

Social Science Goes to War: The Human Terrain System in Iraq and Afghanistan. Edited by Montgomery McFate and Janice H. Laurence. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 383. ISBN: 978-0-19-021672-6.

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This book is about the deployment of American social scientists called the Human Terrain Team (HTT) by the United States military into the battle zones of Afghanistan and Iraq for the purpose of developing a module known as a Human Terrain System (HTS). The reason for the deployment was that the military forces could not win the battle without understanding the social ‘terrain’ of the locals. This has been reported as the main deficiency faced by the US soldiers when operating in the battlefields. Lack of understanding of this socio-cultural pattern contributes to ineffective operational strategies, loosens ties with possible local oppositional coalition, and thus costs their winning prospects. The HTS programme, which began in 2007, stopped operations in 2014.

The description of this project constitutes a large chunk of the long introductory chapter which paradoxically begins by quoting Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*, “If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not to fear the results of hundred battles” (p. 1). Seeing such words of wisdom from an antique oriental sage as the stimulus in the opening of the book’s discussion, to some extent, signifies that the Westerners are learning from the wisdom of oriental social science and giving it due recognition.

Chapter two discusses the gaps between the working cultures of the military organizations and those of the social scientists. Some of the social scientists preferred to work alone and this contradicted the team-work creed of the military units. As mentioned by the author, McFate, “Most military operations are group efforts; most academic books and articles are individual efforts” (p. 72). This was one of the gaps observed by the author in his feedback to the US government which had commissioned him to provide reports on the progress of the HTS. However, whether the research objectives of these researches were dedicated only to serve the military’s interests and, whether the interests of the locals were also given the same weightage as those of military’s

are some of the questions that protrude into the ethical considerations of the reader's Muslim postcolonial perspective. In other words, how democratic were these social scientists in treating their data? To debate the definition of the military interests that could include imperialism or neo-colonialism by the name of "democratization" is another matter. In fact, such curiosities were actually foreseen by McFate (p. 46). However, no appropriate justification has been provided in this book's longest chapter, aside from extensive discussions on the gaps between the two regime apparatuses. The author then quotes an army colonel, "social science research conducted on the ground in support of the military during a war was not only valuable to the mission, it had the potential to reduce the level of violence" (p. 46). The author, one of the developers of the concept of the HTS, firmly believes that by providing good social science research findings to the military, conflicts could be reduced, and thus would end the war faster. At least "they gave it a shot" (p. 76), he states. In fact, it is ironic when the author criticises those social scientists that question the ethical aspects of such research by accusing them for being non-democratic and succumbing into the "culture of accusation" (p. 84).

Chapter three, written by Ted Callahan, an anthropologist, attempts to fill the gap between the pros and cons of the academic-military collaboration. However, the chapter comprises only narrations of the author's experience on the battle zones – his diary – with little scientific-hypothetical points. Plausibly, the author tries to fill the gap through his story telling. As he recalls, one of the American soldiers used to grumble about how much they needed the help of anthropologists to understand the socio-cultural factors that caused tribal clashes in Farah (south-west Afghanistan) and to be able to resolve them, since the military was not supposed to act on the offensive mode (p. 96-97).

Such justifications were not followed in chapter four, but the story-telling was. Moreover, its author, Katherine Blue Carroll, continues to highlight the thrill of having the life-time opportunity to prove the efficacy of her social science research to the military commanders in return for recognition and appreciation. Carroll could be best described as a political scientist with an unapologetic realist paradigm. However, she recognises the lack of knowledge on the theological aspects of Islam as her and the soldiers' major hindrance towards achieving their

objectives. The 2008 incident of the shooting of Qur'an in Iraq is one that deserved her broad elaborations.

The diary-like writing is continued by Jennifer A. Clark in chapter five. With a catchy title, "Playing Spades in Al Anbar: A Female Social Scientist among Marines and Special Forces", this chapter describes no further than an experience of a backpacker who travelled across rabbit holes. It can also be seen as insensitive because playing spades, which has been associated with gambling, may not be seen as appropriate especially in a Muslim country. Nonetheless, the author's observations on the ethnic relations between the Kurds, Yezidi, Sunni and Shia Muslims in Iraq in the late 2000's are noteworthy, together with her appreciation of the warm hospitality provided for the HTT by each of these conflicting parties during their short visits. In addition, Clark offers a few tips on how to work effectively as a female social scientist within an extreme social environment.

Chapter six, written by Kathleen Reedy, an anthropologist specializing in Middle East studies, is titled "The Four Pillars of Integration". Apparently, the phrase "four pillars" mirrors the fundamental Islamic creed, namely the "five pillars of Islam." This chapter provides more scientific proposals than the previous chapters, despite being the shortest one. From her research, Reedy comes out with four strategies on how to work effectively as a social scientist in a war zone. These are short-term recommendations on immediate issues, medium-term analysis of a unit's effectiveness, long-term identification of social issues leading to insurgency, and successful integration within the unit.

The same scientific quality can be seen in chapters seven and eight. In chapter seven, James Dorough-Lewis Jr. tries to reconcile between the acumen of military intelligence and social science, especially in areas where the former is measured to be robust yet ineffective. This includes the study of complex social environments. Chapter eight, by Leslie Adrienne Payne, highlights the interlocking conflicts between the modus operandi of the British and United States civilian enablers in according to the military forces one of the most complex and dangerous area in 2009 Afghanistan, the Helmand Province. The author, as part of the HTT cum civilian enablers under the US flag, criticises her British

counterparts for being immature as individuals and as an allied enabler team, which in turn affected their operations as force multipliers.

In chapters nine and ten, our earlier concerns pertaining to ethical considerations of these research studies starts to receive serious attention. However, unfortunately, the title of chapter nine, "Assessing the Human Terrain Teams: No White Hats or Black Hats, Please," forewarns against any direct criticism of the HTS and HTT projects. The authors of Chapters 9 and 10, Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban & George R. Lucas Jr. and Brian G. Brereton respectively, highlight controversies surrounding and criticisms received by the HTT regarding the program, but they refute almost all of them. The final chapter, by Laurence, stresses on how the program has improved over time and proposes recommendations for the future.

Above all, the book provides valuable insiders' information about the Western military alliances that should be studied by strategists from other parts of the world, especially in terms of understanding their operational weaknesses and strengths. In addition, the praxis of professional social scientists in their intellectual activities is rarely studied, particularly in challenging social environments, and this book addresses this gap. Furthermore, other than the ethical considerations, the efforts to enter warfare places that, despite the existence of governments can still be said to be anarchic, deserve commendation. Still, in doing the kind of research that this book proposes, indigeneity is an added advantage. Such research could be vastly helpful if it is also conducted by local social scientists. Within the contexts that are covered by this book, Western social scientists do not possess such indigenous knowledge. Another concern is that, are the theoretical paradigms adopted by these Western social scientists apposite enough to be applied in these Eastern-Muslim polities? It would have been better if the methodologies and theoretical frameworks that have been deployed were explicitly mentioned in each chapter.
