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of war had changed to "hybrid war."

Let me emphasize that the enemy strategists have read the history and understand the strategy, doctrine, and tactics of what we are calling "compound," "asymmetric/irregular," and "hybrid wars." They fully understand the effectiveness of the "mass and disperse," "safe haven," and support from a "major-power ally" strategies. They also fully understand the impact of "protracted wars" and "protracted negotiations" on the home fronts and international communities and expect us to cut and run—as they said we did in Somalia and Vietnam. Their experience, past and present, continues to prove to them that these wars are won or lost within the population, not just within the population of the combat country, but within their enemy's home front and the international community. They have adapted these strategies to their situations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, and elsewhere, but, in spite of what many may say, their basic strategies, doctrines, and tactics are essentially the same as in the past.

To effectively counter such an expensive, complex strategy will take great political and military will, which may be hard to marshal after the unpopular wars we are now fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. We may well find that it is difficult to retain the lessons of the past and that we lack the political and military will to fight a hybrid war. The bottom line is simply this: We have a strategy that we believe will win hybrid wars. Although this strategy requires a very heavy commitment of "boots on the ground" and other resources, as a nation we have both the manpower and resources to successfully execute that strategy.

Soldiers and statesmen must understand the threat of hybrid war. We must learn the strategy necessary to wage and win a hybrid war if the nation's vital national interests are threatened. That is, in itself, a vital national interest.

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Anthropology, Culture and COIN in a Hybrid Warfare World

Anna Simons

While debate might rage in the military over whether we are (or should be) enmeshed in a long irregular war, a long unconventional war, or a long hybrid war, there appears to be no debate about what is needed; namely, more sophisticated cross-cultural awareness and understanding. Indeed, for better or worse—and I am going to argue for worse—"anthropology, culture, and COIN" has developed the ring of a mantra these days. From the perspective of someone who has been playing in these fields since the Dark Ages (e.g., pre-9/11), and is therefore not a recent convert to this shiny new religion, I want to deliver three quick broadsides about the effort made to rally anthropologists and other like-minded culture brokers to the cause of waging hybrid warfare. I also want to sound a warning about how the cavalry can get ahead of themselves. When that happens—think Custer—there's a good chance those charging in may do more inadvertent harm than long-term good.[1]

I begin with anthropology. Anthropology is a great subject, but has become an increasingly ridiculous discipline—I first began saying that twenty years ago for several reasons. First, too much of what anthropologists write is, literally, unreadable. You need a PhD in anthropology just to wade through all the jargon. That wasn't always the case. The second unfortunate development in anthropology is too much navel-gazing. This has so consumed anthropologists that the most penetrating writing about other peoples is often done by novelists, travel writers, and journalists these days—people who actually travel abroad and spend time on their own in dusty villages. But even before 9/11 there was a third reason the discipline of anthropology had become dogmatically irritating: many anthropologists disdain the military.

Even today, it is possible to count on no more than two hands the number of anthropologists in the academy who have spent time studying military units, never mind combat units. That alone should raise more pointed questions than it has regarding anthropologists who work

1 This chapter is based on a presentation made to the Culture, Cultural Modeling, Counterinsurgency (COIN) and Conflict Behavior Conference, held at the Naval Postgraduate School in April 2009.

with the military, since if you don't know what the military does—actually does, daily, in the field—how can you condemn those who associate with it? What is especially ironic about all the hand-wringing that has been done over whether anthropologists should aid and abet the military is that if anyone is supposed to hate the idea of objectifying, essentializing, or stereotyping another group of people, it should be anthropologists. Talk to anyone in the military. Nothing like "the military"—a monolithic, single-minded, separate society—exists.[2]

At the same time, for all the criticism that concerned anthropologists have leveled, they perhaps purposely overlook the trenchant arguments they could, and arguably should, be making—a subject to which I will return.

As for what might be problematic about Culture—it is the ultimate black-box term. One perfectly normal question all humans ask at some point because all humans are keenly interested in why those people "over there" do such weird things, is: "Why *do* People X do such-and-such?" The standard answer—"They do such-and-such because that's their culture!" This response should be totally unsatisfying, since "culture" as an answer explains everything and nothing at the same time. But as an alternative, ask six anthropologists to define culture and you will also wind up with seven different definitions.[3] Anthropologists joke about archeologists who, whenever they find some object they can't quite identify, say, "Well, it must be a ritual object." Culture, it turns out, is anthropology's ritual object.

As for COIN, it should be conventional wisdom that it is next to impossible for the U.S. to orchestrate an effective counterinsurgency campaign in someone else's country. If that other country's government is legitimate, faces an insurgency, needs our technical assistance, and solicits our advice—which means we aren't twisting anyone's arm or compelling its leaders to cry uncle—then *maybe* we can do some good.[4] As a practical endeavor, however, the notion that the U.S.

2 I am purposely broadening my broadside beyond the Human Terrain System since there were sharp criticisms made of anthropologists working with the military before HTS was ever fielded. As should be apparent in the pages to follow, there are *many* legitimate reasons to call HTS into question; the American Anthropological Association has focused almost exclusively on what it regards as the ethics involved. On this score, the AAA makes a number of very good points (see the AAA Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the U.S. Security and Intelligence Communities Final Report on The Army's Human Terrain System Proof of Concept Program, submitted to the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association, October 14, 2009).

3 The one I prefer is that culture is everything from what people make with their hands to what they think in their heads. But—this is also why I insist I am a social anthropologist, not a cultural anthropologist (which I am by academic pedigree). Social anthropologists pay attention to social structure, social organization, and social relations—all things that can actually be mapped. Social anthropology tends to be taught in Europe, the UK, and Anglophile American institutions as opposed to cultural anthropology, which is exceptional to us.

4 This is not just based on reading about COIN. No graduate program anywhere has had more COIN-oriented talent pass through its doors than the Department of Defense Analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School over the past dozen years.

can engage in whole-of-government or even whole-of-DoD counterinsurgency warfare outside our borders seems to defy certain realities about us as a people, never mind realities about us as Americans interacting with *thems* who are not.[5] Worth noting, too, is that those who promote COIN most insistently tend to point to an inordinate number of woulda, coulda, shoulda counterfactuals for lessons to be learned.[6] Doubtless this is because post-colonial West-on-non-West successes have been few and far between. Actually, *non-Western* militaries have a better track record of success when it comes to crushing insurgencies—though for obvious reasons no one systematically studies non-Western cases, and particularly not when crushing is what non-Westerners often do.

So, anthropology as a discipline is fraught, culture as a concept is questionable, and COIN as an endeavor is flawed. Do I really mean to say we are better off waging twenty-first century warfare without them?

To answer, let me point to what may be the biggest problem of all: parachute expertise. And, because I am not an anthropologist who has conducted fieldwork in Afghanistan or Iraq, let me use a case with which I am somewhat more familiar: Somalia. There were almost as few American Somaliists—academics who studied Somalia—in 1991 as there are bona fide military anthropologists today. In the late 1980s Somalia was an extremely difficult place to do research. Somali is an extremely difficult language to learn. The country itself was coming unhinged. Long story short: it was not possible at the time for anyone to be an expert on the whole country. But—when the U.S. and UN spun up for Operation Restore Hope and UNOSOM I, that did not stop certain Somaliists from presenting themselves as experts and selling their expertise to any and all bidders. Did any of these individuals say, "Well, to be truthful I did fieldwork in such-and-such a location at such-and-such a time, and if you want to know about the situation "over there," I can't really help; you should turn to so-and-so instead"?

To be fair, the worst offenders when it came to dialing up their expertise for dollars were not anthropologists. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said

5 Few others are good at COIN outside their borders either. In fact, in the post-colonial world, no one seems to be adept at this. Consider India. No other country has had more experience waging more different kinds of counterinsurgency. Yet, when the Indians attempted to do this in Sri Lanka, they too failed.

6 Predominant among these are, for instance, the CIDG and CAP programs from Vietnam. One argument you often hear these days is that if only these hadn't been either conventionalized or super-sized we probably would have won in Vietnam. No one stops to consider that we Americans almost always conventionalize and super-size everything we do if we consider it successful; if a little is good, more is better—in fact, that's part of what distinguishes us *as* Americans. Along the same lines, it is curious (but speaks volumes about us) that we also never seem to learn that we never learn lessons learned.

today. Post-9/11 more than a few anthropologists have elbowed their way to the feeding trough. Anthropologists who have never conducted fieldwork in the Muslim world, let alone in Iraq, Afghanistan, or neighboring countries, along with other anthropologists who last conducted fieldwork decades ago yet haven't updated their knowledge since, have busily sold themselves with utter abandon—and absolutely no humility.

Yet, the hallmark of good anthropology *is* humility, which is what fieldwork (the *sine qua non* of our profession) demands. Unfortunately, humility is easy to fake if you are doing parachute lectures and briefings. Much harder, it would seem, is to be humble about what you shouldn't be lecturing and briefing about. Hardest of all, of course, may be just saying "no."

Or to be totally unvarnished: parachute anthropology defies what professional anthropologists should do. Indeed, if those who dub themselves concerned anthropologists honed in on *this* it would trump most, if not all, of their other concerns. That they haven't suggests they have other political axes to grind, which is too bad.

To be clear, a PhD in anthropology does grant anthropologists a license to theorize and generalize in the classroom—it is virtually impossible to teach anthropology without doing so. But a PhD does not—nor should it—entitle anthropologists to advise the U.S. government about people anthropologists only know about from reading others' work. At best, we anthropologists might be able to take some intelligent stabs at suggesting some questions worth asking and some parameters for action worth policy makers' consideration. But should we be telling anyone—soldier or policy maker—how to interact with specific sets of people on the ground when we haven't lived with those people and can't communicate with them in their vernacular? Absolutely not!

Yet another reason parachute anthropology should make an oxymoron of anyone practicing it is best captured by the book title *They Lie, We Lie*.[7] Read almost any honest ethnography. Natives—the locals—never tell the truth about the things that are of greatest importance or most value to them until they have taken the measure of the person asking. It can take months, years, and numerous repeat visits to build, never mind secure trust. And even then, who knows. This is but another reason why it should defy common sense that anyone ever thought that teams of civilians, no matter how well-intentioned, might be able to flit in and out of the battlespace and do a better job of figuring out the locals than some of the Soldiers or Marines who are already in the battlespace—and have proven to

7 Peter Metcalf, *They Lie, We Lie* (Routledge, 2001).

the locals that they, at least, are prepared to shed their blood on the locals' behalf.

Or, consider current conceits about human terrain from a slightly different angle: there we Americans are, waging war in someone else's country. We belatedly determine we should be fighting a population-centric war. So, at considerable expense the Department of Defense hires Americans who have never been to that country before and who speak none of the local languages to help ferret out local-level ethnographic truths. These Americans not only lack prior familiarity with the populations at hand, but—even more amazingly—are also unfamiliar with our military. Yet, they receive exorbitant sums of money to engage in on-the-job learning about cross-cultural translation—and this despite the fact there are plenty of unemployed Iraqis, Afghans, or citizens of you-name-the-country who themselves have advanced degrees *in* the social sciences and could do exactly the kind of cross-cultural work DoD believes it needs.

We are not living at the turn of the twentieth century, when only Americans and Europeans had "higher education" or training in cross-cultural techniques.

But this also begs the larger question: what *does* DoD need? The short answer: not Human Terrain Teams, as Marine officer Ben Connable pointed out in his 2009 article in *Military Review*.[8] For supporting evidence examine any recent issue of *Special Warfare* magazine. Like the Marines and Soldiers Connable describes, numerous Special Forces teams have managed to operate absolutely fine in the tribal zones of Afghanistan and Iraq without Human Terrain Teams and civilian interlocutors. Or, to be totally undiplomatic about it—if the military is going to keep promoting officers to brigade command who need civilian culture whisperers to tell them why it might be important to drink tea with tribal elders, or to know who's who among the sheikhs in their Area of Operations, then DoD might as well go ahead and outsource leadership, too.

Connable's larger point is that there are currently programs in every Service that will weave cross-cultural competence throughout training and education, so the exorbitantly expensive Human Terrain Team system should already be considered moot.

But *is* weaving greater cross-cultural awareness through the Services the direction in which the entire military should be headed? The politic answer is "yes, maybe"—to help prevent otherwise avoidable cross-cultural faux pas. But will this be sufficient? Hardly. Or, to cite that great anthropologist Sun Tzu, it is never enough just to understand the enemy; you better also understand yourself.

Here is where those within DoD and elsewhere in the government continue

8 Ben Connable, "All Our Eggs in a Broken Basket: How the Human Terrain System Is Undermining Sustainable Military Cultural Competence," *Military Review*, March-April 2009.

to fool themselves. Young men who sign up for the Combat Arms in our All Volunteer Force do not sign up for the infantry, for armor, or for a Ranger Regiment because they couldn't get into the Peace Corps. A lot of young Americans, and those in uniform especially, are solipsists—American values are the only values worth fighting for, and by definition these are better than anyone else's values. It seems a contradiction in terms to then ask these young people, who devote themselves to defending our way of life, to stop and think at every turn about the worthiness of others' values, particularly when others' values involve everyday behavior toward women and minorities (to pick just two examples) that most liberal-minded Americans consider wrong.

It seems unrealistic to expect most Americans in uniform to be able to square this circle—just as it is unrealistic to assume that foreign language training will stick, or that everyone deployed can be sent to the training. All of us should remember from high school that while some of our peers had a facility for languages, most did not. While there may be some justification for exposing everyone to a smattering of another language, the military would be better served to invest deeply in those who have what it takes to achieve real proficiency, rather than taking its usual one-size fits all approach.

At the same time, DoD should be far more aggressive than it's being when it comes to addressing and redressing another gap—namely, the lack of ethnographic intelligence. This is a gap that can't be met until the military looks within and selects experienced people in uniform who have a desire to develop more than just cursory relations with non-Westerners. Again, not everyone has an ability or desire to get to know—really know—non-Westerners, any more than everyone has the facility to learn Urdu or Dari.[9] As for what constitutes ethnographic intelligence, consider how people typically associate in the non-Western world. Kinship matters. But so can religious brotherhoods,

9 What I am referring to here is, essentially, a new capability. What the U.S. needs is a relatively small number of people who, over the course of their careers, would overtly steep themselves in a region, or a network. They would start off living in-country, and would develop friendships, maintain local ties, and establish long-standing relationships they could tap into over the course of twenty or more years. These would be individuals whose mission would be to keep up with what is going on among populations whom Americans on two or three year tours don't have the time, inclination, or ability to pay attention to. This is an idea initially developed in Anna Simons and David Tucker, "Improving Human Intelligence in the War on Terrorism: the Need for an Ethnographic Capability," Report submitted to the Office of Net Assessment (Office of the Secretary of Defense), December 2004. It has also been written about by (among others): Alfred Renzi, "Networds: Terra Incognita and the Case for Ethnographic Intelligence," *Military Review*, September-October 2006; Erik Eldridge and Andrew Neboshynsky, *Quantifying Human Terrain*, master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, June 2008; and Varman Chheong and Chad Machiela, *Beyond Lawrence: Ethnographic Intelligence for SOCCOM*, master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, December 2009.

secret societies, healing cults, and clans. One reason we need to pay far more consistent attention to how people elsewhere interact is because without being able to track all the various ways in which people associate, the U.S. remains vulnerable on multiple counts. Locals, for instance, always know better than we do what we don't know, which then becomes something adversaries can exploit. Second, because we don't pay sufficient attention to indigenous or traditional means of association these serve as ideal sources of cover, support, and recruitment—think Windtalkers in reverse. There are all sorts of diabolical ways for our adversaries to put latent ties of moral obligation to work. Keeping a close ear to the ground and developing a fingertip feel for what is burbling beneath the surface and among people who can hide in plain sight requires some of the sensibilities of an anthropologist—yet we have no one in the military or in any of our intelligence agencies assigned to track such means of association.

This brings me to my third cautionary point. Anthropological or ethnographic methods can seem extremely useful and, like skills, methods can seem easy to train. But it is not at all clear that the intuitive ability to *think* anthropologically—or to be able to read situations and people, and be able to read how people are reading you—can be taught.[10] Typically, people interested in this are interested in it "just because." Usually, they are the kind of insatiably curious individuals who will talk to anyone and everyone they can, compare what others say with what they do, and seize on connections, continuities, inconsistencies, internal contradictions, and discern patterns. Those who are really good at this try to learn from the past as well as the present, ask "why" and not just "how," and don't study others so much as internalize their point of view. The best are able to analyze situations in ways that even those they are talking or writing about would find revelatory.

I bring up these sensibilities because, again, not everyone has them. Nor can everyone be *trained* to have them. More akin to traits than skills, sensibilities have to be selected for. Consequently, the military needs to do a far better job of identifying those with these attributes. It should want to do this for a host of reasons, not least among them is that it is counter-productive to try to ineffectively reproduce what already exists.[11]

10 This, actually, pushes Sun Tzu's maxim to the next level, beyond "It is never sufficient just to understand the enemy; you also have to understand yourself" to "You also better understand how the enemy understands you." This is my corollary to Sun Tzu.

11 For more, see Brent Lindeman, "Better Lucky than Good: A Theory of Unconventional Minds and the Power of 'Who,'" master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, December 2009; also Anna Simons, *Got Vision?: Unity of Vision in Policy and Strategy*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute), June 2010.

This brings me to a second Horn of Africa-related experience. Several summers ago I went to Djibouti with one of our graduate students, a very capable Special Forces officer. Before we arrived the two of us had already begun a long debate about the merits of collecting data, turning people's relationships into bits and bytes, and running them through social network analysis programs. My take: while databases may be useful places to store and cross reference data, garbage in not only means garbage out, but it seems unlikely that Western software engineers will ever be able to effectively duplicate non-Western ways of navigating non-Western social worlds.

My traveling companion, I think it is fair to say, remained skeptical—okay, argumentative—until we had our first meal with a Djiboutian Somali I hadn't seen or talked to in seventeen years. I always knew Iman (not his real name) would be "somebody" one day. Djibouti is a small enough country and he was a talented, well-connected young professional when I knew him in a different capital (and context). But I had no idea when I suddenly resurfaced in his world that he would be at the very epicenter of connectedness in Djibouti, with his finger on more different pulses than anyone could possibly keep track of. It took sitting with him through several meals to fully appreciate why no one can possibly map how Iman manages to manage all his relationships, or how much he knows about others' relationships, or how and when he puts a new two and two together, or how and why he might determine that now is the time to use a particular triangulation to effect. This is the sort of stuff that not even anthropologists can systematically capture, never mind computational models based on what anthropologists might bring back from the field.

Like most other social sciences (and all -ologies), anthropology is designed to strip away the significance of personality, contingency, inadvertence, and inter-personal chemistry—the very essence of all human relationships. We anthropologists are not quite as reductive as computer programs. To make our time in the field worth something, we can't help but generalize. We thus end up being far more reductive than historians, who do pay attention to contingency, inadvertence, and the incomparable significance of personality—all the things the rest of us social scientists try to leach out of our accounts and theorize away.

Thus, while we anthropologists *can* help make the strange familiar and are better positioned to offer certain kinds of cross-cultural insights than many other academics, people's presumptions about what we can do can lead some

among us to oversell what anthropology alone will *never* be able to do.[12] Or, to hone in on a contemporary hot topic—tribes and tribal engagement—how many culture brokers have you heard recently say to their patrons and putative sponsors in DoD: Don't be ridiculous; to even think Soldiers and Marines can meaningfully tribally engage means they better be totally familiar with local history; for that, they better be able to pay close attention to everyone's competing stories; while for that, they better make sure they understand who's who, and who did what to whom in everything from prison cells two years ago to villages 200 years ago, and even that might not be sufficient. You don't hear those peddling culture say: Wait a minute, when it comes to tribes you better call in reinforcements; we need historians!

No doubt one reason historians have not been recruited in any number is because historians require even more time than anthropologists to figure things out. This just reinforces anthropology as the quicker-picker-upper—and becomes yet another reason why it is anthropology, along with expertise in COIN, that has been awarded twenty-first century magic parachute status: have parachute, can effect a rescue. But as even those colonial-era anthropologists accused of having helped advance imperialism once upon a time would have cautioned: *Yes, well,* maybe *you can figure things out if you are left someplace for several years—on your own. Do that successfully one place, and then* maybe *it won't take you several years in the next location.*[13]

What seems especially strange is that it is precisely those who have been on the receiving end of parachute journalism and have experienced faulty reporting by here-today-somewhere-else-tomorrow journalists—namely, senior members of the military and policy makers—who would put so much stock in parachute social science. What makes this irony doubly sad is that for anyone truly familiar with COIN history, it should be more than evident what happens when too much faith is placed in air dropping expertise—as accounts by members of Detachment 101, SOG, and other units make clear. As for those who don't know this history, here is a hint: sending for the anthropologists won't help.

12 For instance, tribes? We anthropologists should be more than capable of explaining what's both different and similar about tribal politics. Though tribal politics compared to what—compared to politics in a city like Chicago? Or a town like Fishtail, Montana? The devil always lies in such details.

13 See Appendix 4 of E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford University Press, 1976 [1937]).