

# Human Terrain Systems and the Moral Prosecution of Warfare

DAN G. COX

There is a growing consensus that cultural variables play an integral role in conflict mitigation. Whether one believes we are truly in a “long war,” in which capturing “hearts and minds” is integral, or whether one thinks that a major combat operation is looming on the horizon, cultural knowledge and understanding of the area of operation are instrumental to success.

The recently developed and implemented Human Terrain System (HTS) Project was designed to play an important role in developing cultural knowledge for the US military and is critical to mission success and the moral prosecution of warfare.<sup>1</sup> But this program is new and, admittedly, not perfect. Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) were designed to play a key, on-the-ground role in bridging the cultural and personal identity gap between western military forces and the foreign cultures in which they operate. This is an extremely important but often overlooked aspect of “just war” theory. A deeper understanding of not only adversarial but friendly culture and personal identity formation allows the US military to better discriminate between friend and foe and to build deeper relationships with local leaders. These measures create a more precise and humane war effort than if the United States was forced to rely solely on indiscriminate, blunt, and largely kinetic options. The US military does not have the ability to veto a political decision to go to war or abscond from any order to engage overseas. Having said this, the US military does have a great say in how a campaign will be conducted and HTS was designed to play an integral role in ensuring that a campaign is conducted as morally and unobtrusively as possible.

In a general sense, the US military needs to be permitted the latitude to conduct a moral and honorable campaign regardless of the circumstances that brought the military into the conflict. Any military that is professional and honorable is not exonerated from conducting a moral war simply because the decision to go to war is being vigorously challenged. There has to be a separation, as Michael Walzer states, between *jus ad bellum* (the justice of war or the

---

*Dan G. Cox is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies. He earned his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Nebraska and is engaged in research on culture, identity and war, operational art, issues relating to counterinsurgency and terrorism, and foreign policy's influence on military intervention.*

| Report Documentation Page                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                    |                                     |                                                                      | Form Approved<br>OMB No. 0704-0188                  |                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. |                                    |                                     |                                                                      |                                                     |                                    |
| 1. REPORT DATE<br><b>2011</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                    | 2. REPORT TYPE                      |                                                                      | 3. DATES COVERED<br><b>00-00-2011 to 00-00-2011</b> |                                    |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE<br><b>Human Terrain Systems and the Moral Prosecution of Warfare</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                    |                                     |                                                                      | 5a. CONTRACT NUMBER                                 |                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |                                     |                                                                      | 5b. GRANT NUMBER                                    |                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |                                     |                                                                      | 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER                          |                                    |
| 6. AUTHOR(S)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                    |                                     |                                                                      | 5d. PROJECT NUMBER                                  |                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |                                     |                                                                      | 5e. TASK NUMBER                                     |                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |                                     |                                                                      | 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER                                |                                    |
| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)<br><b>US Army War College,ATTN: Parameters,47 Ashburn Drive,Carlisle,PA,17013</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                    |                                     |                                                                      | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION<br>REPORT NUMBER         |                                    |
| 9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                    |                                     |                                                                      | 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)                    |                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |                                     |                                                                      | 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT<br>NUMBER(S)           |                                    |
| 12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT<br><b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                    |                                     |                                                                      |                                                     |                                    |
| 13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                    |                                     |                                                                      |                                                     |                                    |
| 14. ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                    |                                     |                                                                      |                                                     |                                    |
| 15. SUBJECT TERMS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                    |                                     |                                                                      |                                                     |                                    |
| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |                                     | 17. LIMITATION OF<br>ABSTRACT<br><br><b>Same as<br/>Report (SAR)</b> | 18. NUMBER<br>OF PAGES<br><br><b>13</b>             | 19a. NAME OF<br>RESPONSIBLE PERSON |
| a. REPORT<br><b>unclassified</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | b. ABSTRACT<br><b>unclassified</b> | c. THIS PAGE<br><b>unclassified</b> |                                                                      |                                                     |                                    |

justice of the initiation of war) and *jus in bello* (justice in war or justice in the practice of war).<sup>2</sup> Any ability the United States has that does not violate human rights, the US Constitution, US legislation, or the military's rules of engagement (ROE) needs to be considered. There is a small but vociferous chorus of pundits and academics who are attempting to discredit and marginalize the HTS Project. The purpose of this article is to counter this cohort by showing that when one attempts to link arguments against HTS to the justness of a war, the argument quickly falls apart. In fact, HTS is critical to the moral conduct of war, and prohibiting this practice, especially if there is no replacement program, will make it nearly impossible for US forces to effectively and morally conduct warfare in divergent cultures.

### ***The Arguments Against HTS: A False Link to Jus ad Bellum***

Anthropology, apparently as a nearly unified field (if one considers the governing body to speak for the majority of anthropologists), is the most vocal audience criticizing HTS. These claims are key to the discussion as many contain *jus ad bellum* arguments directed against HTS. Several prominent anthropologists claim that US military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are illegitimate and, therefore, so is HTS. Other moral arguments against HTS from anthropologists stem from the belief that anthropology, as a field, will be sullied if its members collude with the military in combat environments abroad. These claims have gone largely unchallenged, but as this article will detail, these arguments fail to account for the basic right of the nation and its soldiers to conduct moral warfare.

One of the main reasons anthropologists and other critics of HTS are calling for an end to this project stems from these critics's belief that US involvement in both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars is unjust. Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins claims that HTS operatives are attempting to manipulate local culture and help the US government impose its will on indigenous populations while also acting as spies for the American government.<sup>3</sup> Often, these arguments against HTS are linked to claims of spying or targeting of civilians by the military. It is a short leap from such assertions to claims that HTS is engaging in war crimes similar to ones these authors believe occurred during the Vietnam War.<sup>4</sup>

Roberto Gonzalez compares HTTs directly to Operation Phoenix in Vietnam. Gonzalez claims that HTTs are providing the same targeting information which is being used to inform hit squads as it was, in his view, so unjustly used during the Vietnam War.<sup>5</sup> Gonzalez argues that "HTS was created as an espionage program" similar to the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) organization in Vietnam and we should assume HTS, as a replica of CORDS, will target "tens of thousands of people for 'neutralization.'"<sup>6</sup> Hugh Gusterson compares the use of anthropologists in counterinsurgency to the use of social scientists during the Vietnam era and warns that the "best and brightest" anthropologists are prepared this time as "the academy's most left-leaning discipline . . . many people become anthropologists out of a visceral sympathy for the kinds of people who all too often

show up as war's collateral damage."<sup>7</sup> Gusterson, who cofounded with David Price the Network of Concerned Anthropologists, has garnered over 1,000 signatures from anthropologists condemning HTS. He goes on to note that the Pentagon will likely get less qualified anthropologists to do its bidding in the counterinsurgency environment and that this will lead to more errors occurring in various operations, not less.<sup>8</sup>

Another critical argument against the unjustness of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the involvement of HTS links these wars to perceived colonialism. David Price argues the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan amount to nothing more than illegal occupations and that President Obama is using "counterinsurgency as a tool to conquer peoples who have historically been difficult, if not impossible, for outside colonial powers to dominate."<sup>9</sup> Gonzalez also cries foul in his book on HTS asking, "Should social scientists use expert knowledge for social engineering, manipulation, and targeting of people living in societies under illegal occupation by the US?"<sup>10</sup>

This article is not aimed at debating the justness of US military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, the justness of the decision to go to war in these locales does not matter at all with regard to the use of HTS. There is an attribution error contained within these arguments against HTS. Even if one accepts the premise that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were unjust, that does not lead to the conclusion that laudable attempts to provide vital cultural knowledge and awareness to commanders in these theaters is incorrect. Military commanders do not choose their wars, but they do have a constitutional duty to prosecute them. Just war encompasses more than the simple decision to go to war. It encompasses *jus in bello* or the just conduct of the war. Hence, when Hugh Gusterson relates that an anthropological colleague of his confronted him with the challenge that anthropological ethics should not trump national security, and he correctly points out that the choice "between anthropology and national security is wrong-headed,"<sup>11</sup> he still misses the point. The real choice is between anthropological and military ethics, and it remains far less clear that anthropological considerations should trump military ethics, especially in the just conduct of war.

### ***HTS and Jus in Bello***

One needs to understand that there is a clear distinction between the justness of the declaration of war and the justness of the conduct of the war. Michael Walzer notes that there are "rules of engagement that apply even to soldiers whose wars are criminal."<sup>12</sup> But Walzer is not the only seminal figure in the just war debate to assert this position. What follows is a brief overview of some of the propositions by key figures in the just war debate with an emphasis on the development of *jus in bello*.

### ***Jus in Bello: The Necessity for Any Military to Conduct an Honorable Campaign***

In Book XIX, Chapter 7, of the *City of God*, Saint Augustine explains his concept of just war and provides insight into the heart and mind of a moral warrior. War, in all its forms, is rightly explained as horrible and something that should not be entered into lightly. One is begrudgingly dragged into war. As Augustine puts it, “For it is the wrong-doing of the imposing party which compels a wise man to wage just wars.”<sup>13</sup> Further, he elucidates that war cannot be avoided by simply ignoring unjust suffering. If one avoids war by ignoring the inequity of the adversary, then that person is not just and has lost all human feeling.<sup>14</sup> In other words, warriors and war decisionmakers need to approach the possibility of war with an empathetic heart. Finally, in Book XV, Chapter 4, Augustine notes that a leader moved to war should bear in mind the ultimate goal of obtaining a peace. As Augustine states, “For it desires earthly peace for the sake of enjoying earthly goods, and it makes war in order to attain peace; since, if it has conquered, and there remains no one to resist it, it enjoys a peace which it had not while there were opposing parties who contested for the enjoyment of those things which were too small to satisfy both.”<sup>15</sup>

Augustine’s thoughts point to the need for empathy and compassion when deciding to go to war, and one can assume these characteristics will not be lost while engaging in that war. Also, in the spirit of soldiers being driven to war by the adversary’s “wrong-doing,” Michael Walzer notes that we hold soldiers “to certain standards, even though they fight unwillingly—in fact, precisely because we assume that they fight unwillingly.”<sup>16</sup> Finally, Thomas Aquinas speaks to those waging war having “rightful intention” in which wars are waged “not for motives of aggrandizement, or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace, of punishing evil-doers, and of uplifting the good” [*italics removed*].<sup>17</sup> The disposition of the just warrior is important to all three authors and the standards which soldiers in a just or unjust war are to be held remain paramount.

But what are these standards for soldiers who want to prosecute an honorable, just war? The two main components of *jus in bello* are discrimination and proportionality. Discrimination simply means that the soldier is disciplined and aware enough to place potential targets into categories based on combatant status. An enemy soldier in military uniform firing on an American soldier is the clearest case of a combatant who can be engaged in kind. A clearly unarmed child crying in the middle of a street would fall under the noncombatant status and be subject to no military coercion. It is the moral soldier’s duty to discern between the two and act accordingly.<sup>18</sup> Discrimination implies the soldier has decent intelligence of the area and people and a reasonable understanding of local culture. For the foreseeable future, enemy combatants will try to blend in with civilian population. This obvious deception by the enemy does not give any military the right to kill indiscriminately. As Walzer writes, “A legitimate act of war is one that does not violate the rights of the people whom it is directed.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, any information the US military can gather, which helps

a soldier discriminate between combatant and noncombatant, goes a long way toward helping the American military engage in the just prosecution of war.

The discussion regarding discrimination thus far has focused solely on people who intend to directly harm those they fight, whether or not they wear an identifiable military uniform or deceptively don civilian clothing. The distinction between combatant and noncombatant becomes even more troublesome when one attempts to discern if those supporting direct combatants should themselves be categorized as combatants. Hugo Grotius notes that this is a persistent question in the just war debate but that “it is evident that any one must be ranked as an enemy, who supplies an enemy with the means of prosecuting hostilities.”<sup>20</sup> Walzer adds to this by noting that combatant status can be carefully extended to munitions manufacturers and those who supply the modern military machine with “a continuing stream of equipment, fuel, ammunition, food, and so on.”<sup>21</sup> These propositions are further confounded by new challenges presented in 21st century conflict. While it may have been difficult to target the proper factory producing munitions in World War II, it is almost impossible to discern who is providing safe housing and food to insurgents, guerillas, and terrorists. Such discernment cannot be made without deep understanding and development of high-context relationships in a foreign country and culture. Further, it is easy to see a munitions factory as a legitimate military target, but it is far harder to argue for targeting a bakery that may provide some of its bread to the enemy. Still, cultural understanding will aid American soldiers in understanding why the baker is supporting the enemy, and such knowledge may lead to nonkinetic solutions.

As difficult as it is to develop discrimination between combatants and noncombatants in times of conflict, it is equally as difficult to determine proportionality in a military response. But it is no less important for the moral warrior. The Dutch theologian Grotius speaks to proportionality arguing, “When punishment is lawful and just, all the means absolutely necessary to enforce its execution are also lawful and just, and every act that forms part of the punishment, such as destroying an enemy’s property and country by fire or any other way, falls within the limits of justice proportionable to the offence.”<sup>22</sup> But this is a tricky calculus and as the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz notes, war tends toward absolutes and can quickly become uncontrollable.<sup>23</sup> Clausewitz argues that war is the “continuation of policy by other means”<sup>24</sup> and that civilized nations can show far more restraint in war than a conflict between savages.<sup>25</sup> But this restraint or proportional response is not bounded by an absolute law governing warfare. It is bound by social agreements between warring parties and it is, unfortunately, probable that emotion will trump rationality in warfare leading to Clausewitz’s greatest fear of an escalation in violence and lack of restraint on the part of both warring factions.<sup>26</sup> Despite all this, military officers are required to train and discipline those who violate *jus in bello*; such a relationship requires the officer to have a deeper understanding of proportionality than the “commonsense requirement that attacks be proportionate to the military value of the target.”<sup>27</sup>

For the soldier, war involves injury, killing, and destruction but these can never be an end for a moral warrior and these actions should always be aimed at the ultimate end of peace.<sup>28</sup> This means that the ultimate aim is to disarm your adversary, not necessarily kill the enemy. Out of this logic comes the 1949 Geneva Conventions which provide certain protections to soldiers who surrender. Those who lay down their arms become subject to certain rights as a prisoner of war, including medical aid and honorable treatment of the individual taken prisoner.<sup>29</sup> Again, the Geneva Conventions are instructive and in Article 3, subsection 1C, prisoners are not to suffer, “outrages upon personal dignity, in particular, humiliating and degrading treatment.” While this seems *prima facie* obvious, it is not easy to discern what “humiliating and degrading treatment” is on the battlefield when one is operating in a foreign culture. For example, the simple act of hand searching a suspected combatant in Afghanistan could have devastating consequences to that individual if proper care is not taken to remove the suspected combatant from public view. If the person is quickly determined not to be an enemy combatant, the damage of searching him in a public forum might be irreparable. Deep knowledge of the local culture is necessary for soldiers to properly carry out their tasks in an honorable and efficient manner.

What does this insight mean to the soldier in the field? Proportionality of response is key to not only conducting a just campaign but also to prevent an escalation of hostilities inching ever more dangerously to unrestrained, total war. All actions on the battlefield need to be scrutinized for second, third, and fourth-order effects, ensuring that the main objective of peace is not lost in the emotional heat of engagement. Any armed force should be allowed to maintain its honor in war, regardless of whether or not the decision to go to war was just. All of this implies that any military engaging in battle should have a keen understanding of the battlefield: the culture they are immersing themselves in; the key local, regional, and national players; the motives of the people; and other factors too enumerable to list.

### ***The Importance of Cultural Understanding***

*Jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* are distinct characteristics of war. While one can influence the other, there is no reasonable argument that can be made claiming that an unjustly declared war necessarily mandates an unjustly conducted war. As Walzer contends, there should be a line “between the war itself, for which soldiers are not responsible, and the conduct of the war, for which they are responsible.”<sup>30</sup> There are numerous illustrations of soldiers and military leaders engaging in just war practices in the face of unjustly declared wars and in contradiction to unjust guidance from national leaders, just as there are instances of soldiers and leaders engaging in unjust acts even though the cause of the war is just. The key is to examine *jus in bello* as a continuum. No just war can be fought without collateral damage or even individual instances of injustice. The goal should be to come as close as one can to the impossible aspiration of a perfectly conducted war. What follows are examples of what

has been described above followed by illustrations of how HTS can provide the proper cultural understanding required in 21st century conflicts and aid the American military to come as close as possible to the goal of *jus in bello*.

The German decision to engage in war against multiple states in World War II is a widely accepted example of an unjust war. As unjust as the war was, General Edwin Rommel refused to be corrupted by it and was noted for fighting “a bad war well, not only militarily but also morally.”<sup>31</sup> One example of Rommel’s commitment to *jus in bello* in the face of an unjust directive exemplifies why it is so important to separate the two concepts. Adolf Hitler issued the Commando Order to Rommel on 28 October 1942. In this order, Hitler directed Rommel to kill all enemy soldiers they encountered behind their lines. Rommel burned this order in front of others and refused to carry it out, showing that his commitment to honorable warfare practices outweighed even his duty to the German national leader.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, the opposite can happen as well as soldiers and military leaders can violate *jus in bello* despite the overall justness of the war. The intensity of combat generally brought out the best in American soldiers during World War II, but conflict can also produce some isolated examples of bad conduct. Most of the war crimes committed by American soldiers came out of a justifiable passion that might explain, but cannot excuse, such acts. A particularly chilling example of this from historian Stephen Ambrose serves to exemplify how a justly declared war can be unjustly prosecuted:

Pvt. Edward Webber of the 47<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment described a gruesome, but hardly unique, incident. He was advancing on a damaged German tank. The crew had ceased firing its machine gun, opened the turret, and were waving the white flag. Webber and his buddies moved forward. The machine gun began firing again—probably by some young fanatic who refused to give up with the rest. Webber’s squad fired back. “The crew came pouring out of the bottom escape hatch,” Webber said. “They were hollering ‘*Nicht schiessen! Nicht schiessen!*’ But by this time we were infuriated with rage. The crewmen were lined up on their knees and an angry soldier walked along behind them and shot each in the back of the head. The last to die was a young, blond-headed teenager who was rocking back and forth on his knees, crying and urinating down both trouser legs. He had pictures of his family spread on the ground before him. Nevertheless, he was shot in the back of the head and pitched forth like a sack of potatoes.”<sup>33</sup>

These incidents occur in any prolonged conflict despite the justness or unjustness of the initial declaration of war. The point here is how, and to what degree, a military attempts to mitigate the frequency of these events. In the case described above, proper training is aimed at controlling emotional reactions which result in war crimes being committed, but the example also goes a long way toward explaining how and when training would reasonably be expected to break down.

How do these examples relate to HTS? The answer begins with two observations drawn from each of the cases. First, as was true in the case of

General Rommel's decision to disregard an unjust executive directive given during the campaigning of an unjustly declared war, all leaders and soldiers have the right to honorably conduct their warfare activities, regardless of the overall justness of the war declaration. Second, the misconduct of American soldiers during World War II was likely due to a lack of discipline in a highly charged environment resulting, at least in a number of cases, from inadequate training and experience.

In modern warfare, a premium is placed on understanding the culture one is operating in for the same reasons as the counterinsurgency expert David Galula identified from his experience of operating in multiple insurgencies. He notes that successful counterinsurgency is twenty percent military action and eighty percent political.<sup>34</sup> A modern soldier's tasks are expanded to "propagandist, a social worker, a civil engineer, a schoolteacher, a nurse, a boy scout"<sup>35</sup> argues Galula and one could add microfinancier, infrastructure builder, diplomat, and arbiter of local disputes to the list. The point is that modern warfare has been operating and will continue to operate for the foreseeable future in environments where the military is tasked with performing a wide array of nonkinetic activities. Current US Army doctrine supports this assertion. FM 3-07 directs that "for military forces, however, stability tasks are executed continuously throughout all operations" and that "leaders will increasingly call on stability operations to reduce the drivers of conflict."<sup>36</sup>

These nonkinetic and kinetic actions will occur in far distant lands where the population speaks a foreign dialect, lives in distinct cultures, and holds a very non-Western view of the world. The gulf of circumspection and mistrust between people of vastly different cultures is best exemplified by this quotation from Saint Augustine:

And here, in the first place, man is separated from man by the difference of languages. For if two men, each ignorant of the other's language, meet, and are not compelled to pass, but, on the contrary, to remain in company, dumb animals, though of different species, would more easily hold intercourse than they, human beings though they be. For their common nature is no help to friendliness when they are prevented by diversity of language from conveying their sentiments to one another; so that a man would more readily hold intercourse with his dog than with a foreigner.<sup>37</sup>

If the opportunity for misunderstanding is this great between people who do not share a common language, imagine how great it might become when these same individuals fail to share a common culture, religion, or worldview.

This is the void of understanding that HTS attempts to fill. HTS permits soldiers, leaders, and even interagency collaborators in a joint effort to build high-context relationships with the local populace while developing an awareness of cultures. Greater efficiencies can be gained so that military and civilian organizations may avoid the cultural *faux pas* that anger locals and lead to violence.

This idea is gaining relevance as writers on counterinsurgency increasingly refer to the need for a cultural appreciation in an effort to effectively counteract insurgent forces and movements. The counterinsurgency theorist

David Kilcullen identifies three pillars of counterinsurgency—security, political, and economic—resting on a foundation of understanding about the “human terrain” associated with a particular operation.<sup>38</sup> Pauline Kusiak, a sociocultural expert, argues that understanding the role of identity, culture, tribe, family, religion, and similar factors, is key to comprehending what fuels a conflict and where the sympathies may be for those involved.<sup>39</sup> Kusiak emphasizes the importance of both HTS and civilian ethnographic researchers to this process. No matter how much the military trains its own experts, the deliberate effort to “see the world through someone else’s eyes” requires full-time dedication that only an accredited researcher can devote to the process.<sup>40</sup>

Task Force Dragon (TF Dragon) in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) V discovered that attempts to separate insurgents from the population rested heavily on a deep understanding of the human terrain.<sup>41</sup> TF Dragon found the simple act of attempting to learn the local culture demonstrated a “commitment to local communities” which, in turn, allowed a trust relationship to develop.<sup>42</sup> The concept of analyzing and understanding the human terrain is emphasized in current US military doctrine. The Army’s counterinsurgency manual, FM 3-24, refers to the need to understand and define the operational environment which includes an understanding of family, tribal, ethnic, and religious links between groups and people as well as an understanding of society, social structure, culture, language, power authority, and the interests of people and groups.<sup>43</sup>

Social scientist Montgomery McFate places this into a strategic, operational, and tactical perspective. She argues that misunderstanding foreign cultures at the strategic level results in ignorant policies that only exacerbate an insurgency, while misunderstanding at the operational level can result in a backlash of negative public opinion. Misunderstanding at the tactical level is even more dangerous as McFate postulates it can endanger “both civilians and troops.”<sup>44</sup> An example of this type of tactical disaster is important. What follows below was related to the author by Major Philip Carlson in an interview conducted in January 2009. Major Carlson describes his initial Human Terrain Team’s (HTT) experience while interacting with a rural tribal culture in Iraq and the disaster that was narrowly averted through a quick reframing of initial cultural indicators.

Major Carlson describes the initial interaction with the local population as follows:

My very first time out in an HTT in Iraq, we had a company air-mobile to the countryside because of the IED threat on the road. We were attached to a very proficient patrol fire squadron in the 2nd ACR which was carrying out random interviews and knock and search operations. We had a problem with our interpreters who were young, gung-ho, Shi’ites who were motivated to capture terrorists. In one house we, the patrol, found an older gentleman named Alawi with a closet full of religious information and a scope for what was later determined to be an air rifle which locals use for shooting birds that kill the honey bees which locals rely on to produce honey for sale in village markets. The interpreters became extremely animated when they found the scope and some Arabic documents and they claimed

that the books were jihadist in nature and the scope was for a sophisticated sniper rifle.<sup>45</sup>

It was not surprising what followed. In most cases, Alawi's arrest and detention would comprise the totality of the immediate story as patrols and commands lacking proper cultural awareness or expertise have to rely on the aptitude and honesty of their interpreters who end up serving simultaneously as linguistic and local cultural decipherers. Major Carlson continued:

Alawi was cuffed and detained and later paraded through the village back to the patrol base. We later found out he was the pride of the village and one of the most respected men. Our cultural expert, Dr. Ammar, was not initially convinced that Alawi was a radical. Dr. Ammar started analyzing the literature we received and determined one book was an elementary level textreader, one was a grammar book, and one was on Arabic history. None of the materials was extremist in any way. Alawi turned out to be a kindly old school teacher.<sup>46</sup>

At this point the commander, aware of the grave mistake which had been made, wanted to immediately release Alawi in an effort to right the wrongful arrest and to quell tensions with the local populace. It took a deep cultural expert, however, to point out that simply releasing Alawi would do little to restore his honor and place in society.

Alawi was to be released immediately, but Dr. Ammar pointed out that there was a process to the release that must be followed to restore Alawi's honor and repair the damage. We phoned his cousin to come pick him up. Four men, one being Alawi's cousin, and a young boy showed up to the patrol base. The commander, the XO, and I all publicly and profusely apologized for the mistake we had made and any affront we had made to Alawi. Alawi's honor was restored.

Interestingly, despite the incident beginning with an error on the part of the military, the proper handling of the situation did more than just return the disposition of the local populace to neutral. Because the US officers, at the behest of the HTT expert, displayed the proper cultural respect and understanding, the local populace befriended the military operatives in their village.

But what is more amazing is that this simple, culturally appropriate righting of a wrong in the proper frame of justice surprised everyone in the village. The news spread like wild fire. While we were there, no troops were sniped at or mortared and soon after Esmat, the son of the late Muktar, who was former leader of the village, showed us where a deep IED was buried, where eighty mortar tubes were hidden, and where two functioning anti-aircraft guns were hidden. Esmat would later take over the role of leader of the village and began using the title of sheikh. Esmat was always cooperative and willing to help after we resolved the incident with Alawi. That is the power of understanding and operating appropriately within a culture.<sup>47</sup>

Major Carlson's experience with his HTT exemplifies the power of engaging in honorable warfare and the proper discriminating between combatants and noncombatants. One might argue that since Alawi was not fired upon,

injured, or killed, this is a poor example of discrimination, but this would miss a key aspect of 21st century conflict. In conflict between and within distinct milieus, slighting the honor of an innocent can cause just as much damage as killing the individual. Imagine if the US military had not caught their error and properly restored Alawi's honor. A deep IED might have been targeted against US forces along with the mortars and anti-aircraft guns. The military would have had to respond with force. No high-context relationships would have been forged. Distrust and hatred would have been sown and the insurgency would have blossomed rather than diminished.

## Conclusion

When one combines an understanding of *jus in bello* with the increasing need for US forces to operate in foreign cultures, it becomes imperative that HTSs not only be deployed but that they are encouraged to prosper and grow. *Jus ad bellum* arguments against US military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have no bearing on the use of HTS. The US military does not, and should not, have any influence on the decision to go to war. That is a matter for the polity in democratic republics. The US military needs to be able to exercise all available means to perpetrate a morally sound campaign while discriminating between combatants and noncombatants in a *jus in bello* environment.

In the midst of a counterinsurgency battle, a premium is placed on "winning hearts and minds," but this is an empty concept if the individuals involved do not know what moves the hearts and minds of the local populace. Human Terrain Systems and the HTTs they deploy in the battlespace provide knowledge and understanding of diverse foreign cultures, how and why personal identities are formed in a specific locality, and how one can most effectively interact with these individuals. HTS assists the US military in developing and maintaining high-context relationships integral to successful operations. Without this knowledge and an understanding of these relationships, the military would simply become a lumbering giant that is more likely than not to step on the collective toes of those it is trying to help.

All HTTs have not performed equally and HTS is not a perfect project. Yet even if the naysayers win the intellectual battle and the HTS project is terminated, the need for cultural understanding on the battlefield remains. A band of vociferous social scientists should not decide the fate of a program they have mistakenly cast as a moral debate without some consideration for the moral warrior. As George Lucas correctly relates in his book, *Anthropologists in Arms*, social scientists on the battlefield would be more correctly viewed as doctors providing aid to both sides in the conflict by mitigating the cruelty of war through treating the injured.<sup>48</sup> Social scientists providing military commanders with accurate cultural information are no different. Without an understanding of the operational environment, commanders run a far greater risk of creating the collateral damage that critics of HTS claim so vehemently to oppose.

## NOTES

1. Jacob Kipp, interview by author, 2009.
2. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 21.
3. Kurt Jacobsen, "Are We There Just to Help the Army Aim Better?" *The Guardian*, 12 May 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/may/13/internationaleducationnews.highereducation>, (accessed 16 March 2011).
4. The perception of the unjustness of the Vietnam War is being vigorously challenged currently as new documents about the war surface. Mark Moyer's book, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1945-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), is one of the best examples of this new trend in revisionist history on United States involvement in Vietnam.
5. Roberto J. González, *American Counterinsurgency: Human Science and the Human Terrain* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2009), 5-7.
6. Roberto J. González, "Human Terrain: Past, Present, and Future Applications," *Anthropology Today* 24, no. 1 (February 2008): 21.
7. Hugh Gusterson, "When Professors Go to War: Why the Ivory Tower and the Pentagon Don't Mix," *Foreign Policy*, online edition, (21 July 2008), [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2008/07/20/when\\_professors\\_go\\_to\\_war](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2008/07/20/when_professors_go_to_war) (accessed 29 July 2011).
8. Ibid.
9. David Price, "A Better Way to Kill? Human Terrain Systems, Anthropologists and the War in Afghanistan," *Counterpunch*, 1 December 2009, <http://www.counterpunch.org/price12012009.html> (accessed 21 March 2011).
10. González, *American Counterinsurgency*, 97.
11. Hugh Gusterson, "Do Professional Ethics Matter in War?" *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 4 March 2010, <http://www.thebulletin.org/web-edition/columnists/hugh-gusterson/do-professional-ethics-matter-war> (accessed 16 March 2011).
12. Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 22.
13. St. Augustine, *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine: Volume 2, The City of God and On The Trinity*, ed. and trans. Whitney J. Oates (New York: Random House, 1948), 481-2.
14. St. Augustine, *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, 482.
15. St. Augustine, *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, 278.
16. Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 35.
17. St. Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," in *The Morality of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, eds. and trans. Lary May, Eric Rovie, and Steve Viner (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006), 28.
18. Martin L. Cook, *The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the U. S. Military* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 33.
19. Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 135.
20. Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, trans. Rev. A. C. Campbell, A. M. (Washington: M. Walter Dunne Publisher, 1901), 293.
21. Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 145.
22. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, 291.
23. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 75-77.
24. Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.
25. Clausewitz, *On War*, 76.
26. Ibid.
27. Cook, *The Moral Warrior*, 34.
28. Taylor, Telford, "Just and Unjust Wars," in *War, Morality, and the Military Profession*, 2nd ed., ed. Malham M. Wakin (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 266.
29. Ibid., 267.

30. Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 38.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Private Edward Webber as quoted in Stephen A. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U. S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany June 7, 1944—May 7, 1945* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1997), 352.
34. Galula, David, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 89.
35. Ibid., 88.
36. U.S. Department of the Army, *Stability Operations*, Field Manual (FM) 3-07 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 6 October 2008), 1-3.
37. St. Augustine, *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, 481.
38. David J. Kilcullen, “Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency,” Remarks delivered at the U. S. Government Counterinsurgency Conference, Washington, D.C., 28 September 2006, [http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awgate/uscoin/3pillars\\_of\\_counterinsurgency.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awgate/uscoin/3pillars_of_counterinsurgency.pdf) (accessed 15 September 2009).
39. Pauline Kusiak, “Sociocultural Expertise and the Military: Beyond the Controversy,” *Military Review* (November-December, 2008), 67.
40. Ibid., 66. See also Montgomery McFate and Andrea Jackson, “An Organizational Solution for DOD’s Cultural Knowledge Needs,” *Military Review* (July-August 2005), 19-20.
41. Lieutenant Colonel Jack Marr, U. S. Army, Major John Cushing, U. S. Army, Major Brandon Garner, U. S. Army, and Captain Richard Thompson, U. S. Army, “Human Terrain Mapping: A Critical First Step to Winning a COIN Fight,” *Military Review* (March-April 2008), 18.
42. Ibid., 19.
43. U.S. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual (FM) 3-24 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 15 December 2006), 3-2, 3-3.
44. Montgomery McFate, “The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 38 (3rd Quarter 2005).
45. Major Philip Carlson, interview by author, Eisenhower Hall, Room 272, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 15 January 2009.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. George R. Lucas Jr., *Anthropologists in Arms: The Ethics of Military Anthropology* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2009).