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## WHY IS THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY NOT MY FRIEND? INTEGRATING HUMAN TERRAIN ANALYSIS IN CONTEMPORARY OPERATIONS

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**JCSP 42**

***Exercise Solo Flight***

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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**WHY IS THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY NOT MY FRIEND? :**  
**INTEGRATING HUMAN TERRAIN ANALYSIS**  
**IN CONTEMPORARY OPERATIONS**

*A knowledge of the character of the people and command of their language are great assets. Political methods and motives which govern the actions of foreign people and their [factions], incomprehensible at best to the average North American, are practically beyond the understanding of persons who do not speak their language.*

- United States Marine Corps Small Wars Manual, 1940

## **INTRODUCTION**

Mullah Naqib, a senior elder of the Alokozai tribe, was among Kandahar's most influential power brokers and was a reliable ally of both Afghan President Hamid Karzai and coalition forces from the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 until his death in 2007. He was a renowned *mujahedeen* leader during the war against the Soviets and served as regional military commander during the years of civil war prior to the Taliban takeover in 1994. He led the warriors of his tribe as one of the two U.S.-backed factions that defeated the Taliban in Mullah Omar's home Kandahar province, and personally negotiated the surrender and expulsion of holdout Taliban in Kandahar City.<sup>1</sup> After being outmaneuvered for the governorship by a political rival, he demobilized his militia to prevent further violence.<sup>2</sup> From his stronghold in the verdant agricultural Arghandab district north of Kandahar City, he worked successively with the Americans and then the Canadians to keep the Taliban from re-entering the province and deter young Kandaharis from joining their ranks.<sup>3</sup> It was thus difficult to understand why following the 15 January 2006 suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device which killed Canadian diplomat Glyn Berry and injured three soldiers, Naqib intervened to obtain the release of the

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Chayes, *The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan After the Taliban* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 44.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-78.

<sup>3</sup> Joe Friesen, "Kandahar Tribal Leader Injured in Blast," *Globe and Mail*, 10 March 2007.

prime suspect two days after he was taken into custody despite significant evidence.<sup>4</sup> Questioned later by a Canadian journalist about his interference in the investigation, Naqib “said proudly that it had been his duty.”<sup>5</sup>

Strongman Abdul Raziq has also been a staunch American ally since the early days of the intervention in Afghanistan, at which time he was youthful warlord in his early twenties. He initially partnered his militia with coalition special forces in Kandahar’s highest traffic border region with Pakistan, around the town of Spin Boldak. His perceived success in hunting the Taliban and disrupting their smuggling of fighters and weapons into Afghanistan led to the absorption of his militia into the fledgling Afghan Border Police. The target of repeated assassination attempts, which he always attributes to his Taliban enemies, he has long been believed to control the trafficking of drugs and other contraband in his border sector.<sup>6</sup> He is also alleged to have orchestrated the revenge killing of sixteen Afghans over a smuggling dispute in 2006 (a damning investigation by the Kabul-based national Criminal Investigation Division was suppressed by the Karzai government).<sup>7</sup> Despite this, in 2011 he was appointed Chief of Police for the entire province of Kandahar.

Situations like these, which have abounded in stability and counter-insurgency operations of the post-Cold War period, are confusing and frustrating for commanders. Speaking in hindsight about the situation in Afghanistan in 2006 when the Canadian task force first arrived, Major-General David Fraser lamented that “I was looking at the wrong map – I needed to look at the tribal map...”<sup>8</sup> He goes on to state that “wherever we go in the world we must take into

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<sup>4</sup> Graeme Smith, “A Country Where Blood is Everything,” *Globe and Mail*, 11 September 2006.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Mathieu Aikins “Our Man in Kandahar.” *Atlantic Monthly*, November 2011: 87.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Emily Spencer and Tony Balasevicius, “Crucible of Success: Cultural Intelligence and the Modern Battlespace,” *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 40.

account culture.”<sup>9</sup> American anthropologist Montgomery McFate, who spearheaded the U.S. effort to enhance cultural understanding in Iraq and Afghanistan, opined in a 2006 essay that “U.S. forces frequently don’t know who their friends are, and just as often do not know who their enemies are.”<sup>10</sup>

Modern armies have long recognized the importance of providing some host nation cultural lessons and rudimentary language training to soldiers deploying. But this *cultural awareness* is well below the level of expertise and insight that allows true *cultural understanding*, the ability to recognize and interact appropriately with the various family, tribal, religious, ethnic, and political entities that populate and affect the operating environment – the *human terrain*. And what commanders have sought goes further still, to a level where the systems that those entities exist in can be mapped and the effects of actions anticipated or even influenced – which is achieved through *human terrain analysis*.

The case for the importance of sociocultural understanding in contemporary stabilization and counterinsurgency operations has been made by McFate and others.<sup>11</sup> This paper will seek to examine the initial U.S. and Canadian efforts to *employ* human terrain analysis in Iraq and Afghanistan – which can at best be presently described to be in a degree of stasis following withdrawal from those theatres – to draw lessons for our future capability in this domain. Contemporary and near future conflicts will be fought in large part amongst populations, and successful military operations will require a human terrain analysis capability that is thoroughly

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>10</sup> Montgomery McFate, "Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of their Curious Relationship," *Military Review* 85, no. 2 (March-April 2005): 25.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to McFate see the work of MG (Retd) Robert Scales, quoted below. In the Canadian context CANSOFCOM researcher Emily Spencer has been active (Spencer and Balasevicius, 2009, and Emily Spencer, "Brains and Brawn: Cultural Intelligence as the Tool of Choice in the Contemporary Operating Environment," *Canadian Military Journal* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2010)).

embraced by command teams, integrated with the intelligence function, and supported by an effective knowledge management infrastructure.

This paper will first clarify the various terms that are used by Canada and its major allies in the culture and human terrain domain, and substantiate the assertion that future conflicts will be among populations – where culture will matter. It will then compare the initial deployed human terrain efforts of the U.S. Human Terrain System and the Canada’s interagency White Situational Awareness Team. Finally, key lessons from both will be assessed and recommendations made for a future human terrain analysis capability to support Canadian expeditionary operations.

## **DEFINITIONS AND FUTURE CONFLICT**

### **Defining the Human Terrain**

Words matter, especially when dealing with a sociocultural topic that has the sensitivities that surround potentially influencing or leveraging non-combatant populations to achieve military aims. It is straightforward to define *culture* as the customs, ideas, and social behaviour of a particular people or group.<sup>12</sup> *Human geography* is the branch of geography concerned with how the human population affects or is influenced by the earth’s surface, and is typically concerned with themes of ethnicity, demographics, language, religion, education, land use and ownership, and transportation – and how to visualize and depict this in relation to the physical surface of the planet.<sup>13</sup> The uniquely military phrase *human terrain* – which immediately contrasts it with the physical, geographic terrain – describes “the social, ethnographic, cultural,

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<sup>12</sup> *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed., 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), *Joint Doctrine Note 04/13 Culture and Human Terrain*, (Swindon, UK: Ministry of Defence, 2013), 1-2.

economic, and political elements of the people among whom a force is operating.”<sup>14</sup> *Human terrain analysis* is the process of assessing cultural and human geography information to create understanding of the human dimension of the operating environment.<sup>15</sup> The term *white situational awareness* is similar to human terrain (referencing the use of the colour white for civilian objects in military map depictions), but more explicitly describes the civilian dimensions.

This work will also employ a hierarchy of cultural capability, borrowed from a comprehensive study of U.S. human terrain efforts by National Defense University professor Christopher Lamb and his colleagues:

- Cultural Awareness: basic awareness of language and religion and an understanding and observance of local norms and boundaries.
- Cultural Understanding: the ‘why’ of behaviour embodied in perceptions, mindsets, attitudes, and customs.
- Cultural Intelligence: the implications of these behaviours and their drivers, including ways in which culture can shape decision making.<sup>16</sup>

### **‘War Amongst the People’**

Retired British General Sir Rupert Smith posits in his landmark 2005 book *The Utility of Force* that based on the state of wars and warfare since 1945 contemporary and near future conflicts have a distinctly different character than the paradigm of industrial-age war which defines much of our current military doctrine, structures, and equipment. He proposes not

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph Kipp, Lester Grau, Karl Prinslow, and Don Smith, "The Human Terrain System: A CORDS for the 21st Century," *Military Review* 86, no. 5 (September-October 2006): 9.

<sup>15</sup> DCDC 2013, 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher J. Lamb, James Douglas Orton, Michael C. Davies, Theodore T. Pikulsky, *Human Terrain Teams: An Organizational Innovation for Sociocultural Knowledge in Irregular Warfare* (Washington D.C.: Institute of World Politics Press, 2013), 8. The use of the phrase ‘cultural intelligence’ is problematic for the implications of intelligence operations against civilian populations. In a Canadian context Emily Spencer also uses it liberally and with a somewhat more relaxed definition than the one provided here (Spencer and Balasevicius, 2009 and Spencer, 2010). David Kilcullen proposes a similar hierarchy but his third-level name ‘cultural leverage’ is at least as problematic (David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 223-224.

considering modern wars as single decisive events (like the world wars), but recognising that almost all are flare-ups of conflict in long-standing confrontations which will not be resolved solely by ending or suppressing the violence.<sup>17</sup> He further offers six trends of future conflict:

- The ends for which we fight are changing from the hard objectives that decide a political outcome to those of establishing conditions in which the outcome may be decided
- We fight amongst the people, not on the battlefield
- Our conflicts tend to be timeless, even unending
- We fight so as to preserve the force rather than risking all to gain the objective
- On each occasion new uses are found for old weapons and organizations which are the product of industrial war
- The sides are mostly non-state, comprising some form of multi-national grouping against some non-state party or parties<sup>18</sup>

Of all of these trends, it is his prescient articulation of *war amongst the people* which has created the most discussion and for which his opus is best known. Smith's explanations for this trend are both because opponents will seek to conceal themselves amongst populations to avoid detection and exploit our aversion to collateral damage, and because in stability and counterinsurgency operations the guerilla will directly target the people to shift their support towards his cause.<sup>19</sup> The industrial-age campaign theme of major combat operations, with its focus on military-to-military engagements, physical terrain, and relative indifference to the population and cultural factors, will be replaced by emerging styles of warfare that blur the established boundaries of conflict such as *unrestricted warfare* and *hybrid warfare*. A 2014 RAND Corporation report on lessons from Iraq observes that we must be as prepared to support future insurgencies as we were to counter them,<sup>20</sup> which will equally rely on the support of the population. Canada's 2014 *Future Security Environment* report predicts that adversaries with

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<sup>17</sup>Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 184-187, 269-70.

<sup>18</sup>Smith, 271.

<sup>19</sup>Smith, 280-81.

<sup>20</sup>Christopher S. Chivvis, Olga Olikier, Andrew M. Liepman, Ben Connable, George Wilcoxon, William Young, "Initial Thoughts on the Impact of the Iraq War on U.S. National Security Structures," *RAND Corporation*. 2014: 7. <http://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE111.html>



socio-cultural ties to areas will operate among populations making distinguishing combatant from non-combatant difficult.<sup>21</sup> The United Kingdom's 2010 *Future Character of Conflict* forecast echoes Smith's trend of operating amongst populations as well as identifying that it will be aggravated by increasing urbanization, and concludes that ". . .we will struggle to dominate" in this environment.<sup>22</sup> A 2014 Australian report shares a similar outlook, stating that "as [ISR] technologies continue to improve, adversaries will seek shelter in complex and congested physical, human, and informational terrain."<sup>23</sup>

How then to meet these challenges? Smith tells us that in order to effectively operate amongst the people, "we must first understand 'the people'."<sup>24</sup> The military solution to this is human terrain analysis to integrate relevant sociocultural information into the commander's understanding of the operating environment in support of decision making.

## COMPARING RECENT HUMAN TERRAIN INITIATIVES

The following section will compare the human terrain analysis initiatives of the United States and Canada in Iraq and Afghanistan, looking at the origins, personnel selection and preparation, methods, contribution to operational planning, and challenges and controversies unique to each, and concluding with an assessment of the success of each national effort.

### The U.S. Response - The Human Terrain System

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<sup>21</sup> Chief of Force Development, *Future Security Environment 2013-2030* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2014), 112. While the issues of urbanization and opponents who hide among the population are mentioned, there is no analysis or nor deductions about the military capabilities required to address this. In contrast, deductions and recommendations abound for cyber and space challenges, suggesting that the human terrain analysis capability gap lacks traction with CFD.

<sup>22</sup> Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre, *Future Character of Conflict* (Swindon, UK: Ministry of Defence, 2010), 16.

<sup>23</sup> Directorate of Future Land Warfare, *Future Land Warfare Report* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2014), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, 281.

As the U.S. struggled with unrealized expectations in Iraq through the winter and spring of 2004, retired U.S. Army Major General Robert H. Scales offered a startling prescription to a military that “remain[ed] wedded to the premise that success in war is best achieved by overwhelming technological advantage,”<sup>25</sup> proposing that:

. . . intimate knowledge of the enemy’s motivation, intent, will, tactical method, and cultural environment has proved to be far more important for success than the deployment of smart bombs, unmanned aircraft, and expansive bandwidth.<sup>26</sup>

Writing in early 2005, anthropologist Montgomery McFate – who would become part of General David Petraeus’s counterinsurgency inner circle – wrote an influential article in *Military Review* that built on the importance of culture in contemporary conflicts (especially COIN) in which she proposed her social science discipline as the toolbox that could bring this required cultural understanding to military commanders in operations with its methodologies of fieldwork, participant observation and research conducted within a context of cultural relativism.<sup>27</sup> The U.S. Army Human Terrain System (HTS) was born in late 2006 from this “recognition of the need for greater cultural sophistication,” with McFate as its Chief Social Scientist and with mixed support within the military for the role and value of sociocultural information.<sup>28</sup> The HTS mission statement was to:

Conduct operationally-relevant, open-source social science research, and provide commanders and staffs at the [Brigade Combat Team] and Division levels with an embedded knowledge capability to establish a coherent, analytical cultural framework for operational planning, decision-making, and assessment.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Robert H. Scales, "Culture-Centric Warfare," *Proceedings* 130, no. 10 (October 2004): 32.

<sup>26</sup> Scales, 32.

<sup>27</sup> McFate, 26. She defines cultural relativism, a central epistemological tenet of anthropology, as “understanding other societies from within their own framework.”

<sup>28</sup> Paul Joseph, *"Soft" Counterinsurgency: Human Terrain Teams and U.S. Military Strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 19.

<sup>29</sup> Human Terrain System, *Human Terrain Team Handbook* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, September 2008), 4.

The components of HTS were deployed five person Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) embedded at brigade level, and a U.S.-based reachback network of dedicated research cells, subject-matter experts, and trainers.<sup>30</sup> Each team was to have a lead with military staff experience, research managers with military intelligence experience (able to connect HTT efforts to military planning), analysts with area-specific expert cultural knowledge and language skills, and at least one PhD- or MA-level social scientist.<sup>31</sup> The pilot project was conducted under the supervision of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) with all HTT personnel hired as contractors and trained by BAE Systems.<sup>32</sup> The first cohort was hired in early 2007 and five HTTs were deployed by the summer of that year. Initial positive feedback led to a demand to quickly create up to 30 HTTs, with one fielded to every deployed U.S. Army and Marine Corps brigade.<sup>33</sup> The rapid expansion strained the contractor's hiring capacity, lowering the bar for cultural expertise and language abilities among analysts and resulting in social scientists with graduate degrees in disciplines beyond anthropology and sociology such as political science, international relations, and economics.<sup>34</sup> Training was initially essentially self-designed by the initial cohort, but as feedback came from the teams in the field it was significantly improved to eventually comprise fifty days of cultural and methodology preparation and nine weeks of military and survival skills which included integration with brigades at the Joint Readiness Training Centre (although rarely those they would actually deploy with).<sup>35</sup> Formed teams were not trained together, but instead once individuals were deemed ready for deployment they were matched to gaps in HTTs already in theatre.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kipp et al., 12.

<sup>31</sup> Human Terrain System, 12-16.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Lamb et al., 45-46.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph, 30.

<sup>35</sup> Lamb et al., 221-236.

<sup>36</sup> Lamb et al., 192-193.

The actual employment of HTT members varied widely depending on both the demands of the commander and staff they served under and the dynamic and skills of the team itself.<sup>37</sup> Most were engaged in fieldwork to varying degrees in order to understand their assigned areas of operations. The teams moved with military patrols for protection and mobility. Although civilians, HTT members wore U.S. military uniforms when outside the wire and had the option of carrying weapons.<sup>38</sup> Over the course of the program three HTT members were killed while conducting fieldwork, two in improvised explosive device (IED) attacks and one social scientist was doused with gasoline and lit on fire while in the midst of an interview.

In order to provide flexibility in advising commanders and their senior staffs – who were sometimes skeptical of the utility of sociocultural advice – the reporting and tasking relationship varied depending on the brigade being supported. The HTT handbook itself suggested either placing the HTT as part of the commander's special staff, or as part of the effects cell in the operations (G/S3) branch.<sup>39</sup> In 2009, in response to continued uncertainty by many brigades about how to work with their assigned HTTs, a *Commander's Guide: Employing a Human Terrain Team* was issued by the Centre for Army Lessons Learned.<sup>40</sup>

The HTT handbook also laid out in detail how the team was to integrate into each step of the military decision making process (MDMP – the U.S. Army's equivalent to the Canadian Operational Planning Process), emphasizing ongoing assessment of potential human terrain

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<sup>37</sup> Christopher Sims, "Academics in Foxholes: The Life and Death of the Human Terrain System," *Foreign Affairs*, 4 February 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2016-02-04/academics-foxholes>

<sup>38</sup> Joseph, 25. As many HTT contractors had military service this sensibly added more guns to the patrol from a force protection perspective, and as some analysts pointed out also provided credibility to HTTs members in 'warrior' cultures like Afghanistan's. An opposing view explored below is that armed social science researchers irreparably undermine their own impartiality.

<sup>39</sup> Human Terrain System, 28-9. It was explicitly not to be placed with the intelligence section in order to maintain the academic impartiality of the social science dimensions of their work.

<sup>40</sup> Centre for Army Lessons Learned, *Handbook No. 09-21 Commander's Guide: Employing a Human Terrain Team in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom* (Leavenworth, KS: Department of Defense, 2009).

impacts and second- and third-order effects rather than simply providing an up front human terrain briefing on the selected area of operations.<sup>41</sup> The divergence of backgrounds and mindsets between the social scientists and staff officers was anticipated to create a tension that would enrich MDMP.<sup>42</sup> In practice, HTTs were often challenged to present information in a way that was understandable and actionable by military planners.<sup>43</sup>

The HTS was dogged by controversies. It experienced many of the same allegations of waste and fraud as other rapidly fielded and expanded contractor programs in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as complaints of racism and sexual harassment.<sup>44</sup> More significantly, the employment of social science in support of military operations gained considerable scrutiny and some scorn from the academic world, whose code of conduct for field research can be summarized as: 1) do no harm; 2) have the consent of the population being studied; and 3) don't conduct secret research.<sup>45</sup> HTS maintained that teams were not to actively seek actionable intelligence during fieldwork or contribute directly to kinetic targeting.<sup>46</sup> This assurance was insufficient for the American Anthropological Association, which observed in a report critical of HTS that armed researchers (or even ones surrounded by soldiers) could hardly be considered to have been granted consent without coercion, that there was no ethics review board process, and once collected that the resulting sociocultural information was being classified by the U.S. military.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Human Terrain System, 36-38.

<sup>42</sup> Lamb et al., 128.

<sup>43</sup> Christopher Sims, *The Human Terrain System: Operationally Relevant Social Science Research in Iraq and Afghanistan* (Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army War College Press, 2015), 269.

<sup>44</sup> Whitney Kassel, "The Army Needs Anthropologists," *Foreign Policy*. 28 July 2015. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/28/the-army-needs-anthropologists-iraq-afghanistan-human-terrain/>

<sup>45</sup> Roberto J. Gonzalez, *American Counterinsurgency: Human Science and the Human Terrain* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2009), 17.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph, 20. This was addressed in a FAQ on the now-defunct HTS official program website.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph, 21.

Although HTS personnel transitioned from being contractors to Department of Defense civilians between the end of 2008 and 2010 to improve oversight, it remained a target for critics both inside and outside of the military. At a total cost of \$700 million USD by the time it was quietly shut down in the fall of 2014, it was the most expensive government-sponsored social science initiative ever.<sup>48</sup>

In responding to criticism the U.S. Army has cited many brigade commanders who believe HTTs added “significant value to their operations.”<sup>49</sup> Others seeking to assess HTS have suggested more modest outcomes, with sociologist Paul Joseph concluding that although they increased cultural awareness, they never achieved the level of cultural intelligence that would be actionable by commanders.<sup>50</sup> Christopher Sims, a researcher into the anthropology of insurgencies, observes that “academics were often unable to convey their findings in a timely, digestible format for their military colleagues.”<sup>51</sup> Finally, a comprehensive 2013 study of HTS led by Christopher Lamb and Douglas Orton of National Defense University assesses that while many commanders were “thankful for enhanced situational awareness HTTs provided,”<sup>52</sup> the excessive HTS focus on fieldwork meant they were unable to devote sufficient resources to integrating cultural understanding and intelligence at the brigade level.<sup>53</sup>

### **Canada’s Afghanistan Solution – The White Situational Awareness Team**

Canada had no structured human terrain analysis capability prior to the deployment of the Canadian Task Force to Kandahar in 2006. A degree of cultural understanding by Canadians was achieved through immersion and repetition in the Balkan operations of the 1990s and early

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<sup>48</sup> Kassel.

<sup>49</sup> Kassel. She quotes a March 2013 letter from Secretary of the Army John McHugh to Congressman Duncan Hunter, a former marine and fierce critic of HTS.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph, 39. Although Joseph explicitly acknowledges the hierarchy of cultural awareness, understanding, and intelligence described by Lamb et al., he deliberately eschews use of the term understanding.

<sup>51</sup> Sims, “Academics in Foxholes.”

<sup>52</sup> Lamb et al., 185.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

2000s. The initial ISAF deployments to Kabul included only relevant cultural awareness training. It took the lethality of the counterinsurgency environment in Kandahar to truly drive home the consequences of neglecting this dimension.

The first initiative came through Major-General Fraser's use of then-Army Reserve Major (and current Minister of National Defence) Harjit Sajjan's Vancouver Police Department gang squad background in criminal intelligence to attempt to understand the networks the insurgents and population were connected to, which Sajjan states that he accomplished through "a combination of street smarts and cultural sensitivity."<sup>54</sup> Following this 2006 effort, human terrain analysis was revisited with vigor in late 2007 by then-Brigadier-General Denis Thompson, Task Force Kandahar commander-designate, in cooperation with the head of the civilian mission, Representative of Canada in Kandahar (RoCK) Elissa Golberg, with the intention that a team would deploy to Kandahar as part of Thompson's headquarters in early 2008.<sup>55</sup> After investigating the nascent U.S. Army HTS with their tactical collection focus as well as efforts in the U.S geospatial intelligence community to visualize human terrain data to support cultural understanding, Thompson and Golberg elected to focus limited Canadian resources on an interagency analysis team that would be linked to but independent from the intelligence function.<sup>56</sup> The initiative was titled the White Situational Analysis Team (WSAT), in reference to the colour coding assigned to the civilian environment in depicting the battlespace (where blue was for friendly forces, red for enemy, green for allied factions, and brown for terrain, etc.).

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<sup>54</sup> John Geddes, "What Lies Beneath," *Maclean's*, 18 January 2016, 19.

<sup>55</sup> Colonel Hugh Ferguson, email to the author, 21 April 2016. Then-Lieutenant-Colonel Ferguson served as J2 to now-MGen Thompson and was charged with developing the White Situational Awareness Team.

<sup>56</sup> Ferguson, email to the author, 5 May 2016.

The initial WSAT was composed of five members; two military from the intelligence branch (one officer and one corporal to act as a collator for the team), and three public servants from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (two foreign service officers and one policy analyst seconded from National Defence) – thus similar in size to an HTT for the brigade-strength Task Force Kandahar.<sup>57</sup> The civilian members were chosen from among federal public service volunteers for Afghanistan, with military input to selection criteria limited to a request for social science backgrounds and a description of the work to be conducted.<sup>58</sup> All of the civilian members had graduate degrees (although none in the social sciences), and the uniformed members brought familiarity with the intelligence cycle, the operational planning process (OPP) and the military environment.<sup>59</sup> The civilian WSAT members participated in the same pre-deployment training as all federal public servants deploying to Afghanistan in personal protection and survival skills, as well as a two day familiarization with the OPP for all policy officer-level civilians.<sup>60</sup> The only specialized preparation consisted of visits to Canadian intelligence organizations and Foreign Affairs to liaise with potential reachback resources.<sup>61</sup> The WSAT was deployed in the summer of 2008, and officially launched in October.<sup>62</sup>

Once established, the WSAT reported through the Task Force Kandahar J2 (Chief of Intelligence) although their work was compartmentalized from the intelligence section of the headquarters.<sup>63</sup> The J2 also assigned and prioritized their areas of focus, and as this was a nascent capability provided guidance on the type of products to be produced – typically link analyses and

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<sup>57</sup> Debbie McCosham, email to the author, 5 May 2016. Debbie McCosham was one of the civilian members of the initial WSAT deployment.

<sup>58</sup> Ferguson, 5 May 2016.

<sup>59</sup> McCosham, 5 May 2016

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Tom Blackwell, “Mapping ‘White’ Afghans Aim to End Civilian Deaths,” *National Post*, 8 November 2008.

<sup>63</sup> Ferguson, 5 May 2016.



tribal maps for key districts as well as personality profiles of identified power brokers.<sup>64</sup> The Canadian WSAT was not intended for fieldwork to conduct its own collection, but one analyst did spend some time outside of the wire accompanying the RoCK to key meetings with local leaders as well as at forward operating bases debriefing patrols and consulting directly with local coalition commanders.<sup>65</sup>

The desired WSAT interagency reachback capability to Canada for further research and analysis was never fully realized, and an early initiative for academic reachback to a major Canadian university also floundered on issues of context for those outside of theatre, the sheer volume of raw data, and challenges with transfer between classified and unclassified networks.<sup>66</sup> They did participate in something of a community of practice within Regional Command (South) with other national human terrain initiatives as well as collaborating with an ISAF team seeking to achieve a macro view of the region. There was no routine integration of the WSAT into the tactical OPP of Task Force Kandahar, although WSAT products were requested and reviewed by the operational planning group as part of the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB). The task force J2 during the initial WSAT rotation opines that during his time this provided *awareness* of the human terrain in an area of operations for planners but there was insufficient *analysis* for it to really shape course of action design and selection.<sup>67</sup>

One of the identified major challenges for the WSAT in fact came from being segregated from the intelligence function: without being part of the intelligence cycle and with no tasking authority for military assets, there was no means to target collection of required human terrain

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<sup>64</sup> McCosham, 5 May 2016.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Ferguson, 5 May 2016.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* One analyst noted that as then-Brigadier-General Jon Vance's model village project was assembled in 2009 she was intimately involved in the OPP for the selection of the pilot location and plan development (McCosham, 5 May 2016).

information by patrols or specialists like Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) or human intelligence (HUMINT) teams to fill gaps.<sup>68</sup> There were also issues in managing access and information sharing between WSAT and the intelligence section, and lack of familiarity with military reporting. Finally, when then-Brigadier-General Vance arrived in theatre in early 2009 with a special advisor on human terrain on his personal staff with whom he had prepared for the deployment (and where direct, regular access to the commander provided a different effect), the existing WSAT analysis capability was largely sidelined.<sup>69</sup> The military positions on the WSAT were not replaced after the first rotation, while the civilian analyst positions were moved to the Provincial Reconstruction Team.

The Task Force Kandahar J2 from the period of the initial rotation assesses the operational impact of the WSAT's work as modest over their initial six months, but emphasizes the progress made to understand the challenges of collecting, collating, and analysing human terrain data and information into usable products to enable commanders.<sup>70</sup> The approach of General Vance and his special advisor produced a different dynamic that is beyond the scope of this paper.

## **ASSESSING HUMAN TERRAIN INITIATIVES**

This section will examine key lessons from the comparison of the human terrain analysis initiatives, including the relationship with the intelligence function, the role of fieldwork versus a focus on analysis, the role of knowledge management systems and technology, and the importance of command team endorsement to the successful incorporation of human terrain analysis in to military decision making.

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<sup>68</sup> McCosham, 5 May 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Debbie McCosham, email to the author, 31 March 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Ferguson, 21 April 2016.

## Integration with Intelligence

Both examined initiatives were conceived to be distinctly separate from the extant military intelligence organizations that supported commanders, which was on balance detrimental to their effectiveness. A first reason for compartmentalization was to maintain the perceived ‘non-military’ and academic impartiality of the social scientists (in anticipation of the American Anthropological Association criticisms described above) and interagency analysts (to maintain the support and cooperation of other Canadian government departments, principally Foreign Affairs). Canada’s conviction that this needed to be an interagency effort that supported all lines of operations was sufficiently strong that the first public announcement of the WSAT was made by RoCK Elissa Golberg, rather than a military spokesperson.<sup>71</sup> It was also the result of institutional resistance among the military intelligence communities to acknowledge the importance of the population in understanding the operating environment, which had traditionally been defined by enemy, ground, and weather.<sup>72</sup> In the Canadian case there were also concerns that this would dilute the efforts of already scarce military intelligence resources.<sup>73</sup>

In practice, not integrating the human terrain analysis effort into the existing intelligence cycle produced a number of frictions and missed opportunities. The WSAT lacked both physical and network access to much of the data already collected on areas they were studying and the intelligence analysts already working on the terrain and enemy dimensions of the environment in those same areas.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, by excluding them from the intelligence cycle the WSAT was unable to inject information requirements (IRs) for task force elements to collect on, nor did they have any authority to task collection resources on their own to fill gaps in their data no matter

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<sup>71</sup> Blackwell, *National Post*, 8 November 2008

<sup>72</sup> Ferguson, 21 April 2016.

<sup>73</sup> Ferguson, 5 May 2016.

<sup>74</sup> McCosham, 5 May 2016.

how high the priority of their analyses.<sup>75</sup> Both Canadian and U.S. human terrain personnel also reported frustration with their lack of familiarity with military reporting systems, vocabulary, and habits, and how to transform sociocultural observations into ‘actionable’ information in a way that would be understood.<sup>76</sup>

A further argument in favour of integration of human terrain analysis into the intelligence function comes from former marine intelligence officer Ben Connable, who suggests that only an organic, uniformed solution will condition military professionals to “view the cultural terrain as a co-equal element of the military terrain.”<sup>77</sup> He argues that military intelligence institutions have matured past their early resistance to incorporating the human domain into their understanding of the operating environment, and that seeking an external solution (such as the contractors of HTS) sends the flawed message that cultural considerations are a transitory feature of today’s conflicts which he opines “will eventually lead to another wave of first round operational failures . . .”<sup>78</sup>

Canadian intelligence officer Colonel Hugh Ferguson, J2 of Task Force Kandahar during the initial WSAT deployment, concurs that the intelligence function has turned the corner in its readiness to embrace relevant cultural information, and that future human terrain analysis efforts should be fully integrated with the intelligence function.<sup>79</sup> Lamb et al.’s 2013 study of HTS similarly concluded that the program should have been part of the theatre intelligence architecture.<sup>80</sup> The role of the military intelligence function is to contribute to comprehensive battlespace awareness in support of decisions by commanders. It is the role of the staff to collate

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* The prospect of unit and sub-unit commanders trying to manage a unique, second set of human terrain IRs was acknowledged to be unfeasible.

<sup>76</sup> McCosham, 5 May 2016, and Sims, “Academics in Foxholes.”

<sup>77</sup> Ben Connable, “All Our Eggs in a Broken Basket: How the Human Terrain System is Undermining Sustainable Military Cultural Competence,” *Military Review* 89, no. 2 (March-April 2009): 57.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58.

<sup>79</sup> Ferguson, 5 May 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Lamb et al., 192.

the information on the enemy, terrain, friendly forces, and now increasingly civilian populations into a single common operating picture at some point prior to reaching the mind of the commander. The architecture to fuse this cultural information and give it significance in military decision making already exists in the intelligence function.

### **Fieldwork**

The HTS focus on tactical fieldwork is reported by some who have examined the program to have become a preoccupation that, based on the small size of the teams, distracted from analysis and integration at the brigade level.<sup>81</sup> One brigade commander described the wastefulness of using the specialized knowledge and analysis capability of the HTT to do collection as “using a squirt gun to fight a forest fire.”<sup>82</sup> It also brought significant inherent risks in force protection – borne out in the three deaths of HTS members as a result of insurgent action – and since HTTs could not move independently in the battlespace created coordination challenges and competition for resources with other military priorities. In designing the WSAT, Major-General Thompson and his J2 deliberately sought to avoid a tactical collection focus, and instead prioritize analysis and the effort to create cultural intelligence for decision makers.<sup>83</sup> The contemporary battlespace already has a large number of collection resources in the form of patrols, CIMIC and HUMINT teams, special operations forces, interpreters as well as Language and Cultural Advisors,<sup>84</sup> liaison with other agencies and non-governmental organizations, and open sources. The challenge of targeting collection by these resources in support of human

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<sup>81</sup> Lamb et al., 189

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>83</sup> Ferguson, 5 May 2016.

<sup>84</sup> In the Canadian context, interpreters are minimally vetted locally engaged translators with a sufficient degree of knowledge of the local language and English or French (usually English) to enable routine military activities like patrols and low-level Key Leader Engagements. Interpreter quality, reliability and effectiveness will typically vary broadly. Language and Cultural Advisors (LCAs) are thoroughly vetted Canadian citizens or residents who provide a higher level of translation as well as context and analysis to senior commanders and within the intelligence function.

terrain analysis is addressed by integration into the intelligence cycle, as proposed above. As a result, if they are not going to grow significantly larger, future human terrain capabilities should be targeted at analysis and integration rather than collection.

### **Knowledge Management and Technology**

Canadian and U.S. efforts were both hampered by conceptual and technical limitations to their information and knowledge management systems. There was a vast amount of data available and more created daily by all of the collectors described above. WSAT attempted to use the wiki-based information management solution implemented locally in Task Force Kandahar (known as ORION) to make its efforts discoverable throughout the task force, but it was overwhelming to keep up. HTS attempted to employ a tailored software tool known as Mapping Human Terrain (MAP-HT):

. . . an automated database and presentation tool that allows teams to gather, store, manipulate, and provide cultural data from . . . such subjects as key regional personalities, social structures, links between clans and families, economic issues, public communications, [and] agriculture . . . the system will regularly transfer data to rear elements for storage [and] to allow for more advanced analysis and wider use.<sup>85</sup>

Map-HT was despised by teams for its unintuitive interface, requirement for dedicated laptops, and inability to connect to military networks.<sup>86</sup>

One challenge these initiatives sought to mitigate was the significant loss of cultural understanding that typically took place during unit rotation. In the case of HTS this was achieved by an offset rotation cycle that saw the HTT remain in place through the handover, however was assessed to only have been as effective as the preparation of the HTT and the willingness of the incoming commander and staff to engage with them.<sup>87</sup> Unsatisfactory or excessively tactical

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<sup>85</sup> Kipp et al., 13.

<sup>86</sup> Lamb et al., 42 and Joseph, 29.

<sup>87</sup> Lamb et al., 188-195.

handovers in fact often set the tone for the relationship between BCTs and their HTTs for the duration of the deployment.<sup>88</sup> The WSAT also did not measurably improve the quality of handovers for Task Force Kandahar during the period examined.<sup>89</sup> Human terrain analysis can only have enduring operational value in a theatre if it is underpinned with a technologically supportable knowledge management system that provides discoverable information and knowledge for follow-on rotations.

### **Command Team Endorsement**

Both WSAT and HTS sources identify the attitude of the commander towards sociocultural information and his human terrain capability as key drivers of their success. The very existence of the WSAT was as a result of the efforts of both Major-General Thompson and RoCK Elissa Golberg, and the team was tasked with specific analyses and production tasks by those leaders to inform their decision making.<sup>90</sup> Conversely, once General Vance rotated in with a different model for human terrain awareness (through his special advisor and his team) the existing WSAT became even more detached from the intelligence fusion function and was searching for a role.<sup>91</sup> Anthropologist Joseph as well as Lamb et al. document numerous and varying perceptions of HTTs by brigade commanders, who in many cases had the opportunity be supported by different HTTs on consecutive deployments.<sup>92</sup> A common thread was the level of involvement and direction provided by commanders and their key staff to the HTTs: where

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<sup>88</sup> Sims, *The Human Terrain System*, 349-50.

<sup>89</sup> Ferguson, 5 May 2016. One analyst who moved to the PRT later in her rotation felt she did contribute at a lower tactical level to the preservation of cultural understanding for CIMIC teams within very specific areas of operations (McCosham, 5 May 2016).

<sup>90</sup> McCosham, 5 May 2016

<sup>91</sup> McCosham, 31 March 2016. This should not be taken as a criticism of General Vance's approach to human terrain, which was enthusiastic evidenced by his appointment of an experienced special advisor who was resourced to develop his own analysis team and who travelled with the commander throughout the area of operations. Regrettably much of this work remains at the classified level and no sources could be found.

<sup>92</sup> Given the pace of deployments brigade commanders would by later in the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns often have already worked with an HTT while in a different position on a previous deployment.

efforts were targeted, HTTs produced increased cultural awareness and some cultural understanding in support of their commander's priorities; otherwise they often created their own research projects that were of questionable value.<sup>93</sup> Commanders and their senior staff must trust, use, and guide the efforts of their human terrain analysis capability, taking into account that to achieve the best cultural and analysis expertise for a particular human terrain set the team may be composed of a mix of military, academic, interagency, and other civilian personnel.

## **CONCLUSION – WHAT SHOULD A FUTURE CAPABILITY LOOK LIKE?**

From the analysis above we can draw some desired characteristics for a future Canadian human terrain analysis capability for expeditionary operations:

- It requires command team buy-in and engagement. Senior staff and subordinate commanders will employ it if they see commander endorsement, and will sideline it if they see disinterest or indifference.
- It should be integrated with the military intelligence function, which is where trained analysts able to fuse all sources of information into the commander's visualization of the battlespace already reside. External experts with language and area-specific cultural knowledge can be engaged as required. Integration into the intelligence cycle will provide the means to task collection resources to meet human terrain analysis IRs.
- It should be focused on analysis and integrating human terrain understanding for decision makers, not be another tactical collector. To do this it must be connected to all of the collectors already in the battlespace. This may require a reach forward to debrief patrols and other assets.

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<sup>93</sup> Kassel. One U.S. Army S2 is quoted as saying of an HTT: "Nobody tasked them with anything for a the whole year [between the S2's deployments] so they were just running around doing their own thing."



- It requires a knowledge management system that provides discoverable information for current and future users, and is technologically supportable in theatre. Steps forward in computing power, data storage, and analytics – already leveraged in intelligence – make this more achievable than when the HTS and WSAT initiatives were launched almost a decade ago.<sup>94</sup>
- Human terrain analysis efforts must be integrated throughout the OPP. While a substantial contribution is required in defining human environment and its systems as part of the Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operating Environment (JIPOE), human terrain and its effects must be considered throughout all stages as possible courses of action are developed and compared, and plans made and refined.

We must be realistic about what outcomes can be achieved. There is significant hubris in believing that human terrain analysis will provide the level of cultural intelligence that lets us reliably anticipate higher-order effects and even predictably manipulate behaviours in incredibly complex sociocultural systems, which we inevitably approach with preconceptions and biases.<sup>95</sup> There are simply too many variables. Even at the levels of cultural awareness and understanding, however, human terrain analysis will provide actionable information to assist commanders to manoeuvre soundly in wars amongst the people.

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<sup>94</sup> Ferguson, 21 April 2016 and 5 May 2016.

<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, there is agreement on this point from Colonel Hugh Ferguson (email to the author, 21 April 2016), Lamb et al. (176-177), and anthropologist Roberto Gonzalez, a rabid critic of the social science flaws of HTS (Gonzalez, 85). The reasonable limits of cultural intelligence would be a worthy area for further study.

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