

# Unity of Effort: A Culture of Cooperation and the Cooperation of Cultural Systems

by Captain Nathan Finney

For a couple of years, the Department of Defense has intensely searched for means by which combat forces could overcome the gap of cultural knowledge in theaters of operation. This gap was identified as early as 2004 in an article by Lieutenant Colonel George W. Smith Jr., titled "Avoiding a Napoleonic Ulcer: Bridging the Gap of Cultural Intelligence," and coalesced into two U.S. Army programs: the Human Terrain System and the University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies.<sup>1</sup>

Each program produces highly trained and knowledgeable teams that deploy to support commanders and staff from brigade to combined joint task force and corps levels by providing cultural knowledge to advise and focus military plans and operations. The Human Terrain System deploys five- to nine-person teams called, "human terrain teams," while the

University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies train "red teams." Both programs have deployed these teams into theater and have gained a better understanding of what is needed by units on the ground and are thereby refining training to reflect these requirements.

The members of a human terrain team are trained in three main areas: counter-insurgency, military staff functions and plans, and most importantly, anthropological research methodologies. This training allows team members to "provide brigade commanders and staffs with relevant, socio-cultural data, information, knowledge and understanding of the local cultures, and the dedicated expertise to integrate that understanding into the military decisionmaking process."<sup>2</sup> The most innovative aspect of a human terrain team is the make-up of the team. Military members are built around academicians

with strong social science credentials, bringing both unique research capabilities and legitimacy to the team.

These teams are deployed and integrated into a brigade staff to provide cultural knowledge that could positively affect combat and civil-military plans and operations. Integrating human terrain teams into military units began at the brigade level, based on the knowledge that the most influential commander and groundholder in both Iraq and Afghanistan is the brigade commander. Human terrain teams provide three primary capabilities to the brigade commander and staff. First, the human terrain team provides expert human terrain and social science advice based on a constantly updated, user-friendly ethnographic and socio-cultural database of the area of operations. Second, it provides the ability of focused study on social science, cultural or ethnograph-

ic issues of specific concern to the commander. Finally, it maintains a tactical overwatch and reachback link to the Human Terrain System's Research Reachback Center, which provides direct support to the human terrain teams.

The overall focus of a human terrain team is to use socio-cultural research and knowledge of the population to advise and make recommendations to the brigade during planning and operations that positively affect both the population and the military unit, preventing violence before it starts, or decreasing it after inception.

Members of a red team are trained in a graduate-level course designed to effectively anticipate change, reduce uncertainty, and improve operational decisions. They learn concepts in anthropology, joint military doctrine, and red teaming. This training teaches red teamers the ability to conduct "a structured and iterative process executed by trained, educated, and practiced team members with access to relevant subject-matter expertise, and that are uniquely suited to this kind of critical analysis. This process provides the commander with an independent capability to continuously challenge operational environment concepts, plans, and operations from partner and adversary perspectives."<sup>3</sup>

Red team members are uniquely trained to encourage combat units to avoid group thinking, mirror-imaging, cultural missteps, and tunnel vision in their plans and operations, as well as help them identify when they make poor assumptions and fail to account for the complexity of the operational environment.

Red teams have been placed at corps and division, and will soon be placed at combined joint task force levels. While integrated into these staffs, they provide critical thinking skills and cultural information that could focus or adjust plans. The team has multiple roles, the two most recognized being "devil's advocate," to impartially and critically look at plans as they are being produced, and "threat emulators" that can accurately depict the enemy without "mirror-imaging." More importantly, they are trained to "challenge the organization by providing alternatives through critical thinking in order to improve decisionmaking and achieve the endstate."<sup>4</sup> By understanding group dynamics and how to constructively question a staff, a red team can help focus plans away from the means and toward the ends. A red team also focuses on ensuring the unit staff is taking all aspects of the environment (including its own unit) into account when planning, to include both tactical and cultural assump-

tions made by the staff. Through this critical analysis of plans, the team can positively affect the operational environment of the supported unit.

Signifying many of the similarities between the two programs, both the Human Terrain System and the University of Foreign Military Cultural Studies require specific personnel characteristics for their teams. The most important characteristic in a human terrain team or a red team member is the ability to critically analyze the world around them and think about the operational environment of their supported unit. This critical analysis leads these teams to ask "how others — our enemies, allies, or other parties — will perceive a situation and American actions in the streets Baghdad," and based on this knowledge, the most effective way to reach the endstate.<sup>5</sup> By using this knowledge to advise the commander and staff early in decision and planning cycles, both teams can enhance and focus the resources the American military has to bring to the situation.

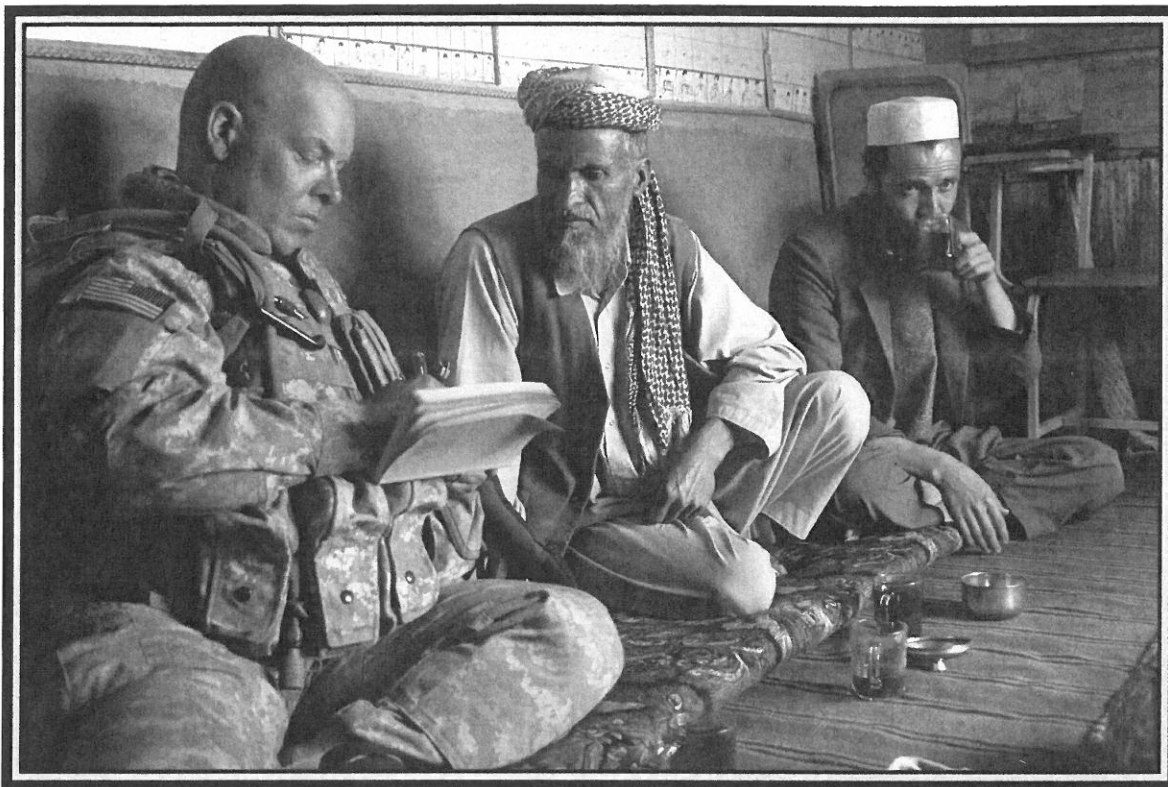
Another important characteristic needed by both types of team members is the ability to easily relate to other people. Members of both teams are not indigent to the organizations they support, so when they introduce an outside per-

spective, while productive, they also challenge assumptions and biases that have been accepted by the unit. This can cause friction between the two parties if good personal and professional working relationships have not been introduced. These relationships can smooth friction and allow senior leaders to decide whom to trust with their thinking and analysis. This also helps both teams support the unit by "productively challenging ideas and decisions, bringing fresh perspectives, and ensuring the cultural factors are injected into the decision cycle."<sup>6</sup> Bringing alternate perspectives will not make a difference, however, if poor communication exists between the staff and the team, as minds will be closed based on clashing personalities alone.

The third characteristic needed by both human terrain team and red team members is an understanding of cultural-gaining methodologies and their role in the current operating environment. Both teams are a result of the capabilities gap in cultural knowledge; therefore, both are trained how to recognize key signifiers and influences in cultures around them, whether through semiotics, participant observation, or surveys. To use the knowledge of these methodologies, team members must be able to translate them so that both academicians and military officers



*"Each program produces highly trained and knowledgeable teams that deploy to support commanders and staff from brigade to combined joint task force and corps levels by providing cultural knowledge to advise and focus military plans and operations. The Human Terrain System deploys five- to nine-person teams called, 'human terrain teams,' while the University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies train 'red teams.'"*



*"The overall focus of a human terrain team is to use socio-cultural research and knowledge of the population to advise and make recommendations to the brigade during planning and operations that positively affect both the population and the military unit, preventing violence before it starts, or decreasing it after inception."*

can understand them, avoiding jargon that only one side or the other can fully understand. Team members can achieve this by understanding the cultures in which they are working, visualize how important culture understanding is to the unit being supported, and describe it to commanders and staff, clearly enumerating its importance and how it influences their operating environment.

All three characteristics must be present in both teams. Because of a shared personnel requirement, how they both approach problems, and the type of knowledge they require to positively affect the situation, cooperation between the two organizations is a natural and necessary fit. The quickest and easiest way to work toward cooperation between the two programs is to crosstalk and share information between teams deployed down range.

Cooperation at the present time would be particularly beneficial, based on the different levels of command that each program is supporting. Human terrain teams support brigade combat teams, while red teams support division, corps, and joint task force levels. Each organization can collect and analyze cultural data at their respective level, while providing that information to their counterparts at other levels of command. Cultural information

and analysis at lower levels, where the "ground truth" can be found, would be particularly beneficial to groups at higher levels, who have less opportunity to talk to the people and research the local cultures while in their element.

The second area of cooperation is one of the keystones of the Human Terrain System — its Research Reachback Center. This organization is designed to provide deployed human terrain teams a 24/7 communications connectivity, which provides reachback research and expertise through open-source cultural research, the support of a subject-matter expert network, cultural debriefings for units without a human terrain team, research working groups, and focused military research.

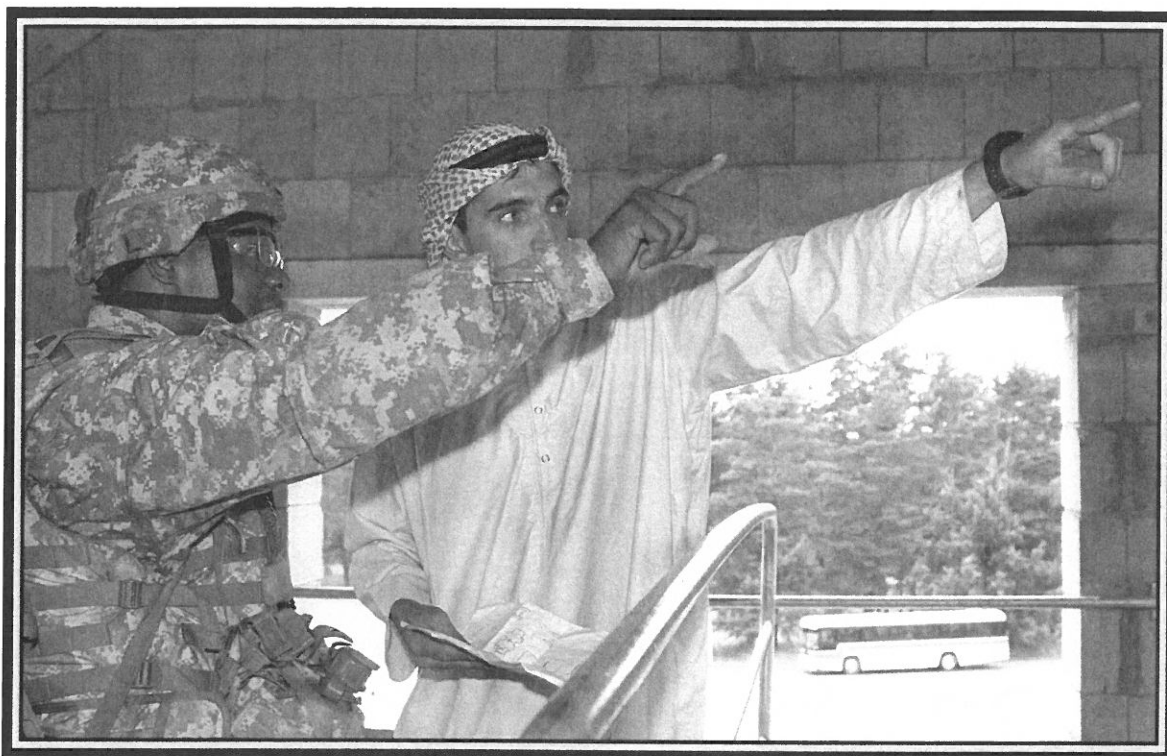
The research and products produced by the Research Reachback Center can as easily and applicably be used by customers other than a human terrain team. Currently, the center is being used by the 101st Air Assault Division in preparation for deployment to Afghanistan, and by the red team supporting the 4th Infantry Division currently deployed to Iraq. Both units found the products to be very valuable and informative. By adding qualified analysts, as well as integrating personnel who understand the mission and focus of red teams, the Research Reachback Cen-

ter would be even more valuable to both organizations, as well the military overall. With both organizations feeding data to the Research Reachback Center, the amount of cultural information archived would exponentially increase.

The Human Terrain System and the University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies should also collaborate prior to deployment. Separate training programs provide top-rate instruction that parallel each other. Both programs revolve around instruction in anthropology and other cultural-gaining disciplines, while other portions of the instruction are used by only one program or the other. Using beneficial selective portions from each other's training program could enhance the knowledge and abilities of all team members. This cross-pollination of instruction has already begun. The University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies provides expert communications and negotiation instruction to human terrain team members during their training in preparation for deployment.

Using selections of each other's training is not the only, or even most effective, way to create a productive link between the Human Terrain System and the University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies. Team members trained in both





*"Cultural information and analysis at the lower levels, where the 'ground truth' can be found, would be particularly beneficial to groups at higher levels, who have less opportunity to talk to the people and research the local cultures while in their element."*

programs would be more beneficial to both deployed teams and in the Research Reachback Center. The Human Terrain System's training is centered on gathering tools and methodologies to conduct cultural research that can positively affect the operating environment in which their supported unit is working. The University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies' training focuses on critical thinking and analysis of the operating environment, and the staff's processes of its supported unit to more effectively and efficiently frame and answer the unit's problems. Both cultural research and critical analysis are necessary and beneficial skills for both teams.

Now that both programs have teams in theater supporting different levels of command, the time is perfect for coordination between the Human Terrain System and the University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies, and the resources they both bring to bear on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These teams are in the field learning tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) that improve the operating environment and gathering cultural knowledge that can support operations across the military for government and nongovernment agencies. Sharing TTP and cultural information can only improve our understanding of the operating environment. Cooperation and knowledge sharing are also having positive ef-

fects through the support of the Research Reachback Center of deployed red teams and human terrain teams. Finally, training support between the two organizations has already begun, improving the skill-sets of deploying team members.

The way forward for both organizations depends on a closer working relationship; the first step is cross-leveling people in both training programs and on deployed teams. The knowledge and experience gained from a reciprocal training and support program will enhance team members, particularly team leaders, and analysts of each program. Further steps for cooperation and integration between the programs could develop from the solid base built by cross-leveling. In the end, both programs are attempting to inject socio-cultural knowledge into our military institutions and should join together to push this evolution of military affairs and ensure its success.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>George W. Smith, "Avoiding a Napoleonic Ulcer: Bridging the Gap of Cultural Intelligence (Or, Have We Focused on the Wrong Transformation?)," In Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Strategy Essay Competition Essays 2004, National Defense University Press, Washington, DC, 2004, available at: <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/mcwar/IRP/Documents/CJCS%20Essay%20-%20Smith.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup>The concept for the current Human Terrain System was suggested by Montgomery McFate Ph.D., J.D., and Andrea Jackson as described in their article, "An Organizational Solution

for DoD's Cultural Knowledge Needs," *Military Review*, July-August 2005. Most of the practical work to implement the concept under the title "Human Terrain System" was done by Captain Don Smith, U.S. Army Reserve, Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, KS, between July 2005 and August 2006. Under this concept, "human terrain" can be defined as the human population and society in the operational environment (area of operations) as defined and characterized by socio-cultural, anthropologic, and ethnographic data and other non-geophysical information about that human population and society. Human terrain information is open-source derived, unclassified, referenced (geospatially, relationally, and temporally) information. It includes the situational roles, goals, relationships, and rules of behavior of an operationally relevant group or individual.

<sup>3</sup>Gregory Fontenot, "Seeing Red: Creating a Red-Team Capability for the Blue Force," *Military Review*, September-October 2005, pp. 4-8.

<sup>4</sup>University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies, "Red Team Handbook," Fort Leavenworth, KS, 12 Oct 2007, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>Colonel Allen Batschelet, Major Mike Runey, and Major Barry Hafer, "Risking Critique," *Armed Forces Journal*, November 2007, available at: <http://www.afji.com/2007/11/3072814>, accessed 30 October 2008.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

Captain Nathan K. Finney, U.S. Army Reserve, an armor officer, is currently serving as a doctrine team leader, Human Terrain System, Fort Leavenworth, KS. He received a B.A. from the University of Arizona and is currently pursuing an M.A. from the University of Kansas. His military education includes Armor Officer Basic Course, Stop-Gap Red Team Leader Course, Military Intelligence Captains Career Course, and Defense Strategy Course. He has served in various command and staff positions, to include training officer, Human Terrain System, Fort Leavenworth, KS; cultural research manager, Human Terrain System, Fort Leavenworth; and XO and platoon leader, C Company, 2d Battalion, 34th Armor, Fort Riley, KS, and Baqubah, Iraq.