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How Critical Should Critical Thinking Be? Teaching Soldiers in Wartime

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How Critical Should Critical Thinking Be? Teaching Soldiers in Wartime

Anna Simons

In the past decade, Anna Simons has emerged as one of the foremost social scientists studying defense, security, and military matters in the United States. Her 1997 ethnography, The Company They Keep: Life Inside the U.S. Army Special Forces, *details the training and socialization of the Army's Special Forces units, which are responsible for some of the most sensitive and dangerous missions the military undertakes (Simons 1997). In her career as a Professor of Defense Analysis at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), Simons has taught, mentored, advised, and interacted with Special Operations Forces (SOF) professionals from the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, and has both participated in and observed the shifting paradigms of preparedness and training as the United States has moved out of the Cold War and into the post-9/11 era of counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and nation-building.*

Like Clementine Fujimura, Simons has been teaching in the military's educational system for well over a decade. Simons, however, is a professor at the only graduate institution in the Department of Defense's Professional Military Education system, which makes her student interactions somewhat different than those that Fujimura and Holmes-Eber experience. Like Fujimura and Holmes-Eber, Simons has tacked back and forth between the world of academic anthropology—she taught at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and has published numerous articles about anthropology, the military, and warfare—and the world of military education and training. Because of her role as a graduate professor and adviser, however, we felt she was particularly well positioned to speak about the institutional dynamics attending the emergence of the "new culturalism" among elite military operators (those with actual operational experience in the field) and decision-makers.

Simons received her Ph.D. in social anthropology from Harvard University and taught at UCLA, where she chaired the graduate program in African Area Studies. In addition to The Company They Keep, *Simons wrote* Networks of Dissolution: Somalia Undone, *which details*

the tumultuous collapse of the Somali state in the 1990s (Simons 1995). Simons' interdisciplinary publishing ranges from the Annual Review of Anthropology, *for which she contributed a review of anthropological research on warfare, to political science and security studies journals including* The American Interest, The National Interest, Orbis, Third World Quarterly, *and* Parameters.

Many anthropologists have identified and lamented a range of dangers and threats that are posited to emerge when military decision makers and operators appropriate anthropological theory, methods, and information to support military operations, no matter how development-oriented those operations may seem to be. In her essay, Simons turns anthropology's concerns inside out by reframing the "new culturalism" of the post-9/11 era in the context of the military's politics, practices, and epistemology. In doing so, she challenges anthropologists of all persuasions to reconsider what we think we know about the dynamics, implications, benefits, and dangers of incorporating "culture" into military planning, decision-making, and operations.

One thing that has troubled me considerably since the invasion of Iraq is how much skepticism we who teach officers should convey regarding a war (or set of wars) our students have to fight. What is our role? To what extent should we worry about—or, is there a difference even—between stoking cynicism and encouraging critical thinking? Do we have a responsibility to temper our remarks, knowing that officers will re-deploy to difficult, maybe even impossible war zones? Or, by questioning policy, do we help gird them for the grim worst that might lie ahead?

My field site for this inquiry is my academic department. My students are midcareer, field-grade officers, which means they hold the rank of major and above.[1] Virtually all are operators. These days, most have served numerous tours in Afghanistan and/or Iraq.[2] Or, they have deployed to the Philippines. A number have also spent considerable time in what some call the third front in what used to be known as the "War on Terror": Colombia.

Typically, our students graduate after 18 months and, if they're in the U.S. Army Special Forces, either attend a three-month-long career course and then deploy, or go straight back to units gearing up to return to a war zone. Navy SEALs likewise head back to their units and deploy. In contrast, many of our Air Force officers (pilots, navigators, intelligence officers, and former Weapons School instructors) get swallowed by staffs.

One observation with which I would have concurred prior to 9/11 is that some graduate education can be a dangerous thing, since at least a few of our students graduated with the unhealthy conviction that they now

knew plenty because they knew more than their peers who had not been exposed to the 40 or so books they'd bought and (ideally) read on their way to receiving an M.S. in Defense Analysis. No question, simply sitting through our classes before 9/11 enabled students in our curriculum to quote and cite various theories related to counterinsurgency in ways that few others could. But, whereas in the pre-9/11 Special Operations Forces (SOF) world this would have lent them a bit of an edge; today, it grants them incomparable additional advantages since counterinsurgency has become *the* military topic du jour and they, literally, are the masters of irregular warfare knowledge.

To set a bit more of the scene: as is true in most academic settings, much of what our students learn comes prepackaged for them by faculty who, like faculty elsewhere, vie to get our points across and enjoy being talking heads in our own classrooms. I mention this because our version of graduate education differs from "normal" graduate education in at least two regards. First, our students are already professionals; we are not grooming them to become professional academics in our particular discipline(s). Most faculty who teach in "normal" universities can probably agree that there is some body of foundational knowledge and certain disciplinary methods all students *should* learn to be professors in those fields. In contrast, we offer a terminal degree. We are not helping to train the next generation of anthropologists, or political scientists, or even defense analysts. As it is, fields like Security Studies, National Security Affairs, and Defense Analysis also are broadly interdisciplinary. Of the tenure-track faculty in my department, something like six have degrees in political science, three in mathematics, one in history, one in computer science, one in sociology, and one in anthropology. Thus, it is not clear that even if we wanted to we could agree on the content we would like our students to leave with. However, we all are in accord that the 30-something-year-old officers we teach should go back to the force with more analytical methods than they came with. Worth noting is that they seem to want this, too.

The Cult of the Unconventional

I am sure all my colleagues at NPS, the military's only graduate research university, feel the weightiness of teaching men and women who, in their real-world jobs, are used to managing millions of dollars worth of equipment and making life-and-death decisions. But I'd say there are two added challenges in my department. First, there is the specter of the cult of the unconventional. Second is the tricky business of trying to counter not just military, but SOF conditioning. Both are interrelated. Let me tackle the cult of the unconventional first.

In SOF circles, "unconventional" is used to describe certain kinds of military units, a distinct mode of warfare, and a superior manner of thinking. This leads to any number of elisions. Take thinking, for instance. A common presumption is that people who think unconventionally think outside the box. For those who think they think outside the box, this is, not surprisingly, considered the best and smartest of all possible approaches. Not only do many members of unconventional units consider themselves elite—which they are by virtue of having made it through rigorous assessment and selection filters—but further proof comes with their higher-than-average General Technical (GT) (or IQ) test scores. Smart men, smart units. From here it is but a short slide to then thinking *their* method of warfare is itself the smartest kind of warfare there is; just look at who wages it. Indeed, at times, devotees of the unconventional use the word "conventional" as if it were a slur.

Unfortunately, this attitude poses serious problems. First, it essentializes. Once tribalized, members then get sucked into spending far too much time countering, dismissing, and trying to undermine members of other tribes (or, in military parlance, branches and services). Second, this conventional/unconventional dichotomy itself is falsely based; there is no solid history to support it, which means, third, those who read this divide into the past distort a record from which they are prone to learn faulty lessons.

Advocates of the unconventional often cite Liddell Hart's *Strategy* (1954) as one of their ur-texts.[3] However, for anyone who reads it, Hart's emphasis is on the indirect approach in warfare, which does not really line up with current conceptions of the unconventional. Take, for instance, a classic military action, like an ambush. Ambushes are sneaky; they are nothing like frontal assaults. That makes them (technically) indirect. But, are they unconventional? The correct answer has to be no, since they are a tactic that has been used by most if not all armies from the beginning of time. Indeed, *any* kind of commander hailing from any kind of unit should be capable of taking either a direct (overt, frontal) or an indirect (flanking, behind-the-lines, sneaky) approach when trying to overcome the enemy or seize an objective. It's the situation that should dictate which he chooses, though truly great commanders will artfully combine both for maximum effect.

In other words, it makes no sense to treat the direct/indirect distinction as if it's a dichotomy, which is what has essentially happened with unconventional versus conventional. Though in what is perhaps the ultimate irony, Hart's version of "indirect" turns out to be a far better descriptive for what U.S. Army Special Forces, the preeminent unconventional force, is designed to do: work by, with, and through indigenous personnel.[4]

Not only does "by, with, and through" represent *the* consummate indirect approach to waging war, but "by, with, and through" is also the only way the United States will achieve a credible exit from Afghanistan, according to most observers. Yet, this is an exit that will only be achieved by, with, and through the development and strengthening of Afghanistan's *conventional* security forces (e.g., its army and police). Ironies really do abound.

Here is another: scan modern history, and among three of the most successful variants of a "by, with, and through" approach to warfare are T. E. Lawrence's work with the Bedouin in the Arab Revolt (during World War I); Americans' leadership of Filipino guerrilla bands on Luzon in World War II; and Detachment 101's employment of Kachins, Karens, and other Burmese against the Japanese in Burma during World War II.[5] What distinguishes these three examples, or a host of others, is that each was its own work in progress.[6] None came from a template, a doctrine, or a model. But each was also just one component in a much broader war effort, which itself was orchestrated by "conventional" military leaders, none of whom had received either "unconventional" training or training *in* the unconventional. Worth noting, too, is that, together, these cases represent three of the most successful lash-ups ever achieved between Western and non-Western forces, though the even more profound point is that in no case of which I'm aware has any unconventionally organized, trained, or equipped military force, acting on its own, "won" or even orchestrated the winning of a war.[7]

Yet, for a number of years now, a number of SOF advocates, to include many of our students (and some of our faculty), have been saying: remove the Big Army (and Marines) from the controls, relegate conventional units to a supporting backup role, put SOF in charge, let it do its thing, and we could win in Afghanistan, just like we would have prevailed faster in Iraq. At best this is questionable. Among other things, it presumes that those serving on U.S. Army Special Forces teams or in SEAL platoons would have been aware of what they or, rather, the United States was (and presumably still is) trying to accomplish. It also presumes that there are enemies in Afghanistan that *can* be crushed or can eventually be made to surrender, *and* that counterinsurgency techniques work. Not only does each of these presumptions merit a book in its own right, but to treat them *as* presumptions would itself be considered presumptuous by many in SOF circles because doing so would call into question the very notion that SOF's expertise in counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare *should* suffice.

Heresy

Because my own reading and research (to include my ongoing "field work" in the classroom) has led me to increasingly question whether

the United States really does have the capacity, nevermind the national stamina, to prosecute a long, drawn-out war of finesse, I'd have to be an actress, rather than a teacher, to avoid raising doubts when I teach. However, I am also always reluctant to suggest to American officers who need to believe they *can* make a difference that while they might excel at the tactical and operational levels—which means they do extremely well on missions or when it comes to planning missions—the overall strategy (if there is a strategy) that they're working so hard to support may well fail, and may well fail them. Even so, I probably do get too negative at times.

In the annals of military advising, there are plenty of occasions when the United States' overall advisory efforts failed. It is no coincidence that many of the United States' most effective military advisors returned home distraught and embittered. I joke in my class on military advising that being embittered—like having a bounty on one's head—may be the ultimate proof of advisory success. But, it surely is no joke for participants on the ground whenever the U.S. government pulls the plug early on what has been an all-consuming effort. Yet, since the Korean War this has been our government's modus operandi. Worse, many of the efforts we read about in class were probably futile from the outset. I often say as much. But can my students afford to agree?

Not surprisingly, students can come up with all sorts of insightful and eerie parallels between what the Vietnam War literature conveys (just to pick one body of literature) and what they have spent the last number of years experiencing themselves. But even when our readings make it more than evident that waging war alongside a government that lacks legitimacy and is corrupt has rarely paid off, it is still hard for them to want to connect *all* the dots between Afghanistan (or Iraq) and similar wicked problems from the past.

Not only do the officers I teach have a personal stake in today's fights (they've all lost close friends), but many clearly feel they have a generational stake in 9/11. At the same time, they are virtually all career officers in the combat arms. That means most are fully vested in the conviction that things *can* be improved. Otherwise, not even the most cynical among them would be sticking it out when, in today's all-volunteer force, none has to.[8] In fact, if students in our program weren't so "onward and upward"-oriented, few of them would be sitting in our classrooms in Monterey.

At the same time, neither Iraq nor Afghanistan has officially been considered lost. Iraq is actually considered a victory in some quarters. Thus, the arc of conflict has not yet begun to look as though it is heading toward defeat, as Vietnam did in the late 1960s. And certainly there has been no antimilitary sentiment in the United States. Thus, though some of our

students are quite open about having no desire to go back to Kandahar to "eat more moon dust," most still have a can-do attitude about the *operational* challenges that lie ahead. Though they might have little faith in Washington, morale remains high; they have faith in themselves.

So, again, is it really my job to prod them to ask truly discomfiting questions? Where, after all, would such questions really get them, let alone the rest of us? The short answer is nowhere. At least not immediately.

Yet, this is the pool from which tomorrow's senior leaders will come. Or, to put this in slightly different terms, the senior leadership of the future can only come from those in uniform today. If cadets and junior and midgrade officers aren't encouraged to think sufficiently critically now, when will that habit be cultivated?

Granted, some among my colleagues might contend that this is exactly what we are already doing: helping to cultivate critical thinking. But are we? Or, by unduly privileging the unconventional, are we only planting the seeds for new iterations of groupthink?

Subverting "The" Unconventional

Here is another catch: our students, who are self-selected in more ways than most, are incomparably sophisticated when it comes to assessing one another's capabilities. They can thin-slice and skewer one another in nanoseconds. But 18 months is hardly sufficient time for them to learn how to adequately separate the wheat from the chaff when it comes to Ph.D.s and subject matter experts, particularly on subjects about which they are not as knowledgeable.

Compounding this is that our students also come to graduate school somewhat uncertain about academicians (as they call us), but primed to want to listen to individuals who *can* speak authoritatively and who must know more than they do, thanks to those three letters, P-h-D. Most, too, are anxious for anything we can offer that will help them cut through the Gordian knot of twenty-first century warfare in places like Afghanistan. All of this renders them almost automatically deferential, which is good—it makes for polite students—but also bad, since it leads them to accept large chunks of what they hear, read, or are told at face value without subjecting it to their normal withering scrutiny. This, I suspect, has something to do with the nature of officerdom, hierarchy, and military conditioning. But also, we do not teach hard sciences and we proclaim, right up front, that there are no right answers, just better and worse arguments.

Without question, our students immediately reject anything that flies in the face of their personal experiences. But, on the whole, we faculty don't talk tactics or operations (at least not in the military sense of the word "operations"). Instead, when we're critical we're critical of policy. Some

of us even know policy makers. Thus, faculty members' "presentation of self" can be quite impressive, so much so it can make smart officers even more susceptible, especially when they are generationally predisposed to think in terms of sound bites: pithy formulations that *sound* convincing, especially when said with authority, can be utterly seductive.

This is why I sometimes fear we teach ideal indoctrinees, though I most definitely do not mean that in the way most civilians might imagine. Rather, my concern is that the more we tout the unconventional, the more routine whatever we present as unconventional becomes.

The conventionalization of the unconventional has been under way for quite some time: at least since I first did fieldwork with U.S. Army Special Forces in the early 1990s. Since 9/11, the institutionalization of "the" unconventional has only intensified. Proof positive comes in the 2007 publication of the University of Chicago Press–issued counterinsurgency field manual. At the same time, SOF numbers have grown substantially and the business of doing SOF-like things is booming throughout the military. But, whereas all things SOF may have gained renewed prominence, it is not clear that SOF has any better an idea today about what to do with, or how to nurture or protect, truly unconventional thinkers.

Also, although SOFs are said to excel at "dealing in the gray," there is a critical distinction to be made between the gray of no clear national policy and granting SOF officers the latitude they need to conduct operations. Give SOF units a coherent strategy, provide them with clear intent, and they will come up with 16 different ways to skin the cat or, depending on the situation, the only two that make sense. But, offer them nothing more than strategic ambiguity and they'll do no better at escaping Groundhog Day than anyone else.

Strategy requires clearly defined goals, along with clearly aligned ends, ways, and means. To be effective, strategy also needs to be easy for everyone up and down the chain of command to understand so that they can repeat it back to one another and know exactly what the other means. Anything else becomes too complex and/or confusing to execute. Thus, it shouldn't be surprising that when our national security strategy is ambiguous, the default is to gravitate back toward what the doctrine says to do. Although doctrine is only meant to serve as a set of guidelines, not a template, as far as those who promulgate it are concerned, when there is no clear guidance about what the U.S. military is supposed to achieve, at least doctrine offers clarity; without being given a compelling "why" to work toward, officers can punt pretty far (though never far enough) by concentrating instead on "how."

Meanwhile, once the unconventional is boiled down to a well-defined doctrine, SOF loses its flair. Others have written recently about the American military's preoccupation with the operational art (e.g., Strachan

2010). They see this as both cause and effect of our chronic strategic incoherence. At my level, what I see is worse: a waste. We are grinding up lives and alienating talent.

Here is why: at least some of the officers sitting in my classes *will* be among those responsible for helping to devise strategy and advise policy makers one day. Surely, it is not too soon to ask them how they might do this, while the best way I have found to try to de-conventionalize the unconventional is to be subversive about who or what really *is* unconventional: a most delicate task with men who have been conditioned to regard themselves as plenty unconventional already.

Editorial Commentary

Anna Simons offers a perspective on education and training at the NPS, in this case teaching SOF operatives, based on long experience. Like Fujimura, Simons' tenure at an elite institution in the Professional Military Education system antedates the events of 9/11 or the military's increased interest in anthropology since the mid-2000s. As such, she is able to reflect on what it means to teach "critical thinking" to operators in the military, while in a way taking account of how the multiple tours of many of these personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan have influenced their openness to new thinking in ways that complicate her responsibilities as an instructor, a mentor, and a translator of cultural anthropology into the domain of military engagement.

Her account can also be read alongside, and productively compared with, other narratives in this volume provided by anthropologists working in military education and training institutions, including those of Clementine Fujimura, Paula Holmes-Eber, and Jessica Turnley. Each of these accounts, however, is notably different, in part since the institutional contexts for each are not identical. Unlike her counterparts, Simons does not offer us an entrance narrative: instead, she dives right into the challenging problems she faces in the present tense. However, like Fujimura and Holmes-Eber, she also interacts with her work space in ethnographic terms, which doubles as a scene of research and reflection: as noted in her biography here, Simons has published extensively on the U.S. Army's Special Forces.

At the same time, these are her students. It is notable that, as an anthropologist teaching in an interdisciplinary department, what the discussion she offers of "critical thinking" is in her account is not in any obvious way related to anthropology's particular critical discourse. In fact, although Simons is a subtle commentator on pedagogy in this context, it is not so evident what her anthropological training has to do with it. This makes us

curious about whether, and how, her status as the lone anthropologist in her department might have mattered in any way.

With Fujimura, Simons also notes tensions between teaching and indoctrination. Simons quips that it might be better to think of her students as "indoctrinees." For Simons, this quip leads to interesting pedagogical reflection on what it means to teach in the shadow of military doctrine, how to reference doctrine, and the risks in doing so. As a particular form of Department of Defense knowledge production, doctrine is at once a distillation of military policy into practice, framework for how the military thinks about the world, and a guideline for how to get things done. Simons notes that "doctrine offers clarity," particularly when there is no strategic clarity for operators to fall back on in circumstances of ambiguity. In a teaching context, the problem with doctrine, however, is that it "essentializes"—to use her term—when uncritically consumed by users.

Her attention here to the pitfalls of essentialization, even "strategic essentialisms" (to borrow this term from discussions of nationhood), does seem to mobilize a disciplinary sensibility. In Simons' narrative, learning counterinsurgency lingo—as summarized in the new U.S. Army *Counterinsurgency Manual*, for example—can be in tension with critical thinking. Here, then, in a way Simons is reflecting awareness of the different expectations for kinds of knowledge production of the military and academia, differences that have come up in other places (if not in the same ways), as more intractable contradictions between military and academic practice. For example, the exchanges among Roberto González, Montgomery McFate, David Price, and David Kilcullen in 2007 in *Anthropology Today* about whether the *Counterinsurgency Manual* is properly categorized as doctrine, scholarship, or plagiarism, illustrates this tension. Simons, in contrast, seeks the best balance.

She is particularly concerned with the "specter of the cult of the unconventional," as this is historically cultivated by the SOF and as more recently represented by the supposedly "out of the box" thinking summarized in the *Counterinsurgency Manual*. She is concerned with what happens when the "unconventional" becomes the new "groupthink," a trend she calls the "conventionalization of the conventional." In conjunction with this, she also identifies another trend that has cropped up in successive accounts offered by our authors; namely, a direct association among her students between knowledge acquisition and problem-solving utility. She tellingly notes, "Without question, our students immediately reject anything that flies in the face of their personal experiences." This comment is interesting in a number of ways. First, it rings a change on one classical anthropological narrative of professionalization, that of "being there," where the field and fieldwork separate the students from the professionals. In Simons's case, her students have been there, often multiple times—a theme echoed

in Turnley's essay as well. This experience, and role reversal, appears to have particular authority for how she is able to teach them.

Another way it is interesting is that students' experience on their tours takes the form of "what works" and what doesn't. And they are concerned with what has worked. Simons tellingly notes that whereas as faculty she pitches her teaching at the policy level (analogous, in its way, to a theoretical approach), her students are typically more interested in the tactical and operational levels (e.g., the utility of knowledge as informed by their experience of successive tours). This poses a challenge for Simons: how does one appropriately teach "outside-the-box" critical thinking to SOF-type operators who need such skills more than most, without either providing too much criticality in ways that undermine their morale or aiding and abetting a groupthink-type, tactical-level problem solving, and utilitarian relationship to knowledge that—doctrine-like—all too easily can become a dangerously uncritical status quo? This seems to be a significantly different challenge than those faced by teachers in nonmilitary academic institutions.

How a military education "is" and "is not" the same as that in a "normal" university setting is a theme addressed by multiple authors in this volume. This theme, however, deserves some more attention. After reading Simons, we came away wanting to know more about what value an M.S. in Defense Analysis, or any degree for that matter, holds for the officer-student. Specifically, we wondered who qualifies for these programs and what they expect from the program in terms of career advancement. The extent to which "schoolroom" knowledge measures up to "real-life" frontline experience is also interesting; for example, when officers study scenarios from Vietnam, what are they expected to learn about differences between past and present military campaigns? We ask this because Simons notes the difficulty her students face in connecting "all the dots between Afghanistan [or Iraq] and similar wicked problems from the past."

If Simons is concerned with the cult of the unconventional, we also wonder about another cult, that of "leadership." A common theme emerging from several cases is how a military education is about—among other things—cultivating "leaders" (think of Holmes Eber and Fujimura's accounts). At first glance, this makes sense, as their students are officers and de facto or intended leaders (in the case of the U.S. Naval Academy). But more is at stake than having a well-run military. Several authors, for instance, remark upon the fact that from the pool of military officers will come many of the future's top decision makers; as such, they all recognize the gravity of their teaching obligations. In fact, the opportunity to shape the outlook and thinking of the nation's senior leaders (military and otherwise) seems a large part of the appeal and/or moral obligation of teaching in a military educational setting. Does Simons agree?

Simons Response

I write this response on the eve of a trip to Baghdad to visit one of the commanders of U.S. SOF forces in Iraq. He has done as well as it is possible to do thus far in SOF.

Whenever I get to travel to visit our graduates I invariably say that seeing how well they are doing in the field is the best part of my job. But that's actually not quite true. Building the relationships that lead to these visits is no less rewarding, as is the impetus behind the invitations to travel "downrange": graduates in command positions *want* us to see what their units are doing. They want us to return to the classroom as well informed as possible so that what we teach and the questions we raise remain relevant for the next generation of commanders. No one is more interested in making the armed forces more effective than are some of those who are charged with running it—except maybe those in the running to run it.

I like to think that, by this point in time, I can distinguish between pure careerists and officers who strive to make a difference, both to others and for the country. It is hard to be around the latter and not work as hard as they do. It is also hard not to want to offer them every possible form of assistance, to include exposure to as many useful anthropological approaches as quarter-long courses permit.

Among the core courses I teach are Anthropology of Conflict and Military Advisor. In the former I focus on what motivates groups to fight. We pay particular attention to identity. I introduce students to concepts like "emic" and "etic," and we read accounts that range from Lincoln Keiser's ethnography of the Kohistani (a book that my pre-9/11 students turned out to especially appreciate after 9/11) to Ed Husain's personal journey through Islamism. In the Military Advisor class our focus is, as the title might suggest, on working *with* others. We delve into a series of cross-cultural advisory encounters. Among other things, we analyze the significance of cross-cultural affinity, linguistic ability, empathy, what "going native" might mean, and all manner of other topics that would be familiar to anthropologists.

I teach other courses with a heavy anthropological bias. Students love this. Indeed, this year for the first time a young colleague whom I first taught as an undergraduate at UCLA is teaching Anthropology of Conflict with me. He tells me almost every week how enthused his students are about the subject matter, how they wish they could take more anthropology courses, and how refreshingly different—but relevant—they find the material.

This, I'd say, reveals something very healthy about our military, or at least the slice of the military we teach. It is one of the distinct benefits of affording midcareer officers (as well as select warrant officers and, soon, noncommissioned officers) 18 months in which to step back from day-to-day operational pressures to reflect, synthesize, question, debate, and be able to put their experiences into a broader context and examine them from different frames. Without question, this particular generation of officers deserves time to reacquaint themselves with their families. I am just finishing a project undertaken with 13 of them. We counted up their total number of deployments since 9/11: 82. SOF has never had so many experienced individuals. At the same time, it is difficult for anyone to make sense of these experiences without being granted the time and tools to think about them critically—which is what graduate programs enable. If even we faculty, who think about these issues full-time, have difficulty working our way through the thicket of the past decade, imagine those who have been in the thick of it.

Of course, I also know that I'm about to be flummoxed once again in Iraq. There are so many moving pieces and parts, so many players, and so many operations that have to be juggled, managed, and monitored that it is never clear to me there is anyone who *can* see the forest *and* the trees. This, too, is an issue I keep raising with students and graduates, knowing that already, some of them are filling positions where this is what they have to try to do. How, then, can one not want to try to help them? Especially when one considers anthropology's strong suits: thinking holistically and from multiple angles.

Notes

1. Lieutenant commander in the Navy.
2. This includes numerous of our international officers, who likewise tend to be SOF-oriented.
3. Or, if they don't, they should.
4. Worth noting is that U.S. Army Special Forces (commonly referred to as Green Berets) are just one among a number of SOF forces. Their traditional specialization has been working with, training, and advising foreign forces, whether insurgents or counterinsurgents, guerrillas, or government troops.
5. World War II is actually replete with examples: both of synergies, and division of labor nightmares.
6. On Luzon there were a whole series of bands, some of which amalgamated over time, and some of which did not.
7. Battles yes, campaigns maybe, but not a war.
8. I need to be careful about not overstating this. The personnel system, for all its faults, is still shrewd, and keeps officers hooked with half-pay at retirement after 20 years, along with other benefits. Among these are generous health benefits, which prove especially important to families with children with special needs.

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Conclusion

"Be All That You Can Be...": The Anthropological Vocation in the Securityscape

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Our casebook arises from and within a period of controversy—the totalizing atmosphere of fear since 9/11, after the four years of work by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the U.S. Security and Intelligence Communities (CEAUSSIC), the appeal of anthropology to the military's counterinsurgency doctrine, the Human Terrain System's use of anthropologists in military operations—but it would otherwise be very worth doing even in calmer times because it contributes to making visible the blurring boundaries and common concerns of an anthropological profession that increasingly operates as much outside academia as within it. And indeed, the terrains of research interest of both academic and nonacademic anthropologists overlap as well. The securityscape, as we term it, is a distinctive sphere in which anthropological work occurs, but is by no means an exotic one. In fact, I will want to argue that careers in this arena satisfy some of the keenest desires for involvement in the public anthropology that is much called for, and referred to, today at the core of the discipline.

The practice of a public anthropology is not only limited to speaking out in the media of the classically conceived public sphere, or to working for activist causes and social movements. It depends at base on the practice of an anthropological vocation wherever and however it is situated. The debates and controversy over the roles of anthropologists in the military and other defense and security institutions have focused on the concept and standards of ethics (at base, "do no harm," and its problems and complications in application). Questions of ethics are undeniably important, and quite intricate in their situational complexity (see Faubion 2011). They particularly focus the issues about which anthropology, as an organization with professional standards of conduct, should be concerned. But the concept of