ON THE USES OF CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Sheila Miyoshi Jager

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Comments pertaining to this report are invited and should be forwarded to: Director, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Ave, Carlisle, PA 17013-5244.

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FOREWORD

Culture has become something of a buzz word among America's senior military and civilian leaders. Faced with an brutal civil war and insurgency in Iraq, the many complex political and social issues confronted by U.S. military commanders on the ground have given rise to a new awareness that a cultural understanding of an adversary society is imperative if counterinsurgency is to succeed.

This monograph, by Dr. Sheila Miyoshi Jager, explores the role that cultural knowledge must play in thinking about a new strategy for counterinsurgency. Although the importance of cultural awareness and understanding of adversary societies has been widely recognized as essential to operations and tactics on the battlefield, Dr. Jager argues its significance has been largely ignored in formulating the broader strategic goals of counterinsurgency. This monograph highlights the importance of culture, and cultural awareness, in formulating a broad strategy for counterinsurgency which also has wide-ranging implications for U.S. foreign policy.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

SHEILA MIYOSHI JAGER is an Associate Professor of East Asian Studies at Oberlin College. She is currently a Visiting Research Professor of National Security Studies for the Strategic Studies Institute at the U.S. Army War College. Her publications include *A Genealogy of Patriotism: Narratives of Nation-building in Korea* (2003) and (with Rana Mitter) *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory and the Post-Cold War in Asia* (2007). Her book, *Korea: War Without End*, is forthcoming.

SUMMARY

The wide-spread recognition of the need for cultural knowledge in counterinsurgency has been noted and actively promoted recently by the Department of Defense (DoD). General David H. Petraeus, commanding general of the Multi-National Force Iraq (MNF-I), has been at the vanguard of these efforts. As the commander of the 101st Airborne Division in the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003, he later took responsibility for governing Mosul, Iraq's second largest city. Relying on his experiences in Mosul, General Petraeus is currently in charge of a major new counterinsurgency effort in Iraq.

In sharp stark contrast to former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's heavy-handed approach to counterinsurgency which emphasized aggressive military tactics, the post-Rumsfeld Pentagon has advocated a "gentler" approach, emphasizing cultural knowledge and ethnographic intelligence as major components of its counterinsurgency doctrine. This "cultural turn" within DoD highlights efforts to understand adversary societies and to recruit "practitioners" of culture, notably anthropologists, to help in the war effort in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

The recent focus on cultural knowledge in counterinsurgency operations and tactics is a welcome development insofar as it has allowed field commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan to radically reassess the failed operations and tactics in counterinsurgency in both these places. However, what has so far been absent from the discussion on cultural knowledge is the effort to link this new knowledge to formulating an overarching strategic framework. If cultural knowledge has helped U.S. forces to refocus their efforts to better achieve

their operational and tactical goals, the question our political leaders should be asking is whether cultural knowledge can also help them to redefine a broader strategic framework for counterinsurgency.

The aim of this monograph is two-fold. First, it attempts to distinguish between the various "levels" of cultural knowledge and how they are used at various levels of warfare—strategy, operations, and tactics. Although not mutually exclusive, cultural knowledge informs these distinct levels in different ways. For example, the kinds of cultural knowledge that are required at the tactical level (e.g., the cultural knowledge of specific customs) is quite separate from the kinds of cultural knowledge that are required to formulate grand strategy and policy.

Second, the monograph attempts to explore how cultural knowledge might help to redefine an overarching strategy on counterinsurgency. While the military has been at the forefront of significant new and innovative thinking about operations and tactics, revising its old doctrines on the fly, America's political leaders have failed to provide the necessary strategic framework to guide counterinsurgency. The innovative insights about cultural knowledge adapted in operations and tactics by our military leaders have so far not yielded *any* comparable innovations from our political leaders. While the use of cultural knowledge is transforming military operations and tactics in significant and revolutionary ways, this same knowledge is not being adapted by our political leaders to help redefine a compelling new strategy for counterinsurgency.

The monograph concludes by suggesting four distinct ways in which cultural knowledge can work

to help redefine an overarching strategic framework for counterinsurgency.

1. Reconceptualizing the "war on terror" not as one war, but as many different wars.

2. Focusing less on the moral distinctions between "us" and "them"—a major centerpiece of the Bush Doctrine—and more on the differences between "them."

3. Building support and relationships among both friendly and adversary states by taking into account how other societies assess risks, define their security, and perceive threats.

4. Building support for counterinsurgency among America's civilian leaders. Especially amid the domestic acrimony spawned by the Iraq War, inadequate coordination between military and nonmilitary power will severely hamper U.S. counterinsurgency capabilities. Cultural knowledge of both military and civilian institutions is therefore vital if the coordination between them is to be effective.

ON THE USES OF CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

> Knowledge of the cultural terrain can be as important as, and sometimes even more important than, the knowledge of the geographical terrain. This observation acknowledges that the people are, in many respects, the decisive terrain, and that we must study that terrain in the same way that we have always studied the geographical terrain.
>
> General David H. Petraeus
> Commanding General
> Multi-National Force Iraq (MNF-I)[1]

Culture has become something of a buzz word among America's national security leaders. Faced with a brutal civil war and insurgency in Iraq, the many complex political and social issues confronted by U.S. military commanders on the ground have given rise to a new awareness that a cultural understanding of an adversary society is imperative if counterinsurgency is to succeed. Now embroiled in a counterinsurgency in Iraq with no clear end in sight, the broad outlines of what went wrong in Iraq—from insufficient post-war planning to de-Ba'thification and demilitarization of Iraqi society that led to the subsequent emergence of old tribal networks and ethnic and religious cleavages—have been traced to a glaring misunderstanding of Iraqi culture and society by American occupation planners and U.S. military forces. American occupation planners simply assumed that the civilian apparatus of the government would remain intact after the regime was decapitated by the military defeat. But in fact, "when the United States cut off the hydra's Ba'athist head, power reverted to its most basic and stable form—the tribe."[2] Without a firm understanding of the cultural dynamics of Iraqi society or the brutal legacy of colonialism and Sadaam's persecution of Iraq's

Shiite and Kurdish population, American occupational forces in Iraq were basically working within a cultural and historical vacuum.

The new efforts to infuse cultural knowledge into U.S. military operations and training in Iraq have coincided with a broad shift within the Department of Defense (DoD), once the extent of the debacle in Iraq became more widely known. In July 2004, retired U.S. Army Major General Robert H. Scales, Jr., wrote an article for the Naval Institute's *Proceedings* magazine in which he disagreed with the commonly held assumption that was prevalent within the Pentagon at the time—that success in war is best achieved by overwhelming force. Instead, he argued that the type of conflict we are currently waging in Iraq requires "an exceptional ability to understand people, their culture, and their motivations."[3]

Since then, the widespread recognition of the need for cultural knowledge in counterinsurgency has been recognized and actively promoted by the Pentagon. General David H. Petraeus, commanding general of the Multi-National Force Iraq (MNF-I), who also boasts a Ph.D. from Princeton in International Relations, has been at the vanguard of these efforts. As the commander of the 101st Airborne Division in the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003, he later took responsibility for governing Mosul, Iraq's second largest city. Relying on his experiences in Mosul, General Petraeus is currently in charge of a major new counterinsurgency effort in Iraq. Desperate to stem the on-going violence, the Bush administration is pinning its hopes on General Petraeus and his advisors to fix the fiasco in Iraq.

In sharp stark contrast to then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's heavy-handed approach to counterinsurgency which emphasized aggressive

military tactics, the post-Rumsfeld Pentagon has advocated a "gentler" approach, emphasizing cultural knowledge and ethnographic intelligence as major components of its counterinsurgency doctrine. This "cultural turn" within DoD highlights efforts to understand adversary societies and to recruit "practitioners" of culture, notably anthropologists, to help in the war effort in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In February 2006, Petraeus invited an array of academics, human rights lawyers, journalists, and practitioners of counterinsurgency to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to vet a draft for a new counterinsurgency manual, *Field Manual* (FM) *3-24*, which was published on December 15, 2006. Owing to its enormous popularity, however—with 1.5 million downloads the first month—it was recently republished by the University of Chicago Press with a forward by Sarah Sewell, a former DoD official who now teaches at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

While the focus on cultural knowledge in counterinsurgency operations and tactics is a welcome development insofar as it has allowed field commanders to radically reassess the failed operations and tactics in counterinsurgency, what so far has been absent from the discussion on cultural knowledge is the effort to link this new knowledge to formulating an overarching strategic framework. As Sarah Sewell has put it, "because counterinsurgency is predominately political, military doctrine should flow from a broader strategic framework. But our political leaders have so far been unable to provide a compelling one."[4]

If cultural knowledge is now viewed as a major component of counterinsurgency operations and tactics on the ground, what can cultural knowledge teach us about strategy and policy? This question requires us to

distinguish the various "levels" of cultural knowledge and how they are used at various levels of warfare—strategy, operations, and tactics. Although not mutually exclusive, cultural knowledge informs these distinct levels in different ways. For example, the kinds of cultural knowledge that are required at the tactical level (e.g., the cultural knowledge of specific customs like "do not spit in public," or "take off your shoes before entering a house," etc.) is quite separate from the kinds of cultural knowledge that are required to formulate grand strategy and policy (e.g., the cultural knowledge that influences such broad issues as how the legacy of Japanese imperialism has influenced contemporary Sino-Japanese relations).

However, within the current literature on culture and counterinsurgency, there has been a tendency to conflate the *practical* application of empirical cultural knowledge (as applied to operations and tactics) with the more *abstract* notions of cultural knowledge as they apply to the formulation of an overarching strategy and policy for counterinsurgency. The kinds of cultural knowledge that inform military operations and tactics on the ground—the "how-to" *practical* application of cultural and ethnographic knowledge—is very distinct from the forms of cultural knowledge that are needed to formulate national strategy and policy. However, although quite distinct, the uses of culture as they apply to all three levels are interrelated and must complement one another: a sound strategic framework based on a deep cultural and historical understanding of an adversary culture will necessarily give rise to sound operations and tactics necessary for waging a successful counterinsurgency.

Thus far, there has been a great deal of concern with the application of cultural knowledge on the battlefield

and far less interest in how this knowledge might be applied to formulating an overarching strategic framework on counterinsurgency. Without a clear articulation of our strategic objectives, our political leaders have confused operational and strategic goals. Achieving stability in Iraq is an operational goal; it is not a strategic objective. Devising a broad strategy for counterinsurgency requires our political leaders to focus their attention beyond the counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan.

If cultural knowledge has helped U.S. forces refocus their efforts to better achieve their operational and tactical goals, the question our political leaders should be asking is whether cultural knowledge can also help them redefine a broader strategic framework for counterinsurgency. The answer to this question requires an examination of cultural knowledge and how it operates in different ways according to the different levels of war-making (strategy, operations, and tactics).

Cultural Knowledge for Strategy.

What do we mean by cultural knowledge as applied to the level of grand strategy? How is it distinguished from the kinds of cultural knowledge needed to wage successful operations on the battlefield? Let us begin by using the definition of culture as articulated by the new National Cultures Initiative at the Department of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College (USAWC).

> "Culture" is a difficult concept to grasp with any certainty, but a fundamental one for defining and understanding the human condition. It is also an important dimension of policy and strategy, because it affects how people think and respond and thus how policy and strategy

> are formulated and implemented. We can consider culture as the way humans and societies assign meaning to the world around them and define their place in that world. It is manifested in languages, ideas, beliefs, customs, traditions, rituals, objects and images that are symbolic (therefore symbolic forms that represent and/or contain certain meanings) of the values, interests, perceptions, and biases of individuals and of the collective society. . . .[5]

Largely in response to the setbacks in Iraq, the USAWC has introduced major new changes to its curricula which have sought to directly address the issue of culture. As part of the "cultural turn" within the DoD, new lessons on National Cultures in the standard *Strategic Thinking* course and a new series of *Regional Studies* courses were introduced into the curriculum in 2006-07. The aim of these courses is to teach students about the importance of cultural awareness and understanding of "how other regions, nations, and societies view themselves and others" and the effect of this awareness on policy and strategy formulations and outcome. This is a significant shift away from the traditional focus on American interest and policy in foreign areas. Led in large part by Colonel Jiyul Kim, Director of Asian Studies at the USAWC, the *Analytical Culture Framework*, which serves as a master guide to these major new efforts and which he authored, lists six dimensions for the study of culture that form the intellectual framework for the new *Strategic Thinking* and *Regional Studies* courses.[6] These dimensions are (1) National Identity, (2) Political Culture, (3) Regional Identity, (4) Political System, (5) Strategic Culture, and (6) Globalization and Culture.

A common theme that infuses all six dimensions is the critical place occupied by the study of history:

> Every dimension of the framework must be appreciated as both a cumulative and revisionist process of not only the actual historical experience, but also memory of that history for memory often distorts history for contemporary purposes. Thus history serves two important functions, as agent and *process* that actually determines specific cultural forms (both tangible and intangible), and as an instrument of culture to be distorted and used for contemporary purposes (most often political).[7]

These new curricular initiatives are significant in their attempt to link the understanding of foreign cultures at its most abstract level (national identity, political culture, strategic culture, etc.) with American strategy and policy: "We live in a world without the comfortable and simple dichotomy of the Cold War . . ." reads the *National Cultures* lesson,

> Greater cultural proficiency at the strategic level is imperative in working with the rising powers such as China and India, dealing with new partners and allies as well as new challenges with old allies and partners, responding to extremism in its many forms, learning to wage an effective counter-insurgency campaign, coping with increasing anti-Americanism, handling transnational threats and issues, and building coalitions across the regions and the world.[8]

While this linkage between cultural knowledge and U.S. strategy appears to be new, culture figured prominently in America's post-World War II planning. The successful military occupation of Japan (1945-52) is a good example of how cultural knowledge informed America's long-term strategic objectives in Asia. The U.S. decision to preserve the Japanese imperial system and shield Emperor Hirohito from being tried as a war criminal (something that was fiercely opposed by Japan's neighbors and many political groups within the United States) allowed the American Occupation

to rewrite a new role for the Japanese Emperor: Hirohito was miraculously transformed from Japan's preeminent military leader who oversaw a brutal 15-year war against Asia and the United States to an innocent Japanese victim and political symbol duped by evil Japanese militarists. The surprising and rapid transition from Japanese militarism to Japanese democracy was made *not* through the imposition of American democratic values and norms, but by a not-so-subtle manipulation of Japanese cultural symbols and meanings, including a rather blatant manipulation of history.[9]

Applied to the level of strategy, cultural knowledge must therefore take into account the vital role of history and historical memory. Culture is not unchanging, nor does it entail a set of enduring values and/or ancient "patterns" of thought from which we can predict behavior. This is where the usage and understanding of culture as applied to the level of strategy differs significantly from the application of cultural knowledge at the operational and tactical levels. The uses of cultural knowledge in counterinsurgency operations emphasize the need for soldiers to understand the intricacies of customs, values, symbols, and traditions in order to be able to adapt and fight in a foreign society. It is hoped that this anthropological approach to war "will shed light on the grammar and logic of tribal warfare," and create the "conceptual weapons necessary to return fire."[10]

Against this definition of culture as an enduring "grammar" of values and customs rooted in a timeless tradition, cultural knowledge as applied to the level of strategy assumes that cultures are *dynamic* entities, not static categories. Hence, in formulating an overarching strategic framework for counterinsurgency, it is important to grasp not merely the cultural logic of

say, Sunni identity, including their values, customs, traditions, etc., but how Sunni extremists have invoked these traditional values, historical experiences, and belief-systems in the contemporary context to justify their extremist actions. Culture as applied to the level of strategy focuses on the issues of interpretation and reception. Cultural knowledge at this level thus requires a complex understanding of culture as a dynamic entity, an on-going process of negotiation between past and present. Far from reproducing the values and beliefs of a static and unchanging culture, extremist groups like al-Qai'da have appropriated and reinterpreted Islamic texts, belief-systems, and traditions to justify their own radical ideology; in other words, they have used culture instrumentally. Cultural knowledge as applied to the level of strategy must be concerned with the *dynamic* understanding of culture and how different Islamic radicals emphasize different aspects of their historical past and traditions to legitimize their political actions and behavior in the present. Such knowledge becomes useful in formulating a grand strategy on counterinsurgency that, instead of lumping all Islamic radical enemies together, differentiates them according to their various "cultures" within radical Islam. To pry apart violent Islamic radicals, the United States has to become knowledgeable about these internal cultural cleavages "and be patient in exploiting them."[11] Cultural knowledge at the strategic level serves this purpose.

Cultural Knowledge For Operations and Tactics.

Cultural knowledge as applied to the level of operations and tactics is concerned with the practical application of this knowledge on the battlefield. In

contrast to the dynamic understanding of culture and its usage at the level of strategy, culture at the operational and tactical levels is defined as a more or less stable and static set of categories that include distinct belief-systems, values, customs, and traditions that can be usefully applied to enhance the cultural awareness of American-led forces on the ground. It is primarily this understanding and usage of culture that have become prominent features of the counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.[12]

Two major efforts in this regard are notable. As part of a new program to help address the shortcomings in cultural knowledge by soldiers on the ground, the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), a U.S. Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) organization that supports the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is overseeing the creation of the Human Terrain System (HTS). According to its creators,

> This system is being specifically designed to address cultural awareness shortcomings at the operational and tactical levels by giving brigade commanders an organic capability to help understand and deal with "human terrain"—the social ethnographic, cultural and economic, and political elements of the people with whom the force is operating.[13]

HTS is built upon seven components, or "pillars": (1) human terrain teams (HTTs), (2) reach-back research cells, (3) subject-matter expert-networks, (4) a tool kit, (5) techniques, (6) human terrain information, and (7) specialized training.

> Each HTT will be comprised of experienced cultural advisors familiar with the area in which the commander will be operating. The experts on the ground, these advisors will be in direct support of a brigade commander.

> All will have experience in organizing and conducting ethnographic research in a specific area of responsibility, and they will work in conjunction with other social science researchers. HTTs will be embedded in brigade combat teams, providing commanders with an organic ability to gather, process, and interpret relevant cultural data. In addition to maintaining the brigade's cultural data bases by gathering and updating data, HTTs will also conduct specific information research and analysis as tasked by the brigade commander.[14]

These efforts represent the "how-to" practical application of cultural knowledge at the operational and tactical level. Designed specifically to teach cultural awareness as a battlefield skill, HTTs are also designed as data gathering systems for acquiring cultural knowledge for the purposes of providing new and incoming commanders and units with the "institutional memory" about the people and culture of their area of operation. In 2006, five HTTs deployed from Fort Leavenworth to Afghanistan and Iraq. If they prove successful, an HTT will eventually be assigned to each deployed brigade or regimental combat team.[15]

Another central feature of the Human Terrain System is the emphasis on human relationships. "To be successful, you must understand the Iraqi perspective. Building trust, showing respect, cultivating relationships, building a team, and maintaining patience are all central features of the human terrain system which emphasize the power of people—friendship, trust, understanding—the most decisive factor in winning the war in Iraq."[16]

The other significant product that has come out of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is the new counterinsurgency manual, FM 3-24. Released on December 15, 2006, FM 3-24 is the first U.S. Army

manual dedicated exclusively to counterinsurgency in more than 20 years.[17] The 282-page document, like the HTS, highlights cultural knowledge and human relationships as central aspects for waging a successful counterinsurgency. These are highlighted in the first chapter under "Ideology and Narrative":

> Culture knowledge is essential to waging a successful counterinsurgency. American ideas of what is "normal" and "rational" are not universal. To the contrary, members of other societies often have different notions of rationality, appropriate behavior, levels of religious devotion, and norms concerning gender. Thus, what might appear abnormal or strange to an external observer may appear as self-evidently normal to a group member. For this reason, counterinsurgents—especially commanders, planners, and small-unit leaders—should strive to avoid imposing their ideals of normalcy on a foreign cultural problem.[18]

Chapter 3, "Intelligence in Counterinsurgency," defines terms including society, social structure, rules, and norms and social norms. It also emphasizes the importance of culture as a "web of meaning shared by members of a particular society or group within a society. Culture might be described as an operational code that is valid for an entire group of people. . . .[it] influences how people makes judgments about what is right and wrong."[19] Another section highlights identity, values, belief systems, and cultural forms. Listed under the cultural forms section are ideologies and narratives:

> The most important cultural form for counterinsurgents to understand is the narrative. A cultural narrative is a story recounted in the form of a casually linked set of events that explains an event in a group's history and expresses values, character, or self-identity of the group.

> Narratives are the means through which ideologies are absorbed by members of a society. . . . By listening to narratives, counterinsurgents can identify a society's core values. Commanders should pay particular attention to cultural narrative of the HN (host nation) population pertaining to out-laws, revolutionary heroes, and historical resistance figures. Insurgents may use these narratives to mobilize the population.[20]

In chapter 5, "Executing Counterinsurgency Operations," the manual encourages the development of counternarratives "which provide a more compelling alternative to the insurgent ideology and narrative. Intimate cultural familiarity and knowledge of insurgent myths, narratives and culture are a prerequisite to accomplishing this."[21]

One of the major innovations of FM 3-24 is its rejection of the notion that human behavior is motivated purely by rational self-interest. Instead, FM 3-24 proposes that culture informs individual actions, whether one society deems these actions "rational" or not. Culture, it insists, shapes the ways in which others perceive us and the world, and hence cultural knowledge of the adversary society must be a major component of counterinsurgency.

FM 3-24 has been described as "radical" and "revolutionary" by *Time Magazine*, and it has received rave reviews in the *New York Times*.[22] Understanding the cause for FM 3-24*'s* enthusiastic reception is itself noteworthy, notes Sarah Sewell, "because it seems to point to the overwhelming feeling of a majority of Americans that the United States is adrift in the world with no foreign policy to guide it in Iraq and elsewhere."[23] Americans are "simply confused about the nation's strategic purpose in wake of September 11, 2001. . . ."[24] Once again, Americans are wrestling

with a "disillusionment about politics and military power, and the debacle in Iraq has reinforced a familiar cynicism that risks disengaging Americans from their government and America from the rest of the world."[25] In an attempt to understand America's new role in the world and also to stem the growing disillusionment about politics at home, they have looked to FM 3-24 for answers: "The doctrine's most important insight is that even—perhaps especially—in counterinsurgency, America must align its ethical principles with the nation's strategic requirements."[26] But in explaining what "fighting well" means, FM 3-24 raises profound moral and ethical questions about what counterinsurgency actually entails.

Anthropology and the Uses of Cultural Knowledge.

Nowhere have the questions raised by FM 3-24 been argued more passionately and more fiercely than among anthropologists for whom these issues have both deep personal and professional resonance. As experts on cultural knowledge, anthropologists in particular have been eagerly sought out by the military for recruitment into counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan. Reactions to these recruitment efforts, however, have been decidedly cool, if not downright hostile.

Once called the "hand-maiden" to colonialism, anthropology had enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship with national security agencies like the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and DoD, but this relationship abruptly ended following the close of the Vietnam War. Today, largely due to the disciplines' ethical codes and also its tendency to look inward and its turn toward postmodernism and critical self-reflection,

anthropology remains a rather insular field which attracts few readers beyond its disciplinary boundaries (ask anyone to name the latest ethnography they have read recently, and you get the point). Furthermore, in sharp contrast to the other social sciences (namely, political science and economics), anthropology remains the least engaged with national security and policymaking agencies within the U.S. Government. The American Anthropological Association's (AAA) current "Statement of Professional Responsibility" states that "Anthropologists should undertake no secret research or any research whose results cannot be freely derived and publicly reported . . . no secret research, no secret reports or debriefings of any kind should be agreed or given."[27]

It therefore comes as no surprise that FM 3-24 has been received with scathing criticism by many anthropologists, but most notably by Roberto Gonzalez who has criticized the manual for is "numbingly banal" material which, he notes "does not reflect current anthropology theory" but reads more like a "simplified introductory anthropology textbook."[28] But the more serious matter of Gonzales' critique is what he sees as a dangerous trend in the co-optation of cultural knowledge for military purposes.[29] These concerns are shared by other notable anthropologists, namely David Price and Hugh Gusterson, who are deeply troubled by signs that "connections between anthropologists, military counterinsurgency experts, and intelligence agencies are multiplying and deepening."[30] They are also concerned by the implication of this relationship and what it means for anthropology's professional ethics. And they are concerned that when ethnographic work is performed clandestinely, it can endanger informants by putting them and their families at

risk. But mostly, they wonder whether using cultural knowledge for covert military operations will threaten the disciplinary integrity of anthropology itself by creating "mercenary anthropology" in which cultural knowledge itself is used as a weapon.[31]

Largely as a result of these critiques, Gonzales and Kanhong Lin submitted two resolutions to the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in November 2006. One condemned torture and "the use of anthropological knowledge as an element of torture," while the other condemned the U.S. occupation of Iraq. If passed, these resolutions, "will send an unambiguous message to the military and intelligence agencies seeking to recruit anthropologists (as well as anthropologists working on their behalf), namely that AAA members oppose wars of aggression and will stand united against activities that might breach our professional ethics."[32] As Gonzales noted:

> Although academic resolutions are not likely to transform U.S. Government policies (much less the practices of contractors to the military) these do articulate a set of values and ethical concerns shared by many anthropologists. They could potentially extend and amplify dialogue among social scientists around issues of torture, collaboration with the military, and the potential abuse of social science in the "war on terror." Anthropologists may well inspire others to confront directly—and resist—the militarization of their discipline at this critical moment in the history of the social sciences.[33]

Although the resolutions in themselves are nonbinding, their effects on the profession have been chilling, especially for new anthropology Ph.Ds who are contemplating working for the military or participating in programs like HTS. Steve Fondacaro,

head of the Human Terrain project, confided recently that since the HTS's inception in 2006, he had been able to hire only a handful of anthropologists. One of those recently hired:

> admitted that the assignment came with huge ethical risks. I do not want to get anybody killed, she said. . . . I end up getting shunned at cocktail parties, she said. I see there could be misuse. But I just can't stand to sit back and watch these mistakes happen over and over as people get killed, and do nothing.[34]

The important issues raised by Gonzales and the AAA about the relationship between ethics and ethnography, namely, that FM 3-24 does look quite like "a suspect marketing campaign for an inherently inhumane concept of war," also raises significant questions about the uses of civilians in military operations. How should civilians respond to a war they condemn as immoral yet which requires their expertise to save American lives? Since the military's mission is to execute the policies of our democratically elected officials, can Gonzales and other anthropologists really deny commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan the cultural knowledge they need to wage a war they were charged by their political leaders with fighting? Is it ethically more correct for them to retreat from the world and leave others to do the fighting? Is the moral response to cynicism about politics and military power to do nothing, or in Gonzales' case, to censure those who choose to do something?

These debates among anthropologists, although academic and insular, are nonetheless instructive because they bring attention to the much larger debate that FM 3-24 raises for all Americans. These entail significant questions about civil-military relations and

the uses of civilians in military operations. The major premise of FM 3-24 is that successful counterinsurgency will require the efforts of both the military and civilians. The manual states quite explicitly that the burdens of waging counterinsurgency must be shared equally, and that it will require the efforts of the entire American population:

> Military forces can perform civilian tasks but often not as well as the civilian agencies with people trained in those skills. Further, military forces performing civilian tasks are not performing military tasks. Diverting from those tasks should be a temporary measure, one taken to address urgent circumstances. . . . The nature of the conflict and its focus on the populace make military and civilian unity a critical aspect of COIN operation.[35]

FM 3-24 asks civilian actors and agencies to be centrally engaged in the field alongside combat forces and share the risks of counterinsurgency equally with the military. As Sewell puts it, "it stresses the importance of effectively employing nonmilitary resources as power to share the burdens of a long-term, difficult, and morally questionable war. It tells Americans that if we fight these wars and if we wish to succeed with any approximation of honor, counterinsurgency will demand more than we are accustomed to giving." [36]

Ultimately, however, the demands of counter-insurgency may be too great for the American public to bear, not because of the significant costs and commitments involved, but because the ethical and moral dilemmas posed by counterinsurgency may drive Americans, like Gonzales, to retreat from the world and leave the fighting to the military.

Cultural Knowledge for National Strategy and Policy.

The greater challenge of counterinsurgency, however, lies not at the operational level but at the strategic one. While the military has been at the forefront of significant new and innovative thinking about operations and tactics, revising its old doctrines on the fly, America's political leaders have so far failed to provide the necessary strategic framework to guide counterinsurgency. The innovative insights about cultural knowledge adapted in operations and tactics by our military leaders have so far not yielded *any* comparable innovations from our political leaders. While culture is transforming the military in significant and revolutionary new ways, it seems to have had little impact on defining overall U.S. strategic goals. Now that U.S. Armed Forces are in Iraq, America's political leaders are consumed by how to get them out of it. Without an overarching strategy on counterinsurgency, our political leaders are focused on achieving short-term goals rather than long-term strategic objectives. Furthermore, the insights gleaned from cultural knowledge on operations and tactics are *not* being adapted by our political leaders to help *redefine* a compelling new strategy for counterinsurgency.

What is needed from our political leaders is an overarching strategic framework for counterinsurgency informed by culture. Internationally, the pursuit of regime change and radical visions of transforming the Middle East that were a primary tenet of the Bush Doctrine have proven costly. They have created instability in the region and resulted in the overextension of U.S. military power. President George W. Bush's "forward strategy of freedom"so far has failed to produce

positive results in large part because it has advocated freedom without taking into account how that freedom would be received by other cultures.[37] The Bush "revolution" was about the imposition of American values, not about laying the groundwork for creating the necessary conditions for their reception.[38]

Moreover, by creating a rigid line between "us" and "them," the Bush Doctrine lumped like and unlike foes together.[39] Unable to distinguish America's enemies abroad, the Bush administration treated all "terrorists" as a monolithic enemy (in Iraq and elsewhere). But this is precisely what George Kennan, who was a very good student of culture himself, had warned America's Cold War leaders against. Communism, he argued was not a monolith, and policymakers ought to be emphasizing and exploiting the differences among them (as former President Richard Nixon did when he went to China in 1972). By failing to exploit the cultural distinctions and inherent tensions among our enemies, we have indirectly empowered them. "What these groups want" argued Hilary Benn, the British secretary of state for international development, "is to force their individual and narrow values on others, without dialogue, without debate, through violence. And by letting them feel part of something bigger, we give them strength."[40]

Dissecting the calamities of the last 6 years of American foreign policy has become something of a sport, only because it has become all too easy to criticize. But as Samantha Powers warns, "it does not itself improve our approach to combating terrorist threats that do in fact loom—larger, in fact because of Bush's mistakes."[41] The challenge is to learn from these mistakes. What the failures of the Bush Doctrine have made abundantly clear is that cultural knowledge

must be an important dimension of policy and strategy because it influences the way people think and respond and thus how policy and strategy are formulated and implemented.

How would cultural knowledge work to redefine a new policy and strategy for counterinsurgency? First, we could begin by reconceptualizing the "war on terror" not as one war but as many different wars. This means fighting terrorist groups and networks, even transnational ones like al-Qai'da, as separate but related conflicts. This in turn implies flexibility and adapting our military operations and tactics to meet the distinct challenges of our enemies.

Second, a related aspect of this strategy would be to focus less on the moral distinctions between "us" and "them"—a major centerpiece of the Bush Doctrine—and more on the differences between "them."[42] This implies separating terrorist groups (as distinct social, cultural, and political entities) and also recognizing that although all of them hate America, they might hate each other even more. The more we learn to recognize and exploit the cultural differences among these terrorist groups, the better we will be able to isolate and defeat them. Of course, any effective campaign against terrorism must include political, economic, military, and paramilitary efforts along with cultural efforts. Stabilization is obviously a major strategic objective of counterinsurgency. But the ability to neutralize terrorist groups by playing up their differences, thus containing them by forcing them back into a local criminal or even political box, requires cultural knowledge.

In a related context, by lumping North Korea, Iran, and Iraq together as one "axis of evil," instead of dealing with North Korea as a distinct cultural and political entity with its own history and grievances,

the Bush administration got locked into an hostile, unproductive, and stubborn policy approach that went nowhere. It was only after the debacle in Iraq became fully apparent that the Bush administration finally backed down, but by then North Korea already had a nuclear bomb.

Third, antiterrorism efforts must also include building support and relationships among both friendly and adversarial states. It can be no longer a question of "you are either with us or against us," because counterinsurgency requires too much work for the United States to go at it alone. This in turn implies both flexibility and deference in how U.S. strategic objectives for counterinsurgency are defined and executed.[43] Cultural knowledge of how other societies assess risks, define their security, and perceive threats all serve to underscore that cultural knowledge is an important dimension of how the United States must go about winning allies in the global war(s) on terror. Americans are not good at conceptualizing how other societies perceive the world and, in particular, how other societies perceive us. FM 3-24 represents a good starting point of how the United States must learn to get inside the minds of its adversaries.

Finally, the role of counterinsurgency and its relationship to U.S. national security must be explained to the American people. America's politicians must build support for counterinsurgency among America's civilian leaders. Especially amid the domestic acrimony spawned by the Iraq War, the inadequate coordination between military and nonmilitary power will severely hamper the kinds of U.S. counterinsurgency capabilities that FM 3-24 has called for.

To this end, cultural knowledge of both military and civilian institutions is vital if the coordination

between them is to be effective. In particular, cultural knowledge of the military, its institutional values, traditions, historical role in society, and how it operates must be explained to the American public. More than the damage that Abu Ghraib did to America's image abroad, the scandal and its poor handling tarnished the military's image at home. Lingering moral doubts about the uses of counterinsurgency capabilities (like those expressed by anthropologists) in military operations may even provoke isolationist sentiments among the American public, leading to an unsteady retreat from abroad. As Sewell notes, "the very word counterinsurgency has become associated so closely with Iraq and a strategy of regime change that civil servants were loathe to consider themselves part of a U.S. counterinsurgency effort."[44] Explaining to the American public why counterinsurgency operations are important, and coordinating these efforts between military and civilian agencies to build a national consensus must be part of an overarching strategic framework for counterinsurgency in the post-September 11, 2001 (9/11) world.

But counterinsurgency is just one of the many challenges to U.S. security in the 21st century. Nuclear proliferation is another major challenge as is the rise of China. All these challenges will require our political leaders to provide a new strategic vision for U.S. security. Already many scholars and practitioners have begun to interpret events like the U.S.-China standoff over a downed spy plane in 2001 or escalating tensions between Japan and China through the lens of national identity and culture.[45] These trends, like those already going on in the military, have profound implications for U.S. foreign policy. Armed with cultural knowledge, the United States will be better

able to restrain our adversaries through engagement by using shrewd diplomacy to dampen the strategic competition with China, Iran, and other potential rivals. A foreign policy guided by a deep understanding of the forces of nationalism, identity, and collective memory is a powerful tool to shape and mold adversarial behavior.

These forces, unwittingly unleashed by the Bush administration in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, now threaten the integrity of the Iraqi nation and have led to our current quagmire there. Although it may too late to save Iraq, it is not too late to apply the lessons that we have learned there to deal with other troubled spots in the world, namely North Korea, Iran, and China. If cultural knowledge has been able to reverse some of the operational and tactical blunders set forth by Rumsfeld's Pentagon, perhaps it not too late for culture to also rescue the United States from the strategic failures of the Bush Doctrine.

ENDNOTES

1. General David H. Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations From Soldiering in Iraq," *Military Review*, Special Edition Counterinsurgency Reader, October 2006, p. 51.

2. Montgomery McFate, "The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture," *Journal of Defense Analysis*, Issue 38, p. 44.

3. Major General Robert H. Scales, "Culture-Centric Warfare," *Proceedings*, October 2004, p. 21. See also Scales, "Army Transformation: Implication for the Future," Testimony before the Armed Services Committee, Washington DC, July 2004. See also "Counterinsurgency Reader: Special Edition," *Military Review*, October 2006. This manual complements the Army/Marine Corps *Field Manual* (FM) *3-24* on counterinsurgency operations.

4. Sarah Sewell, "Introduction to the University of Chicago Press Edition: A Radical Field Manual," *Counterinsurgency Field Manuel*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007, p. xl.

5. Colonel Jiyul Kim, "The Analytical Framework," *Course Reader for the Strategic Thinking Course*, Academic Year 2008, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, p. 2.

6. *Ibid*.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Colonel Jiyul Kim, "National Cultures," *Course Reader for the Strategic Thinking Course*, Academic Year 2008, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2007, p. 1.

9. The post-war American occupation of Japan also possessed a great intangible quality that simply was never present in Iraq: it enjoyed virtually unquestioned legitimacy—moral as well as legal—in the eyes not merely of the victors, but all of Japan's neighbors who had been victimized during the course of Japan's brutal 15 years of war. There had been a formal surrender by the Japanese, and the American occupation and reconstruction had been endorsed by Emperor Hirohito. Furthermore, except for the military, the Japanese government remained intact at all levels, and, of course, the Japanese already had a tradition of democracy and civil society on which to draw (during the Taisho era, 1912-26). There were also no hostile or religious factions within the country. But mostly, planning for the occupation of Japan had begun already in 1942, giving planners ample time to think through many of the cultural and political issues that the American Occupation would confront after the surrender. See John Dower, "A Warning for History: Don't Expect Democracy in Iraq," *Boston Review*, February/March 2003. On the American occupation of Japan, see John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of Word War II*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1999.

10. Patrick Porter, "Good Anthropology, Bad History: The Cultural Turn in Studying War," *Parameters*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 2, Summer 2007, p. 49.

11. Samantha Powers, "Our War on Terror," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, July 29, 2007, p. 8. See also Ian Shapiro, *Containment: Rebuilding a Strategy Against Global Terror*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.

12. In addition to the practical application of cultural knowledge advocated in FM 3-24, the U.S. Army War College has adopted Richard D. Lewis's *When Cultures Collide: Managing Successfully Across Culture* (1999) in its curricula. This book also represents a "how-to" approach to cultural knowledge.

13. Jacob Kipp, Lester Grau, Karl Prinslow, and Captain Don Smith, "The Human Terrain System: A CORDS for the 21st Century," *Military Review*, September/October, 2006, p. 10. "Human Terrain" Studies date back to Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peter's work on "human terrain operations." See Ralph Peters, "The Human Terrain of Urban Operations," *Parameters*, Spring 2000, pp. 4-12.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

15. For a good report and description of the first HTTs deployed to Iraq and Acfghanistan, see David Rohde, "Army Enlists Anthropoligy in War Zones," *New York Times*, October 5, 2007, *www.nytimes.com/2007/10/05/world/asia/05afghan.html?_r=2&hp+slogin&pagewanted=print&oref=slogin*.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

17. "Counterinsurgency," FM 3-24, at *www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf*. The FM mentions "culture" 88 times and "cultural" 90 times.

18. *Field Manual* (FM) 3-24, "Counterinsurgency," Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, p. 1-5.

19. *Ibid*., p. 3-8.

20. *Ibid*.

21. *Ibid*, p. 5-1.

22. Joe Klein, "Good General, Bad Mission," *Time*, January 12, 2007; and Samantha Powers, "Our War on Terror," *New York Times*, July 29, 2007.

23. Sewell, p. xl.

24. *Ibid*.

25. *Ibid*.

26. *Ibid*., p. xxii.

27. American Anthropological Association (AAA), "Statement on Ethics: Principles of Professional Responsibility," adopted May 1971 (as amended through November 1986), on-line at *www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm*.

28. Roberto J. Gonzales, "Towards a Mercenary Anthropology? The New U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Manual FM 3-24 and the Military-Anthropological Complex," *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 23, No. 3, June 2007, p. 15.

29. For a rebuttal of Gonzales' criticisms of FM 3-24 and anthropology's contributions to the manual, see David Kilcullen, "Ethics, Politics, and Non-State Warfare: A Response to Gonzales"; and Montgomery McFate, "Building Bridges or Burning Heretics: A Response to Gonzales," in *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 23, No. 3, June 2007.

30. Gonzales, p. 17. See also Hugh Gusterson, "Anthropology and the Military—1968, 2003, and Beyond?" *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 25-26; and David Price, "Interlopers and Invited Guests," *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 18, No. 6, 2002, pp. 16-21; "Lessons from Second World War Anthropology," *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 14-20; and David Price, "American Anthropologists Stand Up Against Torture and the Occupation of Iraq," *Counterpunch*, Vol. 20, November 2006, *www.counterpunch.org/price11202006.html*. *The Diane Rehm Show* also recently hosted a program entitled "Anthropologists and War" on October 10, 2007. See *drshow@wamu.org* for more information.

31. Price, p. 3.

32. Gonzales, p. 19.

33. *Ibid*.

34. George Packer, "Knowing the Enemy: Can Social Scientists Redefine the 'War on Terror'?" *New Yorker*, December 18, 2006, p. 6.

35. FM 3-24, pp. 2-9, 2-10.

36. Sewell, p. xxxix.

37. "Forward Strategy of Freedom" was a phrase included in President Bush's remarks at the 20th anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Washington, DC, November 6, 2003.

38. The current U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) is referred to as the "Bush Doctrine." Developed in response to circumstances confronting the United States and its allies in the wake of 9/11, it provides a stated use-of-force policy that addresses the requirement for offensive action to prevent threats from materializing on American shores. Lieber and Lieber (2007) have identified four key themes of the Bush Doctrine that have generated controversy. First, it calls for preemptive military action against hostile states and terrorist groups seeking to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Second, it advocates that the United States will not allow its global military strength to be challenged by any foreign power. Third, it expresses a commitment to multilateral international cooperation, but makes clear that the United States "will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary" to defend national interests and security. Fourth, it proclaims the goal of spreading democracy and human rights around the globe, expecially in the Muslim world. See Keir A. Lieber and Robert J. Lieber, "The Bush National Security Strategy," *usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/1202/ijpe/pj7-4lieber.htm.*

39. See Ian Shapiro, *Containment: Rebuilding a Strategy Against Global Terror*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

40. Quoted in Samantha Powers, "Our War on Terror," *New York Times*, July 29, 2007, p. 4.

41. *Ibid*.

42. A variation of the "us" verses "them" strategic outlook is the recent attempt by the Bush administration to create a new strategic alignment in the Middle East by separating "reformers" and "extremists," with Sunni states the centers of moderation and Iran, Syria and Hezbollah on the other side of that divide. This new policy for containing Iran is complicating the Bush administration's strategy for winning the war in Iraq. By insisting once again on imposing divisions from the outside instead of working to exploit the natural divisions *within* extremist groups, the Bush administration clumps our adversaries into one group, thereby empowering them. For a good overview of the new policy on Iran, see Seymour M. Hersh, "The Redirection: Is the Administration's New Policy Benefiting Our Enemies in the War on Terrorism?" *The New Yorker*, March 5, 2007.

43. Sewell, p. xliii.

44. *Ibid*., p. xli.

45. See Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *The Politics of Identity: History, Nationalism, and the Prospect for Peace in Post-Cold War Asia*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, April 2007. See also Graham E. Fuller, "America's Uncomfortable Relationship with Nationalism," *Policy Analysis Brief*, Muscatine, IA: The Stanley Foundation, July 2006; Thomas Berger, "Set for Stability? Prospect for Conflict and Cooperation in East Asia," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 26, 2000, p. 420; Thomas Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998; "Set for Stability? The Ideational Basis for Conflict in East Asia," *Review of International Studies*, Spring 2000; "The Construction of Antagonism: The History Problem in Japan's Foreign Relations," in G. John Ikenberry and Takashi Inoguchi, eds., *Reinventing the Alliance: U.S.-Japan Security Partnership in an Era of Change*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; Peter Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996; Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The*

Cultures of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics. See also Gerrit W. Gong, ed., *Remembering and Forgetting: The Legacy of War and Peace in East Asia*, Washington, DC: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1996; G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *International Relations Theory and the Asia Pacific*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003; and G. John Ikenberry and Takashi Inoguchi, eds., *Reinventing the Alliance: U.S.-Japan Security Partnership in an Era of Change*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.