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Professors in the Trenches: Deployed Soldiers and Social Science Academics (Part 5 of 5)

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“How do I come to know what I didn’t know I needed to know?”

This is the *fifth installment* of a *five-part series*. Each article was co-authored by one Army soldier/civilian and one university professor/academic as part of a joint research project. This project and product responds to the Army’s objectives regarding the integration of cultural social sciences into its training and operations.

Introduction to the Series

The overarching goal of a “Military-Social Science Roundtable”, coupled with a related Delphi research process, is to boost, broaden, and render more viable the relationship between the military and academic fields of cultural studies in a way that benefits both communities. Specifically, the Roundtable and Delphi research process should foster a level of cooperation between these communities which assists tactical military units as well as military/political decision makers to ask the right questions in order to conduct full spectrum operations in unfamiliar cultural settings. The process and the venue of such cooperative roundtable conferences is intended to improve not only military long-term capabilities but also bring academic social science thinking into real world challenges.

The concept for the Military-Social Science roundtable and its associated Delphi process arose out of three common areas of interest. In the spring of 2007, the Command and General Staff College’s Center for Army Tactics (CGSC-CTAC) was seeking further perspectives and input from culturally-focused social science experts in order to enhance its training and research. CTAC was also engaged with many CGSC faculty members and students who had returned from Iraq, Afghanistan, or other combat zones, and who wanted a venue through which they could share unique observations regarding their deployment and interaction with foreign populations. Concurrently, the Training and Doctrine Command’s (TRADOC) Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) was interested in further opportunities to leverage resources from its network of academics and foreign security specialists against the warfighter’s need for intercultural capabilities. A third impetus to hold such cooperative roundtables stemmed from academe -- specifically within the social science community -- where there are a number of very knowledgeable and experienced individuals who believe in applying their disciplines to prevent unnecessary casualties. This is especially important in an era where conflicts are raging in a

number of different geographical as well as cultural environments, revealing a need to explore areas where cultural, social science studies may benefit today's decision makers from the tactical to strategic level.

The confluence of these three areas of interest prompted CTAC and FMSO to jointly develop and host a roundtable and Delphi process at Fort Leavenworth. CTAC found the military participants and FMSO found the academic participants. The nearby University of Kansas – particularly its military supporters with longstanding ties to FMSO and the Combined Arms Center (CAC) – became a local partner in the event.

The primary objective of the roundtable was to publish one or more papers – written together by the participants – that address two related topics:

Unique and/or common experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq, or other areas of operations that may help define the military's need for culturally-related social science training, information, and/or methodologies.

The possible way ahead for “military anthropology”, military and cultural geography, and related culturally focused social science disciplines in terms of research, development, and cooperation that could benefit the military at multiple levels; i.e., from the Soldier level to senior planning staffs.

To meet this objective, four military personnel were each asked to write a paper on their – or their unit's – experience interfacing with a local population while deployed. The paper was to focus on: mission challenges stemming from cultural differences between the Soldiers and the indigenous population, how the Soldier or the unit adapted to those challenges, and whether these adaptations were successful.

This marked the beginning of the Delphi portion of the event. The Delphi method is an iterative process used to collect and distill the judgments of experts using a series of questions interspersed with feedback. The questions are designed to focus on problems, opportunities, solutions, or forecasts. Each subsequent set of questions is developed based on the results of the previous ones. In this case, each Soldier shared his paper with one academic with whom he was paired. Over a series of weeks or months, the academic asked the Soldier questions regarding the experience about which the Soldier had written, with the intention of investigating the story from a Social Science perspective. As these exchanges occurred, the academic gradually integrated his or her observations into the paper, eventually co-authoring the final text with the Soldier and forming the basis of this book.

On June 21st, 2007 – literally in the middle of the Delphi process -- all four teams (each consisting of one Soldier and one academic) participated in a one-day “Military-Social Science Roundtable during which they openly presented and discussed the Soldiers' experiences and the academics' observations. This roundtable was open to the public and facilitated questions and comments from additional attendees. The concept of social scientists and more specifically anthropologists working closely with military veterans -- rather unlikely partners in today's

environment -- drew a fair amount of attention from the academic and military communities, as well as the national and local press.

While there have been numerous conferences and much discourse about “military anthropology” and related concepts, this was one of the first, focused symposiums on this issue with the direct objective to publish one or more substance-filled papers intended to move this field forward. Most conferences or similar events on this topic have focused on sharing ideas, sharing information, and networking; not on publication. Moreover, the papers stemming from this roundtable have the unique credibility of having been written by social scientists -- several of whom are directly affiliated with universities or other DoD services -- in conjunction with experienced military personnel at the Army’s Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth.

These writings – which now comprise the chapters of this book – represent only the beginning of what is hopefully an ever growing appreciation for the extent to which social science and specifically Anthropology can substantially improve a soldier’s ability to stabilize a situation in a hostile environment as well as assist a unit’s capability to deal more viably with a culturally unknown, possibly uncooperative population. Furthermore, such culture-based knowledge will certainly contribute a great deal to a senior decision-maker’s ability to better understand second or third order effects of any course of action/non-action. Cultural fields of study will not provide tactical, operational, strategic, or political planners all the answers they need to know about the environment in question. On the contrary, cultural fields of study will provide these planners the foundation-level context necessary to ask the right questions from the outset rather than erring in their assumptions.

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Part 5 of 5

Some Concluding Remarks on a New Era in Warfare

Felix Moos

Like death and taxes, warfare has become a fact of life in the 21st Century, ranging from 15 major wars at the end of 2003 (the United Nations defines “major wars” as conflicts inflicting 1,000 battlefields deaths per year) to insurgencies in India (Naxalite Uprising since 1967), Peru (Shining Path, since 1970s) and Nepal (Maoists, since 1996). Although some have argued that the nature of war has not changed (Hew Strachan, Oxford Today, 2007), this is not necessarily

so. Warfare has indeed evolved to become primarily asymmetric. What has stayed true however, is that war, as Clausewitz noted long ago, nevertheless remains “a serious means to a serious end. It is a political act. It always arises from political conditions and is called forth by political motive” (quoted in Anatol Rapoport’s 1968 *Clausewitz on War*). This is certainly as true in India, Nepal and Peru as it is for the ongoing conflicts engaging the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. Clausewitz thought that no war should happen if “people acted wisely.” However, how often in real life do ‘the people’ act wisely? Thus, (traditional) war shouldn’t break out suddenly, but asymmetric conflict apparently does.

Current asymmetric conflicts have caught the United States generally, and anthropologists in the United States and elsewhere, unprepared intellectually, emotionally and materially. It requires some considerable ethical agility to identify insurgencies and consequent suicide bombing (perhaps, initially perfected by the Sri Lanka Tamil Tigers/LTTE) and IEDs so successfully employed by insurgents in Iraq, and then copied by the Taliban in Afghanistan, simply with crime rather than an evolved form of warfare. We need to understand this ongoing evolutionary process far better than we do. We need to grasp what has changed and what has not. Non-state actors may still be in the business of war for personal profit, but now, the stakes are often much higher and surely through the evolution in the technology of war, far more efficiently deadly. Although it may be true that by this first decade of the new century few insurgencies have managed to topple existing governments; however, with the evolution of this type of struggle this may not remain so. Asymmetric conflict—even more than traditional war—is not waged with anthropological abstractions, but against a reality that is social, religious, economic, political, and perhaps above all, cultural. It may not be unreasonable to argue that neither US academe nor the US military have fully comprehended the essence of ‘insurgency’ driven by cultural, religious, ethnic, or simply economic circumstances.

Insurgencies in the early 21st Century are far more matters of ethnicity, religion, and ideology than was true for earlier wars of liberation. Such conflicts require a radical new comprehension of the real measure of the forces of culture and language. We can’t just simply attempt to teach, for example, “classes about military values, the law of armed conflict, human rights and the role of a military in a democracy (Garamone 2006, quoted in Kem and Kirby, 2007) in an American-inspired Iraqi ‘Center for Military Values and Principles, and Leadership’ or institute a drug reduction program in Afghanistan by simply destroying poppy fields rather than winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of farmers by buying their crop and/or subsidizing it. Rather than opting for any “either-or” proposition that has been a hallmark of American political and military decision-making, we should find a way to combine cultural ingredients from Iraqi, Afghani and US military cultures. In order to minimize IED incidents it has become a vital necessity to employ “alternative approaches that rely on deep and nuanced understandings of the cultural dynamics of local populations...to engage the civilian populations in efforts to reduce IED activity.” (Dean & Bartels, *Improvised Explosive Devices in Iraq*). Unfortunately, the United States military and a little informed US public responded to Tamil Tigers’ initial extensive use of suicide belts and IEDs not at all or, at best, much too slowly. Even if today most civilian and military decision leaders agree that better intelligence is essential to reduce the threat of either suicide bombing or IEDs, the necessary cultural and linguistic components for such an improved intelligence are still lacking.

Maxie McFarland (Military Cultural Education, Military Review March-April, 2005) has correctly argued that: “the emerging importance of cultural identity and its inherent frictions make it imperative for soldiers and leaders -- military and civilian -- to understand societal and cultural norms of populaces in which they operate and function. They must appreciate, understand, and respect those norms and use them as tools for shaping operations and the effects they expect to achieve.” Such a call for cultural and linguistic agility in the US Armed Forces is not new; it was repeatedly proposed during the Vietnam War but never really fully implemented. Might we even suggest that the lessons of Vietnam were never learned. Nevertheless, the Vietnam War was an excellent model for a study of a post-WWII insurgency. As American cultural and linguistic illiteracy led to evermore casualties in Iraq by 2005/6, a surge in forces, overcoming the opposition of the Joint Chiefs, was instituted and the ‘Petraeus Factor’ was put in place in order to stop the hemorrhaging. General Petraeus subsequently went on to state: “You cannot kill your way out of an insurgency” (as quoted in TIME/Asia edition, February 8, 2008). Apparently, some US military leaders have now come to recognize that a traditional military response based on force alone is doomed to fail. In addition, these new perceptions about the challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan led the US military to create the ‘Human Terrain System’ emphasizing a greater cultural agility for specially trained teams assisting Brigade commanders with cultural information in decision-making. However, this new intellectual, knowledge-based environment in the US military requires a new, truly cooperative, greatly invigorated partnership with American academe in general and social science/anthropology in particular. Moreover, fundamentally, this new realization, that just maybe brains might be more important than bullets, requires a giant leap in how the US Armed Forces trains their soldiers and prepares Human Terrain Teams for deployment—and uses their experience after deployment. In fighting 4th generation, asymmetric conflicts, cultural agility and foreign language fluency must not be the skill of a selected few soldiers but should become skills valued throughout the US Armed Forces. In the 21st century, differences between military and academic learning has become ever more insignificant and a new, far more cooperative, relationship should be agreed to by both constituencies and rapidly implemented.

For example, it is equally important for the soldier and the scholar to recognize that religion is no longer simply passed on from one generation to another, rather it has become far more a matter of individual choice. Thus, when people become so deeply, personally involved with their religious faith, then things both good, but often also bad, begin to happen. Religion becomes THE dominant factor of one’s everyday existence. To become a martyr becomes easier, and to sacrifice one’s life as a suicide bomber or exploding an IED becomes far easier because it is an expression of personal belief. Being loyal to a cause becomes being loyal to one’s religion. Not understanding the major AND subtle differences between Sunni and Shi’a Muslims, or not to appreciate the fact that Iraqi Kurds are Sunni adherents but are not Arab, endangers an ultimate success of US efforts in Iraq. Not to appreciate the fact that neither Hamas nor Hizbullah are a sectarian organization is as fatal as not understanding the religious differences between Sri Lankan Buddhists and Hindu Tamils or that Catholics kill Protestants in Mexico’s Chiapas, or that the PRC now bans Tibetan Buddhist rinpoches from reincarnating without government permission.

To fight 21st century insurgencies, traditional military applications apparently are doomed to fail. Not to engage the American public nor the world public in challenging this new form of warfare

surely means more casualties, both civilian and military. Shouldn't the more than 10,000 lawyers now employed by the Pentagon be complemented by a commensurate number of anthropologists/social scientists? The overall world security mirrors a plethora of different cultures far more than imaging a global ethical or legal paradigm. A dialogue on Iraq and Afghanistan as facilitated by these Military-Social Science Roundtables can only remind us that a pause in war signals ever an end to it. If we are serious to confront 21st century armed conflicts then we must find a new, truly cooperative compact between academe and the military and we must do all we can to continue the dialogue.

Dr. Felix Moos holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Washington, Seattle. He has been a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Kansas for more than 30 years and an anthropologist with fieldwork primarily in Asia and the Pacific for half a century. Dr. Moos has served as a commissioned officer with the US military and has held various positions within the US government. He has taught repeatedly in various components of Ft. Leavenworth since the 1960s. Dr. Moos has also held the Admiral Ricketts Chair for Comparative Cultures at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. He recently served as the Vice Chair (International) for the International Association for Intelligence Education.

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