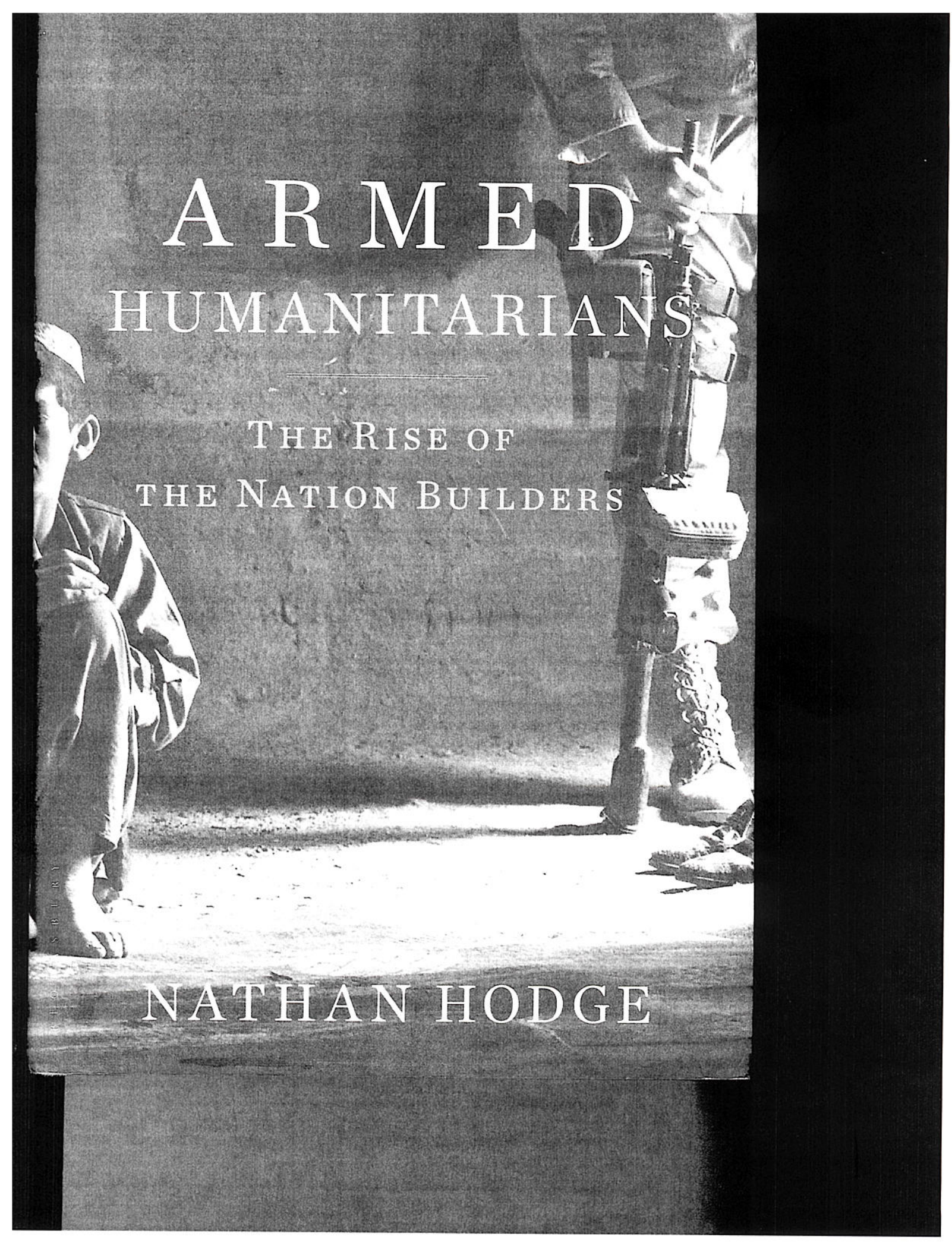

ARMED HUMANITARIANS

THE RISE OF THE NATION BUILDERS

NATHAN HODGE

PUBLISHERY

CHAPTER 11

Windshield Ethnographers

On December 6, 2008, Lieutenant Colonel Pete Pierce was having a rough day. He had a meeting scheduled at noon with Hassan Shama, the chairman of the Sadr City District Advisory Council, but when Shama showed up at noon at the Iraqi Army checkpoint outside Forward Operating Base War Eagle, a U.S. outpost at an old police training center on the east side of the Tigris River, the soldiers would not let him to pass. Now Shama was angry: He had been waiting in his car for two hours.

Pierce marched into the office where Andre, one of his interpreters, was sprucing up a black vinyl couch with eau de cologne. "He's been delayed at the checkpoint," Pierce said, exasperated. "We had to call him and kiss his ass. He was stuck in traffic from ten o'clock to noon, and I promised to buy him lunch."

It was time for Plan B. Pierce would have to send someone out to the checkpoint to escort Shama on base—and order some kebabs. Fetching Shama fell to Abu Bassam, Pierce's Iraqi-American cultural advisor. "You go out to the checkpoint at two o'clock in your full battle rattle," he told Abu Bassam. "I'll get Sergeant Knox to go out with you to the checkpoint."

In civilian life, Pierce was a senior deputy district attorney in Orange County, California; in uniform, he maintained a weary, seen-it-all-before demeanor. In Baghdad, he led Human Terrain Team IZ3, a ten-person

team attached to the Third Brigade Combat Team, Fourth Infantry Division. Pierce and his team were supposed to help the brigade manage its nonlethal operations. They provided cultural advice to the commander; helped the brigade's embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team, or e-PRT, allocate reconstruction funds; and identified key local leaders with whom the brigade commander, Colonel John Hort, could meet. It was all part of the Army's belated push for greater cultural awareness, an effort that had received official endorsement with the adoption of the Army-Marine Corps counterinsurgency manual in late 2006. Team IZ3 had recently organized five *iftar* dinners, meals to break the Ramadan fast, with tribal and religious sheikhs, local government officials and security forces, and members of the district advisory councils. It had also organized today's meeting with Shama.

The district advisory councils, referred to by the Americans as DACs, were local government bodies set up by the coalition following the invasion of Iraq in 2003. They had no lawmaking power or budget authority; their brief was to provide a form of local representative government. Neighborhood advisory councils, or NACs, selected representatives for the district-level council, and the DACs sent representatives to the Baghdad City Advisory Council. The DACs and the NACs also gave the U.S. presence a form of legitimacy, and provided a valuable interface between the U.S. military and local communities.

As its deputy chairman, Shama was a key player on the Sadr City DAC. Despite military commanders' wariness of Shama—Hort, the brigade commander, described him as initially "very anti-coalition"—Pierce and his teammates had persuaded the Army to work with him. Now things were a bit more cordial, although Shama still had a lot of complaints, particularly about the way the U.S. military was spending aid money inside Sadr City, part of the brigade's area of operations.

Sadr City was one of the most volatile places in Iraq. The densely populated Baghdad district had long been a stronghold for Shia militants, and a dangerous place for U.S. forces. Earlier in that spring of 2008, intense fighting had flared up around Sadr City after the Iraqi government launched an offensive in the southern city of Basra. Elements of Moqtada al-Sadr's Jaish al-Mahdi militia, designated "special groups" by the U.S. military, responded by using Sadr City as a launching pad for rocket attacks on the Green Zone. U.S. and Iraqi forces then launched a push into Sadr City, braving minefields and fighting street by street to retake

the southern quadrant of the low-rise slum. U.S. forces then built a concrete wall along Al Quds Street that was supposed to push insurgent rocket teams beyond the reach of the Green Zone. North of the wall, tag teams of drones and attack helicopters loitered overhead, waiting to spot insurgent rocket and mortar teams. After two months of intense street fighting, the Iraqi government and the Jaish al-Mahdi concluded a truce, and Iraqi troops were able to take up positions inside the rest of Sadr City.

A few months after the ceasefire, a fragile sort of normalcy had returned to the area, and the U.S. military had begun aiming a firehose of development funds at the southern quadrant of Sadr City. In the eleven months since the arrival of the Third Brigade Combat Team, Fourth Infantry Division, in Baghdad in early 2008, the unit had spent around $72 million on public works projects in and around Sadr City. It hired local contractors to pick up trash, clear backed-up sewer lines, and repair downed power lines. On patrols, infantry officers were given "walking-around money." They were authorized to hand out $2,500 microgrants to jump-start local businesses that had lost inventory during the fighting. Seventy-two million was an astonishing amount of development money to focus on one section of one neighborhood. The United States had spent roughly the same amount on aid to all of Botswana in one year, 2008.

But the "save Sadr City fund" did not end the violence. In June 2008, a bomb was planted outside Shama's office. A group of Americans was meeting with Shama when the bomb detonated. Shama was wounded in the leg; the Americans, who were standing closer to the bomb, unwittingly shielded him from the blast. Four Americans were killed, along with six Iraqis and an Italian interpreter of Iraqi descent.[1] Two of the slain Americans were soldiers: Major Dwayne Kelley, a New Jersey state trooper and Army reservist, and Chief Warrant Officer Robert Hammett. Two were civilians: Steven Farley, a State Department contractor from Oklahoma and a member of the e-PRT, and Nicole Suveges, a member of Human Terrain Team IZ3.

When Suveges deployed to Iraq, in April 2008, Team IZ3 was part of an ambitious new experiment by the U.S. military to embed social scientists with combat brigades in Iraq and Afghanistan. Suveges was nearing completion of a Ph.D. in political science at Johns Hopkins University (her dissertation was titled "Markets and Mullahs: Global Networks,

Transnational Ideas and the Deep Play of Political Culture"), and she had worked in Iraq for two years, first as a polling expert and then as an advisor to Multi-National Corps Iraq. According to her colleagues, Suveges had been eager to join a Human Terrain Team; these teams were seen at the time as the cutting edge of counterinsurgency warfare and as the possible salvation of the U.S. military in Iraq.

But by December 2008, the military's program of embedding social scientists was in turmoil. Pierce had seen one member of his team killed, and he was in no mood to take any unnecessary risks. That day's meeting was no exception. When Shama finally reached the meeting two hours later, escorted through the checkpoint by Abu Bassam, the discussion quickly turned to the main item of business, the generators the brigade was installing to bring power to the southern neighborhoods of Sadr City. A major with the brigade's civil-military operations center was planning a trip to show members of the DAC where they were installed, and another IZ3 team member, Ben Rabitor, a young, slightly built social scientist, was enthusiastic about a chance to go out with the military team.

"I'd like to go on this mission!" he piped up.

"We'll see," Pierce replied drily. "I know you're anxious to get out beyond the wire, Ben, but"—Pierce paused for effect—"I guarantee by the end of your tour, you will never want to go out beyond the wire, okay? You will be all out-wired out!"

Ali Ghatteh, a deputy to Shama, had been listening in through an interpreter. He turned to Rabitor. "If you going to go out, grow out your beard and we are going to put you in a *dishdasha*," he said, referring to the traditional robe worn by men in Iraq. "And I can show you—I'll keep you safe in my area."

Rabitor sat up enthusiastically. It sounded like exactly the kind of thing a civilian anthropologist attached to the Army should be doing: blending in with the local community to help oversee a development project that might, if all went to plan, help restore stability to the area. "I'll be like *Iraqeen*!" he said.

Pierce, with the tone of a worried father, turned to Rabitor. "All right, Ben, you ain't doing anything like that while I'm here," he said.

The military that routed the Taliban in 2001 and decapitated the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003 was a technologically superior force. It possessed

overwhelming firepower, precision weaponry, and a global communications network. But this twenty-first-century force had blundered into Iraq and Afghanistan with only minimal understanding of the local cultural landscape. By the fall of 2006, with the adoption of the Army–Marine Corps counterinsurgency manual, the U.S. military was in theory taking the first steps toward reemphasizing the importance of cultural knowledge. In practice, these new nation builders were still struggling to understand the cultures they were dealing with in the Middle East and Central Asia. In a keynote address at the 2006 counterinsurgency conference in Washington, Eric Edelman, under secretary of defense for policy and a former ambassador, pointed to an essential new tool the U.S. government needed to deploy if it was to prevail in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as in future conflicts: anthropology.

"In order to succeed in COIN [counterinsurgency] and stability operations, we must understand the cultures with which we are operating," he said.

> This is actually much more difficult than it sounds. Truly understanding another culture requires more than speaking a language or knowing certain social customs so that we do not offend our hosts. Certainly those things are important. But to truly have an impact, and to do more good than harm, we must understand the social power structures that informally govern societies as well as the internal motivations of the enemy and the people. In short, we need to develop an anthropological approach to understanding our enemies.

In Edelman's telling, ethnographic knowledge was in essence an intelligence tool, although perhaps not of the traditional sort. "Our intelligence processes and education and training systems must adapt to the need to obtain, analyze, and disseminate cultural knowledge," he said. "And by dissemination, I mean to everyone who needs it. It does no good for the military or anyone else to collect information if they do not share it with their interagency, coalition, private, and non-governmental partners."

When the can-do culture of the military applied itself to a technical problem, it could produce impressive technical results, particularly when it came to focusing the resources of the massive Pentagon procurement

machine. The most dramatic example after September 11, 2001, was the creation of the Joint IED Defeat Organization, or JIEDDO, an organization within the Pentagon dedicated to countering the lethal roadside bomb threat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

At first, JIEDDO sank a large portion of its funds into technology, paying for myriad technical fixes to protect troops from IEDs. But despite the investment in defensive measures, the number of overall attacks continued to rise. JIEDDO began to shift its focus to stopping insurgent bomb-making cells, small, decentralized, secretive groups of part-time fighters who blended effortlessly into the local population. It was an approach that fused police work with anthropology: understanding the social context in which bomb makers operated, mapping out how they were organized, and learning how they interacted with the local population.

JIEDDO's new approach was presaged by a 2005 article in *Military Review*, the official journal of the Army's Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, written by Montgomery McFate, a policy fellow at the Office of Naval Research in Arlington, Virginia. In "Iraq: The Social Context of IEDs," McFate outlined ways that ethnographic knowledge could be applied to combating the problem of roadside bombs. "Because the insurgency is connected to the Sunni tribal system, certain sheiks probably know exactly where these explosives are stored," she wrote. "The sheiks are vulnerable in two ways: through their love of honor and through their love of money. Although they cannot be pressured to divulge the whereabouts of explosives through appeals to honor, because they see us as infidel adversaries, they are vulnerable to financial rewards. In Iraq, there is an old saying that you cannot buy a tribe, but you can certainly hire one."[2]

McFate suggested that the military units turn Iraq's traditional tribal patronage system to their advantage, bribing sheiks to buy their temporary loyalty and assistance: "In so doing, they [coalition forces] should be careful not to offer money as a 'reward' for divulging the whereabouts of explosives, but as a show of goodwill to the sheik, combined with a humble request for assistance."[3]

This idea of using social science to further military aims was intriguing, but cultural expertise could not simply be procured the same way the Army might buy a new radio or the Air Force might upgrade the camera on a spyplane. The government would need to enlist anthropologists and social scientists with serious professional expertise for this kind of effort.

In 2006, the Foreign Military Studies Office at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, part of U.S. Training and Doctrine Command, launched a pilot program called the Human Terrain System, or HTS. The program grew directly out of the Pentagon's effort to counter roadside bombs. In December 2005, Army Colonel Steve Fondacaro, who headed JIEDDO, received a laptop loaded with ethnographic data and social network diagrams. The laptop was designed, in part by McFate, to help military commanders better understand local cultures they encountered in Iraq. Fondacaro concluded that the computer alone was useless. "I threw that shit out of there," he later told a *Wired* reporter, Noah Shachtman. "The last thing these guys needed was another gizmo . . . They needed a person, someone with knowledge of the society. An angel on their shoulder."[4]

The brigade commanders needed social scientists to provide advice, not a library loaded with ethnographic data. McFate helped come up with a revised plan for providing useful insights.[5] The idea was to set up five-person Human Terrain Teams, or HTTs, that would be embedded within the headquarters of brigades or regiments deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. The civilian social scientists on the HTTs would provide cultural analysis for the commander. Able to link back to a "reachback center" at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for customized social science research, they would build a repository of local knowledge—customs and traditions, social network diagrams, economic data—as a lasting resource for commanders. Building up a database was a particularly important point. When a brigade rotated out of theater and a new unit arrived, the outgoing unit took a mountain of information with it, scribbled in notebooks, folded up on wall charts, and stored on memory sticks. A Human Terrain Team devoted to one area would provide "institutional memory," sparing military units the painful process of relearning everything from scratch.

Five teams were scheduled to deploy from Fort Leavenworth to Afghanistan and Iraq in the fall of 2006, as a "proof of concept." If all went as planned, HTTs would eventually be assigned to each deployed brigade or regimental combat team. McFate, then on staff at the Institute for Defense Analyses, was appointed as the senior social scientist for the program. She would be responsible for making the public case for this new, anthropological approach to winning the war at the September 2006 counterinsurgency conference in Washington.

It was a striking debut. Among the panelists in military dress uniform

and Brooks Brothers suits, McFate stood out with her severe pixie haircut and stylish attire. Her professional biography described her as a "native of Marin County, California, where she grew up on a WWII naval ammunition barge that had been converted into a houseboat." It made an interesting contrast to the other panelists, whose biographies listed the usual bureaucratic highlights: service on bipartisan commissions, memberships with the Council on Foreign Relations, operational deployments, arms-control negotiations. She looked every inch the grown-up Goth punk, and her presentation and her style were meant to provoke. The U.S. military, she told attendees, had a "staggering lack of knowledge" about other countries and other societies, and in Iraq, the military's ignorance of local customs, traditions, and power relationships had been near-catastrophic. The national security establishment, too, needed the potent tools of social science that could help it understand its adversaries.

In "Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of their Curious Relationship," published in *Military Review* in 2005, McFate argued that the military's lack of cultural mastery was a strategic weakness:

> Once called the "handmaiden of colonialism," anthropology has had a long, fruitful relationship with various elements of national power, which ended suddenly following the Vietnam War . . . The curious and conspicuous lack of anthropology in the national-security arena since the Vietnam War has had grave consequences for countering the insurgency in Iraq, particularly because political policy and military operations based on partial and incomplete cultural knowledge are often worse than none at all.[6]

To save the enterprise in Iraq from failure, McFate was arguing, the military needed to forge a new alliance with anthropology.

The rich history of anthropology as an instrument of national power can be traced back to the era of "high colonialism," when ethnographers, archaeologists, and cartographers traversed the globe to catalogue imperial possessions. As McFate noted, ethnography evolved as a practical

tool for understanding and administering "native" societies during the heyday of imperialism:

> As early as 1908, anthropologists began training administrators of the Sudanese civil service. This relationship was quickly institutionalized: in 1921, the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures was established with financing from various colonial governments, and Lord Lugard, the former governor of Nigeria, became head of its executive council. The organization's mission was based on Bronislaw Malinowski's article, "Practical Anthropology," which argued that anthropological knowledge should be applied to solve the problems faced by colonial administrators, including those posed by "savage law, economics, customs, and institutions."[7]

But collaboration between anthropology and the state had a mixed record. In World War I social science research was used as a cover for espionage. In perhaps the most famous example, the Office of Naval Intelligence recruited Sylvanus Morley, a scholar of Mayan archaeology, to survey two thousand miles of remote Central American coastline in search of German submarine bases. Morley also produced almost a thousand pages of intelligence reporting and helped recruit several other archaeologists for clandestine missions.[8] The practice of spies using social science research as a cover was condemned by the prominent anthropologist Franz Boas, who saw it as a serious breach of professional ethics. In a letter published in the *Nation* in December 1919, Boas wrote, "A person . . . who uses science as a cover for political spying, who demeans himself to pose before a foreign government as an investigator and asks for assistance in his alleged researches in order to carry on, under this cloak, his political machinations, prostitutes science in an unpardonable way and forfeits the right to be classed as a scientist."[9]

According to David Price, a historian of anthropology and a critic of the Human Terrain System, the Boas affair "marked the beginning of American anthropology's public debates about the propriety of mixing anthropology with military and intelligence operations."[10] During World War II, however, many of those professional concerns were set aside as anthropologists joined in the war effort. Boas's most famous student, Margaret Mead, contributed to the National Research Council's

Committee on Food Habits, where she applied anthropological methods to food distribution and preparation in war-torn countries. She also published *And Keep Your Powder Dry: An Anthropologist Looks at America*, a patriotic volume on the American national character.[11] Mead's husband, the anthropologist Gregory Bateson, served with distinction in the Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the CIA.[12]

In the one and a half decades after World War II, the military and academia once again became estranged. In December 1964, however, the Special Operations Research Office, a federally funded research institute at American University in Washington, wrote to scholars with an interest in social science research on conflict in the developing world to announce Project Camelot: "Project Camelot is a study whose objective is to determine the feasibility of developing a general social systems model which would make it possible to predict and influence politically significant aspects of social change in the developing nations of the world." The main objective of Project Camelot was to find ways to measure a country's vulnerability to "internal war," and come up with ways to counteract it.[13]

In the national-security jargon of the time, "internal war" was shorthand for Soviet-backed wars of national liberation fought in postcolonial societies. But the authors of a briefing paper prepared by the Army, which was providing the funds for Project Camelot research, put the objective in broader terms of nation building:

> The problem of insurgency is an integral part of the larger problem of the emergence of developing countries and their transition toward modernization . . . The indicated approach is to try to obviate the need for insurgency through programs for political, economic, social, and psychological development. Military support of such programs can be a significant factor in the nation-building process.[14]

Carefully applied U.S. assistance—sometimes economic, sometimes military—could influence the outcome in weak or endangered states, and prevent them from falling into the Soviet sphere. For this enterprise to succeed, however, the U.S. government needed to better understand the current cultural context of insurgency. The first Project Camelot field research was to be conducted in Latin America, but the main focus was

Vietnam, where the United States was becoming ever more deeply involved. Seymour Deitchman worked on Project Camelot as special assistant for counterinsurgency programs under Harold Brown, the director of Defense Research and Engineering. Project Camelot had originated in Brown's office. It duplicated some efforts being undertaken by the military services and the Advanced Research Projects Agency, the science arm of the Pentagon that was created after the Soviets launched Sputnik. Deitchman explained the rationale of Project Camelot in his memoir of the program, *The Best-Laid Schemes: A Tale of Social Research and Bureaucracy*:

> Historically, western nations in colonial times had a lode of data deriving from and relevant for the master-slave relationship between governors and governed. Such data were often not germane, and the learning problem was much more severe, in the more egalitarian relationship we had undertaken with the Vietnamese. We had insufficient knowledge to do the job as well as we wanted to, and while this may be typical of the international efforts of all nations, growing awareness led to a strong feeling at the highest levels of American government that we would have to do better.[15]

That sentiment—not *whether* the job should be done, but *how* to do it better—could easily describe the policymaking elite's discussions about Iraq forty years later. In essence, the Army wanted a new Project Camelot, but planners and policymakers conveniently overlooked the program's abject failure. When the left-wing press in Chile got wind of Project Camelot in mid-1965, lurid stories began to appear about U.S. "interventionism" and "espionage" under the guise of social-science research. To make matters worse, Project Camelot was seen as encroachment by the military on diplomatic turf: The State Department saw foreign policy and social science research as its domain, but the Pentagon was getting all the money.

A furor in Washington ensued after a front-page story by Walter Pincus of the *Washington Star* on July 27, 1965, "Army-State Department Feud Over Social Science Research in Chile," in which Pincus broke the news of the growing feud between the State Department and the Pentagon over the research the Army was conducting in Chile under the auspices of

Project Camelot. Pincus's reporting probably drew on a deliberate leak from Foggy Bottom (Deitchman noted that Pincus's story was based on a classified State Department cable). The controversy had as much to do with bureaucratic turf battle as it did with conspiracy theories: Project Camelot's Chilean study had been started without the knowledge of the U.S. ambassador in Santiago, who called for cancellation of the program. Press coverage was key to bringing Project Camelot to an untimely end, Deitchman noted:

> It brought the Camelot fiasco to the public's attention and stimulated the interest of members of Congress in DOD social research. It fed, if it did not trigger, the bureaucratic conflict between the State and Defense Departments. When all was over it could claim much of the credit for having brought the DOD's supposed misbehavior to public account.[16]

In many ways Project Camelot foreshadowed the controversy that followed the Human Terrain System from its inception. Like Project Camelot, the Human Terrain System arose from the intense frustration of military officials and policymakers with their inability to defeat relatively primitive insurgents. The United States was deeply engaged in giving aid to Iraq and Afghanistan, but it understood little about local antagonisms and local cultures in these and other countries. Washington policymakers rarely understood those dynamics, and any of the knowledge acquired during a twelve- or fifteen-month Army rotation (or in the case of a diplomat, a one-year tour) often had to be relearned when a new unit or a bureaucratic replacement arrived.

The Human Terrain System took things a step further than Project Camelot by embedding social scientists within military units. When the program became public, it almost immediately sparked controversy. Part of the problem was McFate's persona as an intellectual bomb thrower. As McFate saw it, anthropology had beaten a retreat to the Ivory Tower, where anthropologists' professional embrace of postmodernist theory led the discipline to continue a long slide toward irrelevance. In the 1960s and 1970s, she wrote, the anthropological community "refused to 'collaborate' with the powerful, instead vying to represent the interests of indigenous peoples engaged in neocolonial struggles . . . Armed with critical hermeneutics, frequently backed up by self-reflexive neo-Marxism, anthropology

began a brutal process of self-flagellation, to a degree almost unimaginable to anyone outside the discipline."[17]

In a 2006 *New Yorker* profile, McFate explained her collaboration with the military with a well-rehearsed line: "I'm engaged in a massive act of rebellion against my hippie parents."[18] But it was in equal part a rebellion against her profession.

In its search for qualified social scientists, the Army reverted to a familiar pattern: It outsourced. Army Training and Doctrine Command at Fort Monroe, Virginia, awarded a contract to BAE Systems, a major defense contractor, to run the Human Terrain System. Formed from the merger of British Aerospace and Marconi Electronic Systems, BAE Systems was a manufacturer of armored vehicles, naval guns, missile launchers, and artillery systems; it was a "systems integrator" for installing military electronics and communications gear. The company had no problem finding engineering talent, but it was perhaps not the ideal choice for luring qualified anthropologists from academia. Rather than reach out at academic conferences, it posted ads on military- and intelligence-oriented job boards and Monster.com. Of the first thirty-five social scientists who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, only about half had Ph.D.s. Of those, only seven were anthropologists.[19] Once again, finding manpower was the critical challenge in the nation-building enterprise.

The military's culture of secrecy clashed with the more free-spirited world of academia. Human Terrain research was supposed to draw from "open source" rather than classified information, but the teams worked inside military headquarters, a sensitive environment filled with classified maps, monitors, and equipment. The job required, at a minimum, a "secret" clearance; candidates would preferably obtain a "top secret" clearance. Background checks for a top-secret clearance are intrusive; they also require "cleared" individuals to sign what are, in effect, nondisclosure agreements. That kind of restriction could be a potential problem for an academic who was interested in writing and publishing freely. And it could also be an obstacle for social science researchers who traveled widely and had a great range of foreign contacts.

Such was the case with Zenia Helbig, a graduate student at the University of Virginia who joined the Human Terrain program in 2006.

Helbig was in many ways an ideal hire. She was a student of religious violence in the Muslim world, particularly in Shia communities, and her research had taken her twice to Iran, where she had briefly met Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, then the mayor of Tehran. Despite her travel to an "Axis of Evil" state, Helbig managed to receive an interim clearance. But she was suspended from the program after cracking a joke over a beer in a base parking lot during an exercise at Fort Hood, Texas ("Okay, if we invade Iran, that's where I draw the line, hop the border and switch sides," she recalls saying). Stripped of her clearance, Helbig became unable to work in any national security-related program.[20]

The Human Terrain System offered extremely lucrative pay packages, particularly for academics. The typical base salary for a Human Terrain Team member was around $115,000; when combined with hardship pay and other incentives for serving in a war zone, the take-home pay for a team member could climb as high as $300,000.[21] But the Army still had trouble recruiting. Part of the issue was professional resistance. In 2007, a group of anthropologists organized an ad hoc group called the Network of Concerned Anthropologists. They lobbied their colleagues to sign a pledge of nonparticipation in counterinsurgency programs. The pledge stated:

> U.S. military and intelligence agencies and military contractors have identified "cultural knowledge," "ethnographic intelligence," and "human terrain mapping" as essential to US-led military intervention in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East . . . Such work breaches relations of openness and trust with the people anthropologists work with around the world and, directly or indirectly, enables the occupation of one country by another. In addition, much of this work is covert. Anthropological support for such an enterprise is at odds with the humane ideals of our discipline as well as professional standards.[22]

The Network of Concerned Anthropologists' pledge was premised in large part on opposition to the war in Iraq. But the American Anthropology Association, the main professional body for anthropologists, raised broader ethical concerns. In October 2007, the "triple A" issued a statement condemning the program, saying that the Human Terrain System violated the ethical directive that anthropologists first "do no harm" to

the individuals they study. "As members of HTS teams, anthropologists provide information and counsel to U.S. military field commanders," the statement read. "This poses a risk that information provided by HTS anthropologists could be used to make decisions about identifying and selecting specific populations as targets of U.S. military operations either in the short or long term."

Proponents of the Human Terrain System argued that the data they collected in the field was appropriately firewalled, and that it could not be tapped by military units for purposes of targeting. McFate stated in a 2008 interview:

> The S-2 [the military intelligence staff] can't come to the Human Terrain Team and say: "I need to find out x about this person." They literally can't do that. We don't want, as a program, the Human Terrain Teams, doing anything that's involved in lethal targeting. That's not their job . . . The military does not need our help to do that. They're the best in the world doing that. We're trying to be a resource for who their friends are.[23]

Then there was the nettlesome question of consent. Human Terrain Teams traveled in the field with heavily armed military units. When a researcher—in uniform, perhaps armed, and probably accompanied by a rifle platoon—stopped to interview an Afghan villager, it might seem more than just a little coercive. How much useful ethnographic or cultural information could be extracted under such conditions? Would villagers simply tell researchers what they wanted to hear? How, in the long term, did researchers expect to build rapport with ordinary people when they were swaddled in body armor, and carrying weapons? Social scientists training at Fort Leavenworth even learned the practice of "windshield ethnology"—observing groups from inside a vehicle.[24] But that sounded absurd. How much could you understand of a local community while gazing through the bulletproof windshield of an up-armored Humvee?

Despite these flaws, the program still seemed quite attractive to the military. Colonel Martin Schweitzer, commander of the Fourth Brigade, Eighty-second Airborne Division, told David Rohde of the *New York Times* that his unit had reduced their dependence on lethal operations by 60 percent since the Human Terrain Team was attached to his unit.

"We're looking at this from a human perspective, from a social scientist's perspective," he said. "We're not focused on the enemy. We're focused on bringing governance down to the people."[25]

Schweitzer's statistics were questionable: When David Price, a member of the Network of Concerned Anthropologists, filed a Freedom of Information Act request to look at the report supporting that claim, he received correspondence that merely restated the 60 percent figure, without an actual report to back up the statistic.[26] Still, it was a compelling idea. A little respect, compassion, and cultural sensitivity might save human lives. Instead of conducting an aggressive house-to-house search for bomb-making materials, a Human Terrain Team might be sent to coax information from a local community by offering to dig a well, resolve a tribal dispute, or redress some other local grievance. In parallel, the social scientists could teach soldiers to avoid cultural blunders that might injure local pride and motivate someone to shelter an insurgent, stash weapons, or attack coalition forces. Of course, it would be hard to measure progress. The effectiveness would be measured in roadside bombs that didn't go off. The concerned anthropologists might have worried about the purity of their profession, but the Human Terrain System, at least, seemed to offer a practical way of reducing harm to civilians.

That interest in the application of social science to resolving conflict seems to be what motivated Michael Bhatia, a scholar assigned to Human Terrain Team AF1 in Khowst Province, southeastern Afghanistan. A magna cum laude graduate of Brown University and a Marshall Scholar at St. Antony's College, Oxford, Bhatia joined the program in 2007 after working for several years as a researcher on Afghanistan. His doctoral dissertation, "The Mujahideen: A Study of Combatant Motives in Afghanistan, 1978–2005," was based on hundreds of interviews he conducted with current and former combatants throughout Afghanistan, as well as archival and media research. He had also worked as a UN observer in East Timor and an election monitor in Kosovo. Described by his thesis advisor at Brown as "an idealist and a realist," Bhatia went into the program with eyes open. "I am already preparing for both the real and ethical minefields," he wrote in an e-mail to friends shortly before deploying to Afghanistan.[27]

In early May 2008, Bhatia was riding in a convoy through a remote sector of Khowst Province, not far from the Pakistan border. That area

had been the scene of a long-standing tribal feud, and Bhatia hoped that he could help initiate tribal negotiations that might spark reconciliation. The meeting would never take place. A roadside bomb struck the convoy's lead vehicle, and Bhatia was killed instantly. With Bhatia's death, the Human Terrain System lost the poster child for the program, an idealistic, articulate young researcher with serious experience in Afghanistan and a genuine interest in making military operations less lethal. It was the first of a series of deadly disasters for the program.

The main problem for Human Terrain Team IZ3, in Iraq, was electricity, not tribal politics. When major combat ended in Iraq in 2003, the U.S. military quickly discovered that one of the top complaints of the local population was power outages. During the summer months, when temperatures reached sweltering highs and the demand for cooling strained the electricity grid, neighborhoods received only two or three hours of power a day from municipal power. Things were a bit better in the winter, but residents still got power only about eight hours a day on the city grid. Power shortfalls exacerbated an already volatile situation in the capital. Power relations were constantly shifting. The government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki had managed to broker a ceasefire with the Jaish al-Mahdi, but Sunni Arab leaders worried that the Shia-dominated coalition had long-term designs to exclude them from power.

The U.S.-led coalition was in the middle, and it was focused on trying to find the right people to work with at the local level. It had thrown money at these problems before, often with little result. But Colonel Hort, the commander of the Third Brigade Combat Team, Fourth Infantry Division, had made restoring essential services one of the priorities in the brigade's area of responsibility.

In the past, U.S. commanders used their emergency funds to put power generators on the ground in residential neighborhoods of Baghdad. It was a well-intentioned gesture, but those generators were only a short-term fix. They didn't come with maintenance, the government of Iraq and the local municipalities didn't provide fuel, and no one was charged with maintaining them over the longer term. Many generators were supplied with enough fuel for one month; once that was gone, the generators simply were left to rust away.

For Hort's power generation scheme to succeed in Sadr City, the brigade would have to do much more than install new generators or provide fuel. They would have to encourage the District Advisory Councils to exercise oversight, work with the central government to provide subsidized fuel, and make sure that the local community was invested in the upkeep. "With local power, it's about buy-in with the local government; it's about the Ministry of Oil agreeing to the fuel costs; it's about the neighborhood agreeing to take care of it," Hort said. "So it's a co-op. It's not just a generator that's being bought by U.S. taxpayers' money. It takes more time. You know, I can buy a generator probably tomorrow and put it on the ground—it'll last maybe two months, at that. Co-ops take about two to three months to really get moving. Where you get everybody's signature, everybody agrees to it, and that's the cultural thing you described. Everything's slower here, nothing is"—he snapped his fingers—"overnight."

That was where Human Terrain Team IZ3 came into the picture. They were supposed to identify the local leaders who could help make this arrangement work. It would require a laborious series of "meeting engagements" between the brigade's officers and local leaders such as the chairmen and deputy chairs of DACs, government officials, and tribal leaders. But it was more complicated than just identifying local counterparts. It also meant negotiating a byzantine system of local government that was a legacy of the administrative system created by Saddam Hussein.

For example, the government of Baghdad still essentially replicated the preinvasion Ba'ath regime model, in which the provincial council ran Baghdad via the Ba'ath Party. In 2008, the budget for the province still rested with the provincial council. The DAC, the democratically elected district council, had no budget, and no direct control over the *baladiya*, the public-works department for a particular area. The *baladiya*'s managers reported through the *amanat*—the municipal government—to the provincial council; they did not report directly to the DAC.

Another complicating factor was the remnants of Iraq's command economy. Like basic foodstuffs, generator fuel was subsidized by the state, and rations were issued by Iraq's Ministry of Oil, but much of the fuel ended up being sold on the street. The generators donated by the brigade were supposed to receive a certain amount of subsidized fuel, but there was little incentive to keep a neighborhood generator running when the operator

could turn around and resell the subsidized fuel on the open market for a much higher price. This was a striking irony of U.S. involvement in Iraq: In order to keep the country from sliding into chaos, it had to prop up elements of Saddam Hussein's dysfunctional command economy and administrative structure.

To complicate matters further, the clock was ticking. Under a security framework that was negotiated between the United States and Iraq in late 2008, U.S. troops were to begin a gradual withdrawal from Iraq's cities by mid-2009. Within six months, the U.S. military would be moving to the periphery, and local communities would have to rely more and more on the provincial government and the national government and less and less on assistance from the United States. The costly U.S. investments in projects such as micro-power generation would be squandered if there was no Iraqi plan to sustain them. Things were moving swiftly, and the U.S. military needed to show progress.

Over the summer, Hort's Third Brigade had paid for nine new neighborhood generators for that part of Sadr City. So the news that Hassan Shama, now Sadr City DAC chairman, brought Pierce and his Human Terrain IZ3 team was not good: "We had a promise to deliver some generators, you may have delivered those generators and you may have left them, but I'm not aware of it—the council's not aware of it," Shama said.

Ali Ghatte, who headed the DAC's electricity committee and had accompanied Shama to the meeting, had counted only five generators. Another twist: they had no registration documents. In Iraq, a generator, like an automobile, came with registration papers. Without the papers, the DAC couldn't get subsidized fuel from the Ministry of Oil. Shama, a beefy, forty-something man in jeans and green and yellow polo shirt with closely cropped mustache and goatee, explained this complicated situation to Pierce and Ted Andrews, the Foreign Service officer who headed the e-PRT.

As the Americans listened through the interpreters, Shama shifted restlessly in his seat, and steadily began to raise his voice.

"Let me say this," Pierce said, trying to convey a sense of urgency. "Maybe we don't look like we are concerned. We're concerned with what you just told us, believe me."

Andrews, rising above the crosstalk, added, "We will have the Army confirm with you . . . and if there is some big mistake, we have a gentleman from the press here who can write all this down!"

Switching to English, Shama said, "I'm sorry, mister, this is the problem." Leaning energetically forward on his elbows, he resumed in Arabic. "This is how this thing's supposed to be done," he said. "If you have a quantity of generators, you should go to me and say you have those nine or ten generators. You tell us where the areas are that are most in need for them. Even if the Army is trying to put those generators up, they know who's the [council] member for the section they are working in. They should have grabbed him and told him [Ali Ghatte]. The Army may have placed the generator there, but nobody's aware of it. And nobody's watching the generators. So someone may have just come and taken it."

That worried Pierce. He called down to the brigade staff to sort out whether or not the generators had in fact been delivered or if they had in fact disappeared. A major from the brigade staff arrived shortly thereafter, looking confused.

"Let me do this as a district attorney here," Pierce told the major. "Here is the deal that we have discovered. First of all, Ali Ghatte is concerned about the actual location—and, frankly, security of the microgenerators. He's concerned, because we've given him in Arabic their location, and he says some of those are not in those *mahallas* [blocks] . . . Frankly, we're concerned that some of them have been taken. So that's a very significant issue."

Solving that first issue was fairly straightforward. The major would arrange to pick up Ghatte and Shama in an armored vehicle and show them where all the generators were. The second point, getting subsidized fuel, was a bit more complicated. They needed to get registration paperwork from Doctor Moayad Hamed, a Baghdad doctor who had built a lucrative postwar business as a contractor to the U.S. military. Doctor Moayad had won the contract to oversee the repair of Route Irish, the crucial Baghdad airport road. He had contracts for trash pickup, for street repair, even for painting bright murals to spruce up the concrete barriers that surrounded many residential neighborhoods. He had the contract for generators as well. The problem was, he was not turning over the paperwork.

Pierce said, "Ali Ghatte told us that he tried to talk to Doctor Moayad, and that for some reason Doctor Moayad is extremely reluctant to turn over the registration paperwork. Is that right?"

"That's true, we contacted them more than one time," Ghatte said.

Pierce, to the major, said sotto voce, "What I'm afraid is that he is

turning around and using this registration paperwork to secure fuel and then selling it on the black market."

"Sure," the major whispered. "I'm tracking that."

Pierce then cleared his throat. "I do have a couple questions for the group. Will copies of the registrations suffice to get the fuel flowing?"

Shama and Ghatte agreed that, yes, a copy of the paperwork would suffice. After two hours of debate, a temporary solution had been reached—or so it seemed. Later that month, the generators still were not operating.

A few weeks after my visit with Human Terrain Team IZ3, I embedded with an Army infantry company at Joint Security Station Comanche, a small outpost manned by an Army infantry company inside Sadr City proper. First Sergeant Ethan Mizell, the company's senior NCO, told me the generators inside their patrol zone had been installed in August; the Iraqi government provided some test fuel, around a thousand liters. That supply ran out in less than three weeks, although the company donated some extra fuel to get people through the Eid festival after Ramadan. "They ran out of fuel in twenty days," Mizell said. "I gave it to them for the rest of the month because it was their holiday." After that, there was no more money from the Army to keep topping up the generator supply.

Captain Andrew Slack, the company commander, told me the Commander's Emergency Response Program funds had dried up on October 1, at the beginning of the new fiscal year. The Iraqis would be on their own. "You can sort of play Sim City: Come in and build some roads, repair buildings, spruce up a park or a school," he said. "That can be nice visually, but because we weren't so hooked up with the local leadership, we weren't as effective as we could have been."

In many respects Pete Pierce was the ideal person to lead Human Terrain IZ3. As a district attorney he was steeped in the intricacies of municipal politics; he also understood the organized crime–style networks underpinning the insurgency in Sadr City. But that was by accident, not by design. Pierce was recruited to run IZ3 because of his background in Military Intelligence and Civil Affairs; he was recruited by another reserve officer who was in his Civil Affairs unit, who had done a tour in Iraq with one of the senior managers of the Human Terrain System program. He was not a Middle East expert, and both he and the social scientists on

Human Terrain Team IZ3 relied heavily on Arabic interpreters to do their jobs.

For cultural insights, Pierce depended on his senior cultural adviser, Abu Bassam. An Iraqi Christian and Baghdad native, Abu Bassam had emigrated to the United States three decades ago and had returned to Iraq to work as an interpreter for U.S. military commanders. (Abu Bassam, or "father of Bassam" was the nickname he used when dealing with Iraqis.) A compactly built man with a neatly trimmed mustache, Abu Bassam had a gentle, low-key demeanor. Back in the United States, he was a retired engineer. Here, he was the key interpreter of the local scene, and a powerful broker between cultures.

"I am very much a fair broker to both sides," he told me while we waited for the meeting with Hassan Shama. "I don't want anybody to lose. A lot of money was wasted [on reconstruction projects] and we all know that."

The collaboration with Shama was a case in point. "Everyone hated him, the commander, the Americans," Abu Bassam said. "I convinced everyone we should work with him."

Abu Bassam may have emigrated to the States decades ago, but that didn't mean he had shed all of his Iraqi habits of thought. He had a low opinion of the Shia population of Sadr City. "The Shia mentality is different," he told me. "They are ghetto. They can sleep with their cousins, screw donkeys. I don't want to put them down—some of them are doctors, engineers, teachers. Now the Shia took over the government—what do they know how to do? Nothing. Administratively, they have nothing, no experience in governing."

During the years he had spent working for the U.S. military in Iraq, Abu Bassam had noticed a subtle shift under way. The U.S. military was getting smarter. "There was an attitude: Don't fight them with bullets. We need to be not more offensive, not more defensive. We need to listen." If the Human Terrain System had been in place in 2003, he concluded, "this all would have been different. We [the United States] don't know how to spend on projects. We need to run the military more as a business. The military never follows through on anything—so much money wasted, gone into bank accounts in Syria and Lebanon. We give a project a million dollars, and half a million dollars goes to militias."

This was the problem with spending money to pacify Iraq: The whole approach of paying large segments of the Iraqi population not to fight was

extraordinarily susceptible to waste, fraud, and abuse. In Anbar Province and elsewhere, in a program called "Sons of Iraq," the U.S. military bankrolled tribal militias to stop fighting American forces and keep order in their neighborhoods. Many of the "Sons" were former insurgents. Eventually, the Iraqi government was supposed to absorb some of the "Sons" into regular security forces. In Baghdad, the U.S. government sponsored a host of make-work schemes and public works projects designed to keep fighting-age males on the U.S. payroll—and out of criminal gangs or insurgent groups.

Fraud and waste were not limited to the military. USAID also lost track of millions of dollars. Take the Community Stabilization Program, a massive program started in May 2006 by USAID to complement counterinsurgency efforts in selected Iraqi cities. In a March 2008 audit, the agency's inspector general concluded that the program was extremely vulnerable to fraud. The report cited a letter from a USAID representative on a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Baghdad that indicated that "millions of dollars" from trash pickup campaigns were being redirected to insurgents, as well as to corrupt community leaders. This source reckoned that as much as half of the cash directed to cleanup campaigns in one area had been siphoned off by insurgents or corrupt officials. "If the source's estimates are correct—that 40 to 50 percent of payments for such projects were used for improper pay-offs—USAID may have already been defrauded of $6.7 to $8.4 million, with another $3.4 to $4.3 million at risk absent any corrective action," the inspector general concluded—and this was in just one neighborhood of Baghdad, where $16.7 million in Community Stabilization Program funds had been disbursed.[28]

That was where the Human Terrain System entered the picture. It was not, as its academic critics liked to hint, a devilishly complex scheme to target Iraqis and Afghans for assassination, a sort of latter-day Phoenix Program, nor was it a version of COINTELPRO, the FBI's discredited domestic surveillance program that targeted antiwar groups and civil rights activists in the 1960s. Human Terrain IZ3's mission was an outgrowth of the military's employment of cash as a weapon. The military needed better intelligence about how to spend the motherlode of reconstruction funds it was overseeing as part of the nation-building effort, and the Human Terrain System was tasked with obtaining it.

Human Terrain was, in short, an intelligence program. Not intelligence

in the traditional sense, perhaps; instead, information with a practical military application. "Intelligence" was a taboo word for the Human Terrain System, and senior officials, like McFate, insisted that the teams were walled off from military intelligence. Yet the word cropped up in the field.

In a discussion with members of Human Terrain Team IZ3 around a picnic table at Forward Operating Base War Eagle, Pete Pierce, IZ3's leader, described the Human Terrain Team as having a clear role in collecting intelligence for the brigade's Civil Affairs operations.

"Well, we work with them on a constant basis," Pierce said. "So you could almost argue that we are"—Pierce paused, thinking—"the intelligence arm of Civil Affairs and the e-PRT, because they are the ones who control the budget. They are the ones who have the program to do reconstruction."

Robert Kerr, one of the social scientists on Pierce's team, swiftly moved to correct his boss. "The *information* arm," he clarified.

But in that conversation, Pierce repeatedly used the word "intelligence" to describe the kind of work they did. Asked what kinds of product they provided the commander after a key meeting with a local leader, he said, "We provide him with an intelligence . . ." He paused to clarify his language. "With an EXSUM, a summary of the meeting." In describing what kind of support he received from the "Reachback Center" analysts at Fort Leavenworth, he said, "If we go to these meetings and there's something we don't understand, about a tribe or about the political leadership or about the formation of the government of Iraq, then we request, you know, a report, a summary, or an intel product—I shouldn't say intel product—*information* product—from the Reachback Center."

So all the talk of the Human Terrain System being simple "open source" research was a polite fiction. The members of a Human Terrain Team worked for a military commander, they were located within a brigade headquarters, and information they shared, even if in the most general way, could help the commander sort out who was and was not the enemy. Lieutenant Colonel Gian Gentile, who commanded an armored reconnaissance squadron in Baghdad in 2006 and who described himself as "greatly in favor" of the program, pointed out that Human Terrain analysis would on some level allow commanders to understand who the enemy was in the area his unit operated in. "Don't fool yourself," he wrote Marcus Griffin, a Human Terrain Team member working in Iraq. "These Human Terrain Teams whether they want to acknowledge it or not, in a general-

ized and subtle way, do at some point contribute to the collective knowledge of a commander which allows him to target and kill the enemy in the Civil War in Iraq . . . So stop sugarcoating what these teams do and end up being a part of; to deny this fact is to deny a reality of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan."[29]

Nicole Suveges, who was killed in the Sadr City advisory council bombing, would not be the last Human Terrain Team casualty. On November 4, 2008, two Human Terrain Team members, Don Ayala and Paula Loyd, were on a foot patrol in the village of Chehel Gazi, Afghanistan. Loyd, a social scientist, approached Abdul Salam, a local man carrying a fuel jug, and struck up a conversation about the price of gasoline. Without warning, the man doused Loyd in a flammable liquid and set her on fire. Soldiers rolled Loyd in a ditch to put out the flames; Abdul Salam was captured and restrained in plastic flexcuffs. When Ayala learned about the extent of Loyd's injuries, he walked over to the Afghan man, still bound at the wrists, and executed him with a pistol shot to the head.

Loyd died of her injuries after two agonizing months in an Army hospital.[30] Ayala pled guilty to the revenge killing; a U.S. District Court judge sentenced him to five years probation and a $12,500 fine.[31] The incident further tarnished the reputation of the program. In February 2009, morale further plummeted after the program's managers suddenly announced a major change. Team members would have to convert from well-compensated contractor status to a less well compensated government employee status, or they would have to resign. The move was supposed to be in response to the agreement struck between the Iraqi and U.S. governments to lift legal immunity for contractors, but it did not sit well with team members. Around one third of the program's deployed workforce quit.

That same spring, Major Ben Connable, a Marine Corps officer, authored a devastating critique of the Human Terrain System in *Military Review*, the same publication that had introduced the concept to a military audience two and a half years earlier. As a foreign area officer, or FAO, Connable understood the military's need to learn about foreign cultures. FAOs were supposed to be the military's resident experts on local cultures; they had language training and advanced degrees in area studies or international relations. But the Human Terrain approach of hiring civilian social

scientists on contract had been a disaster, he contended. In the article, "All Our Eggs in a Broken Basket: How the Human Terrain System Is Undermining Sustainable Military Cultural Competence," he argued that the military needed to develop its own culturally literate officers in-house. That would further a commonsense aim of remedying the military's devastating lack of cultural knowledge without all the blowback from recruiting anthropologists and other social scientists. Connable asked:

> Why is it necessary to create a separate program, costing (at a minimum) tens of millions of dollars, to assign these personnel to the very staffs at which they were trained to serve? What do the Human Terrain Team FAO and CA [Civil Affairs] officers bring to the table that organic FAO and CA officers do not? If HTS can find these qualified officers, why can't the U.S. military services?[32]

But boosting the military's cultural I.Q. would have been too logical, and by now the Human Terrain System had taken on a life of its own in the Pentagon bureaucracy. U.S. Africa Command had quietly begun recruiting to staff a new "sociocultural cell" that would be attached to the new regional military headquarters. A "research and risk management firm" called Archimedes Global, Inc., was selected to recruit contractor teams. As the military ramped up its involvement in Afghanistan, the Army quietly moved to expand the program. In June 2009, a $40 million expansion of the program appeared in a story posted by the Thirty-fourth Infantry Division at its Web site—buried in a photo caption.[33]

Despite setbacks and failures, and the general inability to find the right people for the job, the U.S. military's embrace of social science showed no sign of diminishing. The approach was seen as the key to fighting a smarter war. But the Human Terrain System ignored a larger problem. The U.S. military was fighting an away game, operating in cultures it didn't understand, in places undergoing violent social change. They were the outsiders. All the anthropological expertise in the world couldn't fix that.