in ethno-linguistic

scholarship, but both pan-Arabist voices and North African Berber nationalist movements have at various times tried to lay claim to Tuareg people as "one of their own."[7] Tuareg themselves have at different times and in shifting political contexts identified themselves as Arab, *Kel Tamashek* ("speakers of Tamashek"), and "people of the Sahara."[8] In other words, there is nothing obvious or given about categories like "white," "black," "Arab," or even "Tuareg" in an area as historically disputed as is the Sahara. Intelligence analyses often deal with racial and identity categories such as these as self-evident black boxes, a practice that, while understandable given time constraints and other priorities, undoubtedly leads to inaccuracies and errors. This is likely even more so the case in the context of insurgencies, in which identity itself is often precisely what is being contested. While one can study the meaning of different racial and identity categories by reading the research of others, the full range and complexity of such concepts is difficult to master any other way than by conducting some kind of ethnographic fieldwork.

Fluency in alternative explanatory frameworks and narratives. One of the most powerful kinds of insights that one can gain from ethnographic fieldwork is an understanding of the rhetorical resources and shared narratives that people use to make sense of their world. The empirical discovery of just how radically different the "normal" and the "sensible" can be to different groups of people can be shocking. When I arrived in Senegal soon after 9/11, for example, local people often asked me "what did you think when you saw the World Trade Center bombing?" Instead of answering, I often turned the question back on my interlocutors. "Well, what did you think about it?" I would ask. Most would immediately exclaim that they found the events

to be horrible and "*incroyable*," but nevertheless, expressed some scepticism that Osama Bin Laden was in fact the culprit. "If you really think about it," they would say, "is it even possible for one guy in a cave to have done all that? America is big and powerful. So whoever did this must be big and powerful too, right?" "Well, who did you have in mind?" I would ask. Their answer? Al Gore.

The first time I heard this response I was perplexed and surprised, dismissing the respondents as seemingly rational, yet slightly unbalanced, conspiracy theorists. However, I gradually started to hear the same explanation from a number of different people, from university-educated professionals to taxi drivers. The story went like this: Al Gore, apparently angry that George W. Bush had stolen the election in 2000, crashed the planes into the Twin Towers and into the Pentagon as part of an attempt to overthrow President Bush in a coup d'etat. While this was not necessarily a widely held view, it was certainly an account circulating in Senegalese popular imagination at the time—and one that at least some found plausible.
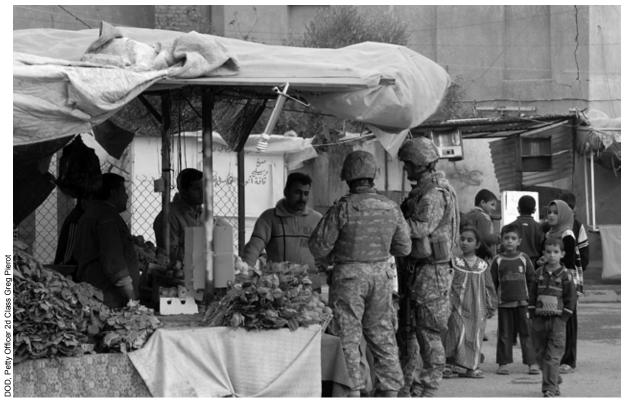
PSYOP planners and strategic communications specialists might hear in this story evidence of an enemy information operations (IO) or PSYOP campaign. While understandably instrumental in simplifying a complex situation, reducing such phenomena to "enemy IO/PSYOP" can precipitate a misfire in our response. Instead, reading these phenomena through the lens of deep sociocultural understanding enables a far more prescient and on-target counter. No enemy IO can manufacture the sociocultural logic that makes it possible for "an attempted coup" to stick as the explanation for 9/11. That logic is entirely indigenous. Although Senegal has been blessed with a relatively well-functioning democracy since Independence in 1960, civil wars and coup d'etats are very much a facet of the West African political culture of which Senegal is a part. From the Senegalese perspective, if America was having contested elections (just as they themselves have frequently experienced), then why should an attempted coup d'etat in America be so far-fetched either? Some of the most unstable places in the world, and the places where we will most likely be forced to intervene in the 21st century, are precisely those developing nations where people are coming of age and living out their lives in political universes

that are radically distinct from our own. It is hard to see how we can possibly understand those peoples' points of view, let alone attempt to change them, without cultivating and institutionalizing some version of ethnography-based research as a part of our national security tool kit.

In short, sociocultural research—and in particular ethnographic fieldwork—can bring to the national security tool kit a raw "feeling" for a place, a time, and a group of people. Arguably, no other academic enterprise has the pretense or potential to provide the same level of insight into the behavior and worldviews of other societies. In many ways, however, this intangible, tacit characteristic of sociocultural expertise makes it comparatively unwieldy to harness as an instrument of strategic planning and military operations. Ethnographic research is in part more unwieldy than other forms of area research because achieving this level of tacit understanding often requires establishing a degree of trust with members of the local community who can serve as ethnographic informants. And it is in large part because they fear that such relationships of trust between ethnographers and local informants

will be betrayed that some academics are alarmed to learn that the military is attempting to mobilize ethnographic resources for its own purposes.[9]

So what is the controversy? And should military commanders care? While the human terrain teams in Iraq and Afghanistan have garnered the lion's share of academic critique to date, some of the more sweeping generalizations about the dangers of "militarized social science" leave little doubt that it is not the HTS initiative alone that animates the academic consternation.[10] Some of this academic apprehension undoubtedly originates in the contentious history of the use of social science by the U.S. military and intelligence agencies during the Vietnam era.[11] The contentiousness of this history itself, however, suggests that more than one response is available to that past.

Given this history, some may find it safer for the academy to unilaterally reject any kind of relationship between the academic social sciences and the military. But those of us who provide, or who want to provide, sociocultural expertise to the military should instead take stock of the lessons from history and endeavor to do it better this time. One first step

DOD, Petty Officer 2d Class Greg Pierot

U.S. Army SSG Stephen McDowell, working with a tactical PSYOP company, speaks to local Iraqis, Baghdad, Iraq, 18 February 2008.

in this direction is to acknowledge the legitimate challenges raised by concerned academics, recognizing that there may be areas of tension—and even incompatibility—between the methodological requirements of social science research (in particular, ethnographic fieldwork) and the exigencies of military operations.[12] Some of the major methodological challenges raised by concerned scholars are the issues of voluntary participation by research subjects and the lack of academic oversight in research conducted for the military.

Voluntary Participation

Some concerned scholars have questioned whether informed consent is possible and whether the safety of research informants can be ensured in the context of armed conflict. In such contexts, these scholars suggest, local people may feel that researchers embedded with U.S. military units can exert power over them and may therefore feel forced to participate in research. Civilian researchers that are wearing military uniforms or carrying arms could exacerbate such feelings of coercion, thereby skewing the accuracy of the ethnographic data collected. Ethnographic fieldwork has a built-in "check" that this concern overlooks; however, rapport cannot be coerced. Those who have conducted face-to-face research know that the best data usually come not from participants who feel obliged to participate but rather from those who want to participate. For a well-trained ethnographic researcher, the bottom line should be simple: if carrying a gun or wearing a uniform interferes with a researcher's ability to build rapport with local informants, then these conditions will likewise frame and limit the data that a researcher ultimately walks away with.[13]

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My own experiences suggest that the general concern over "coercion" may be somewhat overstated. Arriving to an interview as a "white person" in an automobile with diplomatic plates, for example, leaves your interlocutors little doubt about whom they are talking to. No matter who else you might be, to them you are first and foremost an "official American;" local people will convey their views not to a "neutral researcher" but to a representative of the U.S. government. Far from being fearful of the consequences of such engagement, many people in the parts of the world in which I travel are instead willing and exceptionally eager to convey their views through such a channel.[14] After all, it is not every day that a U.S. government official bothers to visit a rural community, to talk to representatives from local non-government organizations, or to spend the day with a collection of students walking through their world. While there may be risks associated with talking to official Americans, local people may feel far more risk in the possibility of never getting the chance. Of course, it is naïve to believe that such interlocutors will forget about your "official" status and confide unvarnished truths to you. But holding out for such a possibility misses the point. Precisely by listening against the grain of these stories to hear what local people want "official Americans" to hear, we learn about their views of the world and of the United States. The challenge for the sociocultural researcher working for the military is not to create some kind of "pure" ethnographic environment, but rather to be doggedly self-reflective about the conditions in which this sociocultural data are collected and to be rigorous in qualifying the analyses that are ultimately made from this data.

Lack of Academic Oversight

Another substantive point raised by some concerned scholars is the issue of secrecy and the limitations that may be imposed on the publication of ethnographic research conducted for or by the military. Many question the academic integrity of research findings if those findings are only circulated in classified channels. As these scholars might point out, part of what moves ethnographic observation beyond mere subjective musings and grounds its findings in objectivity is the regular practice of sharing one's analysis with colleagues. In so doing,

researchers verify and corroborate what they think they are seeing in the field. This process, called peer review, typically involves at a minimum presenting papers at professional society meetings and publishing studies in journals with rigorous reviewing processes. Peer review is not only the means that scholars use to stay abreast of the latest findings in their respective fields, but it is also how academics assess the relative capabilities and expertise of their colleagues. Military requirements can make continued participation in this kind of peer review process challenging if not impossible.

The challenge here for sociocultural researchers working for the military is not so much with classification (since only references to operational activity need to be redacted), but rather that there is a fundamental divergence between the needs and priorities of sociocultural research conducted for the military and that conducted in a university context. The structure of knowledge production in the academic environment of a university is more like a distributed network: typically, no single center monopolizes authority, rather multiple communities compete with each other (as "schools of thought" on a subject, for example). The structure of knowledge production in the military, as well as in the intelligence community more broadly, is instead far more vertically organized and hierarchically oriented. What commanders are looking for is a single authoritative voice on a problem, not a cacophony of competing views (even if the latter is still often what they get). In practice, this often means that rather than making an original contribution to a field of study, sociocultural researchers and analysts working in a military context often find themselves instead summarizing the state of academic understanding on a given topic for an educated lay audience. Our goal is typically not to stake out a new and daring position on a subject among a field of experts (as it would be in the academic arena), but rather to address concerns of immediate relevance to military planners and operators in as timely a manner as possible. These operational priorities cannot absolve the need for academic rigor, however. Without some way to loop sociocultural research back into academic channels, military planners risk putting too much faith in the untested assumptions of their sociocultural researchers and of putting on a pedestal "academic expertise" that is no longer truly tested as such.

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The structural differences inherent to producing knowledge in an academic as opposed to an operational environment will vex any effort to institutionalize sociocultural expertise within the military. The scale of the challenge is hardly a satisfactory reason to not try, however.[15]

There Are Gray Areas

As the above has suggested, some of the issues raised by concerned scholars highlight legitimate challenges entailed in incorporating sociocultural research and analysis into military operations. However, some scholars have weakened their claims about the risks entailed in the military's use of social science by drawing too stark a line between the challenges of working for the military and the challenges of working for any other social institution. In other words, many of the concerns they raise are gray areas for university-based academics themselves. Ethnographic fieldwork in some ways is inherently deceptive as far as the researcher's goal is to integrate him or herself into a community in such a way that people will go about their usual business so that the researcher can observe their "normal behavior."[16] As a result, questions about betraying the trust of informants are in some sense already germane to the production of cultural knowledge. They are not concerns that arise exclusively from doing this work for the military. Furthermore, despite the guiding principle to "do no harm," no scholar can ever know for certain the uses to which his or her work will be put. Even informants in non-conflict settings can potentially be harmed by poorly conducted social science research.[17] For example, studies of workplace practices can precipitate the dismissal of employees, and studies of criminal behavior may render research subjects more vulnerable to apprehension by law enforcement. Scholars are never simply mouthpieces for

the communities they study. Instead, they frame and reinterpret what their informants tell them. In doing so, there is always potential for conflict between the interests of the scholar and the interests of his or her research subjects.

To manage such risks, academic researchers have created institutional review boards and human subject research committees on university campuses. The job of these committees is to review human subject research proposals and to provide oversight of research that involves human subjects. In this case, the academic concern to "do no harm" highlights another component of social science research that can be honed to ultimately improve the quality of the sociocultural research being produced for the military. Nothing precludes the Department of Defense (DOD) from organizing and managing its own institutional review boards or from ensuring that research conducted for the DOD subscribes to common regulations of federally funded research.[18] Because institutional review boards were principally designed to provide oversight on biomedical and laboratory science, there has always been some tension between the requirements of such review boards and the methods of social science research, in particular ethnography-based methods. But there seems to be no clear reason why scholars who work for the military ought to be held to a higher (or lower) standard than are their university-based colleagues with respect to such issues.

The Civilian-Military Gap

Ultimately, much of the controversy surrounding the military's interest in sociocultural expertise highlights the tremendous chasm that exists between the broad strokes of academic theorizing and the everyday workings of the military. Let's face it—very few university professors in social and cultural studies fields have any real exposure to members of the U.S. Armed Forces. They may on occasion have ROTC students in their classes, but they probably have never met a private first class, a staff sergeant, a captain, or even a colonel for that matter. In the absence of relationships with real people, it is easy to substitute fantasy and fear for reality.

When I first came to Fort Bragg, I myself was not sure of what to expect. I imagined that soldiers might be confused or frustrated by my attempt to complicate their worldviews and operational plans, and that I would have to fight hard to make my contributions heard. Nothing has ended up being further from the case. The soldiers and officers that I have worked with have soaked up my analytic soliloquies and have almost uniformly been excited and eager to bring me on as a member of their team. In the process, they have taught me invaluable lessons about teamwork and camaraderie, leadership and management, and above all humility, things which the competitive and individualistic environment of graduate school frankly did not provide much training in.

While there is little time for intellectualism for its own sake at a place like Fort Bragg, the palpable energy and earnestness that soldiers there bring to the task of learning is both infectious and inspiring. As ironic as it is, making the transition from teaching at a university to working as a sociocultural analyst and researcher on a military base has made me reevaluate and appreciate again the purposefulness of scholarship.

From the military member's perspective, some of the anxieties that concerned scholars raise suggest a profound misunderstanding of the range of activities that military members perform. Some claim that sociocultural knowledge can be used to reduce indiscriminate kinetic action. Others believe this claim only white-washes the military's "real" interest in sociocultural knowledge. On blogs and internet chat forums devoted to this debate, some have stipulated that the "purpose" of the military is "to kill." According to this reasoning, by definition, the purpose of anything that enables the military to do its job must be to make lethal action more efficient or more effective. From the military commander's perspective, this reasoning likely appears to be an almost comical over-simplification of the full range of security-related activities in which the military engages, and it completely ignores those military operations whose purpose is actually to avoid killing or to bring violence to an end.[19]

For instance, PSYOP and civil affairs missions are designed to support non-kinetic irregular warfare in order to secure long-term advantage with civilian populations. These are precisely the military units for which sociocultural knowledge is perhaps most critical and for which lethal action is

cal desire for proprietary self-preservation. Military commanders often may not realize that it is precisely the charge of the academic to reproduce his discipline, first by training younger scholars to take his or her place, and second by policing the boundaries of the discipline. The professional world of social and cultural-studies scholars is extraordinarily competitive, and pretenders to disciplinary titles are routinely submitted to intense scrutiny and "cast out" by their peers and mentors if they do not "make the cut."

While academics may be particularly worried about the intentions of the military, analysts who work for the military are differentiated from the academic

U.S. Air Force, MSGT Steve Cline

U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command's CPT Rundgren, right, helps an Ethiopian volunteer carry supplies during a Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa exercise in Boren Jeden, Ethiopia, 5 May 2008.

very often counter-productive. Because concerned scholars ignore the complexity and breadth of military operations such as these, their concerns are frequently dismissed as irrelevant within the armed services.

At the same time, military members' lack of exposure to civilian postgraduate education means they often misunderstand the motives of such academic critique as purely political in nature. There seems little doubt that some of the critique (of HTS in particular) is indeed a thinly veiled protest of the war in Iraq.[20] But the more substantive aspects of the critique are instead motivated by the perfectly logi-

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community as "practitioners" rather than included in it as scholarly members. To survive in this academic environment, young scholars are typically groomed to harbor an intense sense of defensive individualism; rarely are they afforded the luxury of collaborative teamwork. Unfortunately, such norms of competitiveness and boundary-drawing often only "prove" to military members that the "ivory tower" is in fact petty and parochial.

In addition, most press coverage of the debate about sociocultural expertise and the military has been devoted to screeds and unilateral condemnations from the academic community, fueling negative stereotypes of civilian academics as arrogant, patronizing, and self-righteously indignant. As a result, some military commanders may feel even more inclined to do away with the whole onerous hassle of dealing with "civilian academic types" at all. I would contend, however, that there is a real need to take the controversy seriously as a first step in moving past it. There is simply too much at stake to capitulate to academic censure or cross-institutional misunderstanding.

Blurring the Boundaries, Building Better Security

Given the angst-filled controversy among civilian academics, some military planners may feel that it would be easier to find some internal solutions to its deficit of sociocultural expertise. A variety of authors have suggested several internal solutions that might be considered. For example, one suggestion is to train a corps of troops specifically dedicated to collecting ethnographic information, thus avoiding the tendency simply to add another task to the soldier's "to do" list while at the same time enabling the military to respond to its own shifting area needs.[21] While no military occupational specialty currently trains soldiers or officers to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, building up the foreign area officer (FAO) program could constitute a promising intermediate step, especially if force protection restrictions are moderately lifted and an effort is made to engage civilian foreign nationals, not just members of foreign militaries.[22]

Another step that has been suggested is to encourage officers to pursue advanced study in social, cultural, and area studies at civilian universities in lieu of, or in addition to, command and general staff curriculums at military universities.[23] Advanced study and postgraduate work at civilian universities would familiarize military leaders with the demands of rigorous social science research and analysis (such as peer review) and would better enable them to recognize substantive sociocultural analysis and its value for military operations. Opportunities for cross talk between civilian academia and the military can also be augmented by funding research through scholarships, language study, and study abroad.

Finally, adding faculty positions for social scientists and cultural studies specialists at war colleges and military universities would work to constructively blur the divide. In particular, such faculty positions would facilitate institutional bridge building that could better address the challenges of producing rigorous sociocultural analyses within the military environment (for example, by providing an institutional home for human subject research committees). Even if all of these measures were undertaken, however, internal solutions to the military's sociocultural deficit problem are on their own likely to prove inadequate.

There are a number of reasons why civilians inside and outside the Department of Defense must continue to be part of the solution to the military's sociocultural deficit problem.

First, the training involved to produce quality ethnographic researchers is extensive, usually requiring anywhere from five to eight years of focused study in languages, area orientation, and social and cultural theory. During this training, future ethnographic researchers learn how to assess the strengths and weaknesses of sociocultural analyses, especially those concerning the assumptions and framings that unavoidably underpin any interpretation of culture. Time constraints and budgetary realities alone would preclude the possibility of educating enough "school-trained" social scientists and cultural experts within the armed forces to support all potential operations.

Second, military members are first and foremost soldiers, not scholars. While their operational planning and campaigns will no doubt be improved by a comprehension of the sociocultural terrain, understanding that terrain is only one among many priorities that they must manage. Understanding that terrain is, on the other hand, the primary objective of sociocultural researchers and analysts, and their professional success can be made to depend largely upon the quality and value of the research that they produce.

Finally, civilian researchers and analysts should continue to be part of the solution to the military's sociocultural deficit precisely because *they are civilians*. As warfare of the future is projected to be increasingly unconventional, irregular, and population-centric, our military will be forced to operate in largely *civilian* contexts.[24] The translation work needed to operate in this environment will entail not only translating the worldview of foreign area populations, but also translating the mores and practices of non-military U.S. agencies to members of the armed forces and vice versa. Such translation work is far from pointless exercise. In light of 21st century threats and security challenges, increasing opportunities for civilian-military dialogue is one of the best means to build better forces and a stronger national defense.

Unfortunately, it will not be easy to buttress the ranks of socioculturally savvy soldiers with civilian social scientists who are eager and willing to

work for the military. As the controversy over the military's interest in sociocultural expertise has made clear, many university-based sociocultural scholars still deeply distrust the military, and would not only refuse to work for the military themselves, but would also dissuade their graduate students from considering such a path. Attempting to deflate such gestures as mere political grandstanding, however, will do far less to move past the civilian-military divide than would weighing these scholars concerns deliberatively and taking them seriously as research challenges to be overcome. In particular, adhering to widely shared methodological standards of social science research renders the continued academic angst about the military's interest in sociocultural expertise essentially a moot point. Ultimately, the manner in which sociocultural initiatives are implemented today will go a tremendous way toward either bridging the gap or deepening the divide between civilian sociocultural scholarship and analysis that supports military operations.

In the meantime, those civil service organizations that already provide sociocultural research and analysis in support of military operations should continue to act as mediators between academia and the military. Unfortunately, those government organizations that already provide sociocultural expertise for military operations are struggling to meet the increasing demand for their services, especially because of manpower shortages. Such manpower shortfalls are not likely to be resolved soon, however. This reality may make institutional reorganization the best course of action. The military is always forced to prioritize its assets and can only concentrate operations in so many parts of the world at once. Civil service organizations that provide sociocultural expertise to the military must also find a way to respond to these new realities.

While there is merit in maintaining a wide range of area expertise within the Department of Defense in order to respond to unexpected contingencies, proving the utility of sociocultural knowledge and research to service commanders means that sociocultural research units need the institutional flexibility to respond to the military's operational priorities. One way to do this might be to temporarily detail civilian personnel from agencies and organizations that take a "long view" of national security issues (e.g. the Defense Intelligence Agency, defense uni-

versities, and the war colleges) to operational units, and to rotate them as necessary. There simply are not enough sociocultural and area experts in all of the DOD combined–and not likely to be in the near future–to justify the instinctive bureaucratic turf war. Instead of the standard operating procedure of intelligence stove-piping and institutional rivalry, the new security paradigm will likely demand information-sharing, communicative networking and robust cross talk between agencies.[25] Enlisting resident subject matter experts as reach-back support and as internal peer review for researchers who are collecting new ethnographic information in theater are other ways to take advantage of current assets and to get on with the task of providing warfighters with what they need to do their jobs.[26] Ultimately, the best case for augmenting sociocultural expertise across DOD will likely be made by proving the operational utility of sociocultural analyses on the ground.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to explain where some of the academic anxiety over the military's interest in sociocultural expertise originates. I have also suggested that the best response to that controversy is in fact to continue to blur the divide between military and academic spheres, in essence confronting and overcoming the academic critiques by embracing them. The challenges entailed in integrating academic sociocultural expertise into military operations fundamentally reflect a much larger gap between civilian and military spheres in American political culture, especially within the academy. This gap needs to be recognized not only as a handicap to military operations, but also as an essential detriment to our long-term national security. Through the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, military commanders have become acutely aware of the primacy of civil-military cooperation in counterinsurgency, for defense support to public diplomacy, and for other forms of irregular warfare in foreign theaters. It may now be up to our national-level leaders to recognize and to respond to the chasm between civilian and military spheres on the domestic front in order to mobilize the kind of public service required to move past Vietnam-era divides and to collectively meet the challenges of the 21st century. *MR*

NOTES

1. For example, COL Maxie McFarland, "Military Cultural Education," *Military Review* (March-April 2005): 62-69; Montgomery McFate, "The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture," *Joint Force Quarterly* (July 2005): 42-48; MG Robert Scales, "Clausewitz and World War IV," *Armed Forces Journal* (July 2006), <www.armedforcesjournal.com/2006/07/1866019>; and LTC Fred Renzi, "Networks: Terra Igcognita and the Case for Ethnographic Intelligence," *Military Review* (September-October 2006): 16-22. Their work responds to a growing consensus among military strategists that warfare in the 21st century increasingly will be unconventional and irregular. For example, GEN Charles Krulak, "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War," *Marines Magazine* (January 1999), available at <www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic_corporal.htm>; Thomas Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Berkeley Books, 2004); Colin S. Gray, "Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?" U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute (March 2006); and COL Thomas Hammes, "Countering Evolved Insurgent Networks," *Military Review* (July-August 2006): 18-26.

2. Jacop Kipp, Lester Grau, Karl Prinslow and CPT Don Smith, "The Human Terrain System: A CORDS for the 21st Century," *Military Review* (September-October 2006): 8-15; and David Rohde, "Army Enlists Anthropology in War Zones," *The New York Times*, 5 October 2007, <www.nytimes.com/2007/10/05/world/asia/05afghan.html> (1 March 2008).

3. While cultural anthropologists will rightly claim a primordial ownership of ethnography, the methodology has been extensively used and developed in other social science disciplines as well. For example, it is commonly used by sociologists, and is often deployed in fields such as education, social psychology, and the sociology of knowledge. Ethnography is also routinely used as a behavioral research method in advertising, marketing, management, and design.

4. Renzi, *Military Review*; and Anna Simons, "Seeing the Enemy (or Not)," in Anthony McIvor, ed., *Rethinking the Principles of War* (Naval Institute Press, 2005).

5. McFate, 2005, provides a good overview of the inadequacies of the current system to acquire and to deliver sociocultural expertise to military commanders and warfighters.

6. Bruce Hall, "The Question of 'Race' in the Pre-Colonial Southern Sahara," *The Journal of North African Studies*, 10, 3 (September-December 2005): 339-367. A similar point is made in LTC Michael Eisenstadt, "Tribal Engagement? Lessons Learned," *Military Review* (September-October 2007): 16-31, 16-17.

7. LTC Kalifa Keita, "Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Sahel: The Tuareg Insurgency in Mali," U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute (May 1998); Mohamed ag Ewangaye, "The Inadan, Makers of Amazigh Identity," in *The Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World,* eds., Thomas K. Seligman and Kristye Loughran (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2006), 57-69; and Cynthia Becker, "Matriarchal Nomad or Freedom Fighter? Expressions to Amazigh Consciousness in Art by Moroccan, Algerian, and Nigerien Activists," paper presented at annual meeting of African Studies Association; New York, New York; 18 October 2007.

8. Susan Rasmussen, "Modes of Persuasion: Gossip, Song and Divination in Tuareg Conflict Resolution," *Anthropological Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (January 1991): 30-46; and Jeremy Keenan, "Ethnicity, Regionalism and Political Stability in Algeria's *Grand Sud*," *The Journal of North African Studies* 8, 3 (September 2003): 67-96.

9. See for example, American Anthropological Association (AAA) Executive Board Statement on the Human Terrain System Project, 31 October 2007, <www.aaanet.org/blog/resolution.htm>.

10. Ibid.; and Network of Concerned Anthropologists, "Pledge of Non-Participation in Counter-insurgency," available at <://concerned.anthropologists.googlepages.com/NCA-pledge.pdf>. Between 2005 and 2006, *Anthropology Today* also ran a series of articles on the U.S. military and intelligence agencies' interest in sociocultural knowledge.

11. Montgomery McFate, "Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of their Curious Relationship," *Military Review* (March-April 2005), <www.army.mil/professionalwriting/volumes/volume3/august_2005/7_05_2.html>; and Alan Wolfe, "Academia (Kind of) Goes to War: Chomsky and his Children," *World Affairs* (Winter 2008): 38-47.

12. I derive this summary of concerns from the AAA's ad hoc report "On the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities," 4 November 2007, <www.aaanet.org/pdf/FINAL_Report_Complete.pdf>. In addition to the concerns I address here, some anthropologists are also deeply troubled about the potential damage that could be done to the field of anthropology if its scholars engage too directly with the military. Understandably, few military commanders are likely to concern themselves with the potential damage that could be done to the reputation of the field of anthropology, and issues that pertain to such potential damage are almost certainly best left to academic anthropologists to sort out. The American Anthropological Association executive board statement on the Human Terrain System project provides a good summary of some of these concerns.

13. This standard conforms to National Science Foundation guidelines concerning informed consent in ethnographic research. According to those guidelines, "[i]nformed consent is usually implied by the respondent's willingness to talk to the researcher." See <www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/hsfaqs.jsp#egraphy>.

14. Admittedly, I have not conducted such research in Iraq or Afghanistan. Nevertheless, I gather from talking to many soldiers and officers who have been to both that the experience of meeting eager interlocutors is not too dissimilar from their own. There are, of course, important considerations that must be taken into account with respect to protecting interlocutors, but this concern (which I address in the next section) should be differentiated from a concern about the perception of coercion.

15. There are institutional precedents for such defense-oriented social science research organizations, for example social psychology-oriented initiatives of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and the Special Operations Research Office. See McFate, "Anthropology and Counterinsurgency."

16. This point is made, for example, in Kathleen DeWalt and Billie DeWalt, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers* (New York: Alta Mira Press, 2002), 198-9.

17. Social science research generally strives for representativeness and generalizability. These research imperatives should mitigate the bulk of concerns about the harm that may come to specific informants in the context of research conducted for the military. The charge of sociocultural researchers should be to collect information about *types of people*, not specific individuals. If what researchers are doing is the latter, then their claims to be doing social science research could and should legitimately be challenged.

18. According to the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defense already subscribes to the "common rule" regarding social science research, which is stated in Subpart A of the Department of Health and Human Services regulation on human research (Code of Federal Regulation [CFR] Title 45, Part 46: Protection of Human Subjects). Subpart A stipulates that human subject research must be reviewed and approved by an institutional review board that operates in accordance with the pertinent requirements of 45 CFR 46. However, Subpart A also *exempts* from this regulation "research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation." This exemption leaves a wide window in which sociocultural researchers who work for the military can operate while remaining in full compliance with existing federal regulations as far as their research focus should typically be of *types of people* in a given society and not specific, named individuals. See footnote 15.

19. The concerns these academics raise suggest that they are taking a conventional military approach as their model for "how the military works." The requirement to understand one's operating environment is considered the first imperative of Special Operations Forces (SOF), and social and political terrain is usually considered as at least one component of that environment. The need to understand your enemy's operating environment has also recently become enshrined as a pillar of counterinsurgency doctrine (see FM 3-24: *Counterinsurgency* [December 2006]). In other words, even conventional forces involved in COIN operations will need to adopt some basic tenants of the SOF approach. The view that the purpose of the military is to kill seems to completely disregard the distinctions between conventional military and SOF approaches.

20. David Kilcullen makes a persuasive case to this effect in David Kilcullen, "Ethics, politics and non-state warfare: A response to González," *Anthropology Today* vol. 23, no. 3 (June 2007).

21. LTC Alfred Renzi, "The Military Cooperation Group," Naval Postgraduate School Thesis, December 2006.

22. Renzi, NPS thesis; and MAJ Ron Sargent, "Strategic Scouts for Strategic Corporals," *Military Review* (March-April 2005), available at <www.army.mil/professionalwriting/volumes/volume3/august_2005/7_05_1.html>.

23. GEN David Petreaus, "Beyond the Cloister," *American Interest* 2, (July-August 2007), available at <www.the-american-interest.com/ai2/article.cfm?Id=290&MId=14>.

24. FM 3-24; and David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency: A Strategy for the War on Terrorism," 2004, available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/kilcullen.pdf>.

25. Carmen Medina, "The Coming Revolution in Intelligence Analysis: What to do when Traditional Models Fail," *Studies in Intelligence*, 46, no. 3 (2002), available at <www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol46no3/article03.html>.

26. For example, partnering human terrain team social science researchers in Iraq and Afghanistan with resident area experts at the Psychological Operations Group's Strategic Studies Detachment, the Defense Intelligence Agency, or Marine Corps Intelligence Agency.