

**The afterlives of counterinsurgency:
postcolonialism, military social science, and Afghanistan 2006-2012**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the United States military's counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan from 2006-2012. In recent years, the U.S. military has relied upon the methods and research of social scientists to model the Taliban-led insurgency in southern Afghanistan in hopes of predicting and mitigating the movement of the insurgency. The U.S. military has also used social scientists to gather "cultural intelligence" for surveying and interpreting the general population in Afghanistan in order to develop methods for "winning the hearts and minds" of civilians. This dissertation makes three central arguments. First, contrary to the "winning hearts and minds" narrative, counterinsurgency in practice has consistently produced two outcomes: the arming local defense forces, and massive population displacement. Second, "cultural intelligence" has been utilized to produce a narrative that Pashtuns in southern Afghanistan are "naturally" inclined towards local tribal structures as the desired mode of political order and legitimacy. Whether or not this is true, the U.S. military has used this Orientalist "local" narrative to set up place-bound tribal strongmen and warlords to counter what is perceived as a transnational, networked, and therefore locally "inauthentic" insurgency. The dissertation identifies this move by the U.S. military as the "weaponization of scale" at both a global and local level. Third, the dissertation examines the worldview that governs the U.S. military's approach to Afghanistan, and argues that it is one where populations are "de-coded" as "networks." To see like the twenty-first century U.S. military is to see a world of networks. This world of networks is a secular cosmological vision derivative from the human-machine assemblages where U.S. military personnel and institutions are imbricated. These human-machine assemblages have been violently extended within the general Afghan population through new technologies like iris-scan biometrics devices and data-base management. The dissertation draws the important point that many new twenty-first century technologies, like "big data" mining and computational social network analysis, are rooted in colonial practices.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work conducted by the author, O. Belcher. The author did not collaborate with any other authors or teams in preparing this thesis, although the author has benefited greatly from the intellectual support, conversations, and solidarity with collective intellectuals all over the world, particularly in North America, Latin America, Europe, and Russia.

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Dedication

*To the two loves of my life,
Lauren and Dorothy*

Prefatory Quotes

“It is the purest form of European adventuring. What’s it all been for, the murdering seas, the gangrene winters and starving springs, our bone pursuit of the unfaithful, midnights of wrestling with the Beast, our sweat become ice and our tears pale flakes of snow, if not for such moments as this: the little converts flowing out of eye’s field, so meek, so trusting—how shall any crawl clench in fear, any recreant cry be offered in the presence of our blade, our necessary blade? Sanctified now they will feed us, sanctified their remains and droppings fertilize our crops. Did we tell them “Salvation”? Did we mean a dwelling forever in the City? Everlasting Life? An earthly paradise restored, their island as it used to be given back to them? Probably. Thinking all the time of the little brothers numbered among our own blessings. Indeed, if they save us from hunger in this world, then beyond, in Christ’s kingdom, our salvations must be, in like measure, inextricable. Otherwise the dodoes would be only what they appear as in the world’s illusory light—only our prey. God could not be that cruel.”

Frans Van der Groov, in Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, p.113

“Interventions or occupations are usually peaceful and altruistic.”

Small Wars Manual (1940), U.S. Marine Corps, sec. 1-8, p.13

1 Staging the Orient: A Prologue

“The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate.”

Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978), 63

“There’s change in the air/
Do you not hear the heavy silence there?”

Sun Ra, “There is a Change in the Air,” *The Antique Blacks* (1974)

1.1 Dead Air

“HER daughter was killed by an errant bomb,” the State Department official said to me. The official’s face, pale as organdy under the hot September sun, watched as the Mother rushed our way, all-enveloping blue *chaddari* quivering furiously in the wind, caterwauling cries at the soldiers just in front of us. The soldiers had just arrived in a slow crawl from over the hill, a long sinuous caterpillar of armed Humvees stopping just outside the farm. A circle of soldiers walked purposefully up the gravel road from the vehicles, followed closely by a plain clothed Afghan straggling alongside, but just outside, the circle. The journalists—some real, others make believe—surrounded the commanding officer, a SEAL, leading the team of soldiers, courting an explanation for the death of the Little Girl, one of six Civilians in the village whose demise was met too early by an errant ISAF airstrike. The SEAL offered perfunctory courtesies, hand over heart. “What’s he doing?” the State official whispered into my ear, referring to the SEAL with a hint of annoyance. “He needs to secure the premises. Where is his med team for the girl?” The SEAL, keeping to the script, laconically answered a few questions from the press and routine official condolences, promising anyone around him willing to listen that AMERICA will do everything it can to make up for the loss of life, that this was all an unintentional accident. His sharp mode of speaking, which belied any sincerity, was picked up by the State official

who edged a few steps away from me to consult briefly with another official, the wailing Mother quavering nearby, tautly held back by other women, eventually falling to her knees, hands outstretched into the nothingness of the barren purlieu. The Contracting Manager and Afghan Border Police who arrived shortly after the soldiers and the SEAL watched her from a distance. I look down into my green three-ring binder: “*Vignette 4-A: Quality Control & Consequence Management: Operate in a complex, high-pressure, emotionally charged situation.*” Check.¹

Three US soldiers to my right looked on to the scene, mumbling under the wailing Mother’s screams, sharing inaudible laughs to one another. They shifted their weight, left foot to right foot and back, with arms folded over their guns, a pendulum movement swaying at the speed of their clear boredom. It is their sunglasses that stand out for me, sporty and tinted almost like crystal prisms, a rainbow veneer reminiscent of oil on water. Under the blazing heat casting downward across the miles of detritus—broken walls, and strings of barbed wire webbing the expanse of the horizon, holding the world together—I found myself recalling Coetzee (1980), and his figure of the curious magistrate admiring the gold-rimmed dark-tinted eyeglasses of Colonel Joll from the Third Bureau—a new invention at the time, a new artefact of the eye strangely placed at the intersection of modernity and empire. “At home everybody wears them,” Joll said, those opaque lenses.

¹ All quotes herein are taken from field notes and unstructured interviews with and observations of participants, unless where italicized, which come from the “green three-ring binder,” the *Civilian Expeditionary Force, Field Exercise Facilitator Guide, All Vignettes, September 20-22, 2010*, provided to me by military personnel during my stay at the base, September 19-24, 2010. All the names of the participants in the vignettes have been replaced with the anonymous names given in the scripts.



Figure 1: Convoy Approaching [Photo By Author]



Figure 2: Afghan Mother Whose Daughter Was Killed [Photo By Author]

A group of four Afghan men emerge from a cinderblock house about forty meters behind me. Their black rubber flip-flops crunch along the dry grass as they walk purposefully towards the SEAL, who catches a glimpse of them through the voice recorders and scribbling notepads. Excusing himself from the journalists, the SEAL turned to one of his subordinates, ordering him to secure the perimeter, the State official stridently shaking his head at the timing. The SEAL, hands on hips, seemed unsure about whether he should oversee the perimeter security, or wait for the approaching Afghan men.

“Where’s my translator?” the SEAL uttered abruptly, not seeming to notice the young Afghan man, barely over twenty years of age, fitted with Kevlar and standing right behind him, the same Afghan who came alongside the circle of soldiers. “Long day,” the State official whispers beside me. At first glance, the SEAL stands out from the rest, his pixelated uniform a slight shade bluer than the nameless green-brown of Army uniforms surrounding him. He is shorter than I had imagined SEALs to be – that was my first, and only, impression of him. In fact, learning that he was a SEAL came as somewhat of a surprise. He struck me as more of an administrative type, almost librarian in demeanor—reserved and with a face that bore a remarkable likeness to a young Ben Kingsley, during his *Ghandi* days—a paradoxical resemblance. As the Afghan men approached, one of them exchanged a few words with the translator, who relayed to the SEAL that they welcomed him, and requested a meeting or *shura* with him. The Contract Manager stands intently behind the SEAL with the air of a faithful monitor. The SEAL put his hand over his heart, and muttered something incoherent to the Afghan men, bowing awkwardly. “He’s already fucking this up,” the State official hoarsely blurts into the air, at this point hardly hiding his frustration. I’m not quite sure what he means. As I struggle to write everything down, my attention is caught by a group of soldiers fanning out across the farm, who I assume are now “securing the perimeter.” Women watch from one of the doorways of a hastily constructed concrete building. One of the SEAL’s assistants is taking notes into a small pocket-sized

book, dutifully following the SEAL as he and the translator are escorted by the Afghan men back to the cinderblock compound, the Contracting Manager and Afghan Border Police in tow. The State official and I walk behind them, as do the rest of the spectators, about ten of us, mostly civilians—a hodge-podge bunch of journalists, contractors, “subject matter experts,” former officers, and “government officials”... former diplomatic corps, or intelligence maybe, who knows. Nothing is fully disclosed here. “Show time,” the State official winks at me, a sardonic grin stretching across his face.

When we reach the compound, I stand in the doorway as the group of men situate themselves on the pillows and carpets strewn around the floor. Looking back over my shoulder, I see the mother still surrounded on the ground by her companions, ripping up earth with her astringed fingers in front of the walls of another compound, which is doing double duty as a leaning post for conversing US soldiers. There are a total of three buildings on the farm, all made of white-gray cinderblocks. Carpets can be seen hanging heavily on the walls through their doorways—thinly woven lines of green, orange and blue enfold the scarlet and gold ornamentation, the *gol* iconography subtly wreathed into the rugs’ textures, bent into the concentric shapes of mandalas, an architecture of the cosmos. What strange cosmos is being woven here, I thought, right before my eyes? A yellow field of dying grass separates the compounds, and a tilled plot of land rests on the other side of the house I’m standing in now, as I look on to the *shura*. In the doorway right across from me, the State official eagerly waits for the meeting to begin, government-issued leather brown hair wavering gingerly in the warm breeze, one arm across his chest as he eagerly bites his hang-nails. A helmeted soldier pries into the doorway right next to me, trying to get into position for his filming. I hold my ground, readying my camera as well. The men sit in a circle, nine total. A broad Afghan male wearing a *shalwar kameez* and a brown *pakul* conducts the meeting. The atmosphere, in its present tense, is punctuated by whispers from the various officials and onlookers outside, peering in through a partially curtained window, pen and paper in-hand waiting for notes, waiting for fitting images for their cameras. The leading Afghan, who has a habit of

incessantly scratching his beard while he talks, informs the SEAL that the critically injured little girl's father is in attendance, sitting, it so happens, directly across from the Kingsley clone. The father, wearing a colourful Sindhi cap, stares intently at the SEAL who sits cramped in a cross-legged position. The SEAL is flanked by his translator, his assistant, and the Construction Manager.

EARLIER in the day, the SEAL had first met with an Afghan Border Police (ABP) Company Commander, and then the Contract Manager in charge of a stalled construction site for an Afghan Border Police barrack along the "southern border with Baluchistan." The ABP Commander was frustrated at the pace of the barrack construction, and implored the SEAL to consider possible charges of corruption around the site: *is the money being spent appropriately? What the kinds of materials were provided for the building? Where is the oversight?* These were the questions my little green three-ring binder wanted answers to. There was also a discussion around border security and the problem of smuggling materials from Baluchistan into the southern interior, which was possibly lining the pockets of warlords and fuelling the Taliban insurgency. The pace of these meetings was starting to get to me—a slow, methodical affair intended, really, to police against cultural solecisms rather than discuss anything of potential consequence. "You have to start somewhere," I overheard one of the subject-matter experts say over "chow" yesterday with the Iraqi delegation in the old state mental ward. "The process is slow, and you can't know what its like until you're there." Talk of steep learning curves is a frequent topic of conversation among this crowd, the mantra of "Lessons Learned" pervasive in all the vignettes.

It was at this morning's meeting with the ABP Company Commander that the SEAL was informed of the recent ISAF airstrike on a civilian compound near the ABP base. The strike, which

“possibly took out three ‘Taliban’,” killed at least six civilians in a small Village near the ABP base, all of the same family, the place where I am now. The Villagers were very angry over the strike, and according to the ABP commander, this posed a problem for NATO because many of the Villagers working at the ABP base possibly knew the victims. Men in the Village overheard that the Americans were paying a visit to the construction site, and the ABP Commander thought it best that the SEAL and his soldiers meet with the Villagers to assuage any future complications. The ABP Commander thought it would be a sign of respect to meet with the Villagers about the bombing. The SEAL agreed to the meeting, finding it to be an opportunity to engage with the “hearts and minds” of the “local people.” After a brief visit to the stalled “barracks” site situated next to the half-built red, white and gold “mosque,” intentionally and forever remaining in disrepair, the SEAL and his troupe of soldiers followed the Construction Manager and ABP commander to meet the group of Villagers on the farm where the attacks had killed the Family. The Construction Manager was “well acquainted” with the group of Villagers, some of whom were his laborers at the mosque site, which is why he was now in attendance at the *shura*.

IN the *shura*, the SEAL removed his hat, and the top of his bald head was pearled with beaded sweat. He began to offer his condolences to the Father and others in the room, assuring them that the errant bomb was a mistake. “AMERICA is here to help,” he told the men, “we are not here to do any harm.” He spoke in a concise, measured tone, emphasizing every word, maintaining eye contact with the Father and only occasionally scanning the rest of the room. The Father remained quiet. A Villager who was sitting beside the Father—Local Villager #1, according to my green binder—asked through the interpreter why it was that the “simple farmers” are always the ones killed by American bombs? The

Taliban were using their compound for cover, Local Villager #1 said calmly, but that does not make the villagers Taliban too. Wait a second. This seems off. I consult the green binder, which reads: “*Local Villager #1: Initially he will shout at the Civilian Expeditionary Workforce [none of whom are in sight], emotionally demanding to know why they kill good, innocent people. After being calmed down by the Contracting Manager, he will become more focused, and sad rather than angry.*” This villager is much more subdued than expected. Local Villager #1 asks, “Do the Americans think it is OK to kill women and children in order to kill Taliban?” but in a tone much too scripted, almost too pleadingly to the SEAL, a softball intended to derive the right answer. The State official can’t keep still in the opposite doorway, eyes wide, nail-chewing in earnest, a finger platen. The Contracting Manager does not interfere with the conversation—no calming here. The SEAL responds with his mechanical apologies, excessive in character, drowning the conversation with airy regards that AMERICA will do what it can, while not quite offering any concrete promises to the group of men... a clunky conversation going nowhere.

“HAVE empathy for the enemy, but never sympathy,” my Humvee driver told me yesterday, right before we hit an air-compressed IED on a rocky road, and playfully shot .50 caliber blanks together into the forest, shells showering around my head into the interior of the cabin. A career soldier, the gray moustached Major driving the Humvee had been on three tours in two different wars, most of his time spent in northern and eastern Afghanistan, including the deadly Kurengal and Pech River Valleys in Kunar province. As we drove together, the Major waxed about riding his Harley through the Indiana countryside with his wife while she held on to his waist, stopping when they could at burger shacks on country roads. A weekend Midwesterner by heart, the Major was nevertheless a serious soldier during the week. He had seen war, and now it was his job to pass on that experience to the younger generation,

including me. On one of our drives together between the Forward Operating Base (FOB) Panther and the Muscutatuk Urban Training Center (MUTC), we had to stop at one point and dismantle the guns from the top of the Humvees. “The neighbors don’t like it when we display the guns on the roads,” he said laughingly. “And I don’t blame them. We knock their mailboxes off all the time with our side-view mirrors.”

“If I had my druthers,” the Major told me on the way to yesterday’s meeting with the Mosul City Councilman, speaking loudly over the roar of the engine as we drove, “I would turn the entire Middle East into a parking lot. But that’s not how you win wars.” I heard this refrain to turn large swaths of “Hajji” earth into “parking lots” repeated often in conversations with soldiers and officials either at chow or at the hotel bar in Columbus, Indiana over the course of my week of observation of the Civilian Expeditionary Workforce for Afghanistan and Iraq. But, as the Major explained to me, wars are no longer about mere destruction. The war now is to win the hearts and minds, to temper the distribution of death. Counterinsurgency was about getting the enemy to do what you want without giving them very much in return, empathizing without sympathizing—to pacify.

My visit to the Muscatatuk Urban Training Center in Indiana was at the height of this new croon of counterinsurgency within the U.S. military, to secure the “population” within war-zones first and, in most cases, utilize bullets and bombs second. Counterinsurgency doctrine’s focus on “winning the population” and “the people” was apt for an age when, as former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander of NATO Europe General Rupert Smith (2008) put it, “warfare now happens amongst the people.” In order to win wars in the way the Major was telling me on our drives, other strategic and tactical measures were necessary outside of indiscriminate killing, since such killing produced, more times than not, contingent and short-lived “victories.” It was thus no surprise then in late 2006, when the new Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24 (2006) was published at the height of the bloody insurgency in Iraq, the three “best practices” which won the most praise among journalists and analysts

were those intended to reduce violence in precarious “civilian zones”: “SOMETIMES, THE MORE YOU PROTECT YOUR FORCE, THE LESS SECURE YOU MAY BE” (FM 3-24: 1-149); “SOMETIMES THE MORE FORCE IS USED, THE LESS EFFECTIVE IT IS” (FM 3-24: 1-150); “SOMETIMES DOING NOTHING IS THE BEST REACTION” (FM 3-24: 1-152). The emphasis, in rhetoric if not practice, in force reduction, population protection, and building functional governing structures within Afghanistan and Iraq was a stark departure from the two doctrines that had previously dominated military thinking: the Weinberger-Powell doctrine, which emphasized overwhelming offensive force in large numbers (as witnessed in Iraq in 1991) and the Rumsfeld doctrine, a business-oriented approach utilizing sophisticated technological infrastructure and offensive weaponry at the expense of logistically massive troop movements (most prominently displayed in Afghanistan (2001)) and the “shock and awe” invasion of Iraq (2003) (Lafeber, 2009; Gordon and Trainor, 2006; Ricks, 2007). The failure of the Pentagon during Donald Rumsfeld’s tenure to secure and effectively occupy Baghdad and Iraq, as well as anticipate the blowback-qua-insurgency that exploded in the years after the invasion by the U.S.-led “Coalition of the Willing” sent military planners and ancillary think-tank analysts back to their drawing boards within the first year of the occupation. The U.S. military (re)learned the art of occupation through readings of conventional historical accounts of colonialism and counterinsurgency, an active engagement with academics and journalists, and consultations and joint-seminars with the Israeli Defense Force on their own militarized approach to the West Bank and Gaza (Graham, 2011; cf. Clemis, 2009). Occupations are always a violent affair, as the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories attests (Belcher, 2011; Gregory, 2004; Harker, 2009; Levy, 2010; Ophir et al, 2009; Weizman, 2007). But, according to contemporary counterinsurgency doctrine, in order for an occupation to be successful, counterinsurgents need to govern effectively; that is, the occupying force needs to “win,” on some level, the legitimacy of those being occupied.²

² See Chapter 2 for a fuller introductory account of counterinsurgency doctrine.

When I was visiting the MUTC in late 2010, that legitimacy was sought through a militarized appropriation of economic restructuring schemes advanced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank over the past forty years in the global south (Duffield, 2007)—the privatization of public works and services, micro-financing, small-scale development of agricultural markets, incentivized (or forced) urbanization, the implementation of a Westernized rights-based regimes, and the institution of “accountable” governance structures—from the establishment of a parliament-based governing apparatus, to the formal delineation of property lines, to the learning of financial accounting as such. Even though such legitimacy-qua-neoliberal development programs have been widely discarded within development policy circles (including the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program) as a failed approach to the economic reduction in poverty (Carr, 2011), actually resulting more times than not in the *reproduction of poverty* (Davis, 2006: 16; Wainwright, 2008), such a development course has been the mainstay for the US military in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The Civilian Expeditionary Force trainings that I was observing at MUTC were designed for US civilians and military personnel deployed to train their civilian counterparts in Iraq and Afghanistan in the techniques “proper” to agriculture development and governance propagated by state and NGO development agencies, such as USAID, the World Bank, and the IMF.



Figure 3: The SEAL Taking Notes at the *Shura* [Photo By Author]

BACK at the *shura*, the SEAL was diligently carrying out the Major's mantra: "empathize, but don't sympathize." The timid approach of Local Villager #1 was getting nowhere with the SEAL. The other men in the *shura* began to compensate by speaking up with the more aggressive tones called for in the script. The Father continued to glare at the SEAL. The leader of the circle told the SEAL and his interpreter that people from the Village implored the Afghan men not to associate themselves with the Afghan Government or any part of NATO because they were all "foreigners and unbelievers." The leader, eyeing the others around him, found the bombing particularly frustrating because he wanted to work with NATO and the Afghan government, but how can he explain himself to the Villagers when children are getting killed by American bombs? He followed the script seamlessly—albeit with a tone that defies rote memorization; it was a tone that contained a latent sorrow, a real grievance forcing its way to the surface: *"Where is the justice and peace we are promised? Is this the justice that the*

government wants to provide, where innocent children are killed in our homes? Why doesn't the government do something about the police units who harass civilians for no reason? If America is so powerful that it can drop bombs on people's homes, why can't it stop the Taliban?"

Another villager sitting a couple of spaces between the leader and the Father—identified in my green binder as Local Villager #2—chimes in with an accusation that its always the Achakzai people who are at end of the barrel of the gun. This comment sparks conversation. Conspiracies about the role of *those* Noorzai, who whisper sweet-nothings into the gullible American ears begin to fluidly float around the circle; the SEAL, looking confused, as if he wasn't anticipating this turn in the conversation, listened intently. The Noorzai, one of the men argues, are merciless in their pursuit to regain their lost power, a people who slyly circulate accusations that so-and-so are Taliban in order to prompt the Americans to take out their enemies. The other men nod in agreement, and question the SEAL as to the American plans to distance the Noorzai from their governing efforts. The SEAL listens to his interpreter, and tells the men that all he can do is talk to his superiors about the problem. It's always the same refrain: we'll get back to you after talking with our superiors. The other *shura* participants could barely hide their dissatisfaction.

At this point, the Father of the Little Girl finally spoke, his tone soft. A hush fell over the room. The translator relayed the Father's words to the SEAL: "Why do you continue to kill our people, without mercy? Why do we continue to suffer?" The Father's cadence was initially slow, and he only spoke in pointed questions. What is the point of this senseless violence? Why with our people? Why do you attack our communities? Why, this? Why, that? Why? Why! Why? The more questions he asked—about his Daughter, his people, his life—the more animated his arms became, his voice increasingly tense. Suddenly, the Father broke protocol: rising to his feet, lunging towards the SEAL yelling something in Pashtu directly into the SEAL's face, pointing his index finger with an unapologetic accusation, an inch away from touching the SEAL's nose. Screaming. The Father's sudden movements

propel everyone hastily to their feet, the Father visibly upset, and the translator no longer translating but holding the Father at bay. The air, the atmosphere is confused. The spectators outside the windows are rapt in their attention. Script broken, the Council men try to calm the father down, while the SEAL babbles some sort of condolences to nobody in particular. My first thought: “Wait...Is this, this *scene... real?*” The Father, (real?) tears streaming from his eyes, continues to hoarsely scream at the SEAL, whose face is an expression of bewilderment about what to say or do. Something is wrong. The officials outside of the window are shuffling uncomfortably, whispering and trading side-glances with each other. The other Council men try to salvage the scene, working with what looks now to be unexpectedly *rich* improv material, telling the SEAL through the translator that this is the cost of America’s war on the Afghans, this is what bombs do: they tear families apart, tear at the fabric of society. The SEAL haphazardly fumbles through his predetermined ensemble of instrumental responses, one at a time, but everything—the Afghans, the officials’ stares, the shifting perspective of the cameras—shows that he’s out of his element. The scene endures... then ceases.

“Fuck! Ok, ok! That’s it. Stop it!” the State official interrupts, coming out of his invisible director’s chair. “That’s enough! This is over, goddamn it!”

The scene ends. Everybody, the atmosphere relaxes. I’m surrounded by the shuffling of bodies, a cavalcade of confusion. The Father stormed past me, two other men from the *shura* holding his shoulders in consolation. The Contracting Manager, the translator and some Villagers, unsure whether to follow, begin to talk to the SEAL, immediately offering him advice on where he went wrong with the negotiations. The State official, trying to get through the door behind me says either to me or the soldier who’s wrapping up his camera work, “What the fuck’s Special Ops doing in negotiations anyways? A fucking SEAL? Really?” The State official wedged between us, motioning for the SEAL to step outside, into the light, with him. The SEAL excuses himself from the Afghans and walks away with the State official, who takes him near the edge of the farm talking along the way with

rapid, animated gestures. The Afghans and officials who were watching from the windows congregate aimlessly toward the place where the Mother was pulling at dirt only moments ago.

I walked back onto the dead earth and wove my way through the officials and “officials,” journalists and “journalists,” unsettled about the extra-ordinary theatrics (*were they mere theatrics?*). I stood around for a moment, taking a picture of a meeting between the “subject matter experts” and the Afghans, and prompted by a loss of appetite, started to head back up “7th Street” towards the Administration Building parking lot. After deciding to skip lunch at FOB Holland, and I opted to walk through the MUTC site one last time before the final Iraq vignette at the Power Plant, a power crisis meeting in Mosul.

As I walked, I thought about the other vignettes, which had been much more formal and predictable; these were military trainings after all. A typical vignette, composed almost entirely of civilians, usually took place around a table, everybody’s folders out in front of them, checking their notes as they went along, trudging through the duration of the script. Though long and boring for non-participants, the vignettes were times for participants to showboat for their superiors, a moment when a civilian could show their chops at the negotiating table with the staged Other. There were hardly ever surprises at the meetings, except for on Day One at another Afghan Construction Project meeting in FOB Holland when our team came under attack by phantom insurgents, and we were rushed suddenly out from an ABP Company Commander’s office through the deafening roar of machinegun fire into the Humvees waiting outside. This was the moment of my first heroic act in simulated war, when one of the civilians running beside me fell onto the ground while making for cover at the Humvees. I picked her up, put her arm around my neck Hollywood-style, the absurdity of the scene at the forefront of my mind, and helped carry her quickly to safety. She suffered scraped knees.

But, the *shura* I just witnessed was something else altogether—a *trompe l’oeil* in motion escaping the grasp of those playing their parts when a seemingly different reality—or rather silence, a

real *silence*, an inadvertent return of the repressed—breached the seams. What was that outburst by the Father? When I first arrived on the farm earlier in the day, I had a short visit with four of the Afghan men who would later participate in the day’s *shura* vignette. We sat on boxes in the shade of one of the concrete buildings trying to escape the September heat. The Afghan men I spoke with had been to MUTC many times before to participate in the simulated field exercise trainings for both civilian and military personnel. They had all served as translators for US soldiers in Afghanistan, and had been granted visas to live and work in the United States in exchange for their assistance in the battlefields. They now lived in disparate locations throughout the US: outside of Detroit, in Milwaukee, in the suburbs of Nashville and Washington DC. There was a general unhappiness among the four men with their living conditions. They each told me that upon arrival in the United States, they had been arbitrarily placed in “Arab” or “Islamic” areas of town since there were not large communities of Afghans outside of Washington DC. It was a lonely existence, far away from their families. Two of the men had wives and children back in Afghanistan that they had not seen for a year or more, while the other two men longed for the time when they too could start their own families, which almost seemed like a distant dream here in the United States. I asked the men if they would ever like to go back to their homes in Afghanistan, and all answered emphatically in the affirmative. But for now it was too dangerous for former translators and helpers of the US military to return. Melancholy hung heavily, like a cloud, over the men. They looked forward to coming here to Indiana, if anything, for the conversation. Like all the Afghan participants at the site, the four men worked intermittently on part-time contracts for the McKellar Corporation, the private military contractor who ran the vignettes here at MUTC, this irreal vortex of war. They even spent their days and slept in the concrete shacks on the “Afghan farm”—which it so happened was a functional plot that actually produced food for the local farmer’s market, adding another irreal layer to the site.

I paced the gravel road, winding my way through a forest of decaying buildings, debris, and rubble. A sea of broken concrete lay in fields as far as the eye could see. When I first arrived at Muscatatuck, I wondered whether the rubble was intentionally left untouched, a parody by the site's handlers of Walter Benjamin's trash aesthetics: "Only the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them (Benjamin, 2002a: N1a8, 460)."³ The rubble and remains, the dilapidated buildings, the abandoned equipment splayed throughout "the set": all of these figures make up the sublime semiotext of this military simulacra. It is all put to use, framing within the mind of the performers a demolished city, something to prepare for over there. Nothing escapes; *everything is relevant*. The discarded sewer pipes, chunked iron rods, and forsaken roofing shingles are *themselves* embedded with different temporalities, existing side by side, turning the material world of Muscatatuck into a moment that must be *seized* upon as it "flashes up in a moment of danger" as one dances in this devil's playground (Benjamin, 2002b). The detritus has a story, deposited and sedimented. Adorno once said that the truth of psychoanalysis lies in its exaggerations, and yet the whole remains false (Adorno, 2005: 49-50).; the same can be said of Muscatatuck, built as it is on top of a madhouse, where ghosts haunt its structures and shadows. Even in this pastiche arena between unreal war and make believe, the inconspicuous familiarity one expects from the world is jolted and thrown into disarray by the material apparitions manifest themselves in the surroundings. Muscatatuck hoarsely breathes a dead air, lump in throat, coughing discordantly through the dross.

1.2 Trash Aesthetics

"Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get away from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems – but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible."

Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981)

³ I borrow the term "trash aesthetics" from Ben Highmore's *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (2002), pp 60

“Nobody, as far as I can see, is making use of those elements in the air which gives direction and motivation to our lives.”
Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (1934)

Truth lies in traces. As I walk out of the Afghan farm compound, the first building I pass is Elmhurst, or Building 104 in my green binder. Erected in 1920, Elmhurst was one of the original structures of Muscatatuck, now crumbling under its own weight, no longer taking in or administering its earliest inhabitants. Yet, the traces reverberate. When Muscatatuck was originally established on December 16, 1919, it was as the Indiana Farm Colony for Feeble-Minded Youth, a colony for society’s “unfit.”⁴ Due to overcrowding in the county jails and asylums throughout the state, the Indiana state legislature voted to institute the colony for male residents and youth designated “mentally defective,” a measure to alleviate administrative difficulties pervasive in Indiana jails. In 1920, a Board of Trustees was appointed by then Governor James P. Goodrich for the Indiana Farm Colony, and thirty-five “inmates” were transferred to Muscatatuck from the Indiana School for Feeble-Minded Youths located 168 miles north in Fort Wayne (established in 1889, and overcrowded by 1915). With its wide open pasture, farm fields, and ponds for fishing and swimming, the Colony was initially deemed a success for treating—and containing—the “feeble-minded” by both the Board of Trustees and the Indiana legislature. The design for the Colony was based on the thinking of Thomas Kirkbride, an influential 19th century American physician who thought it best to treat the insane and “mentally defective” by secluding them in serene rural environments away from the stresses associated with living in urban environments. In his 1854 opus on asylum design, Kirkbride wrote that at least 100 acres should be used in the treatment of the insane in order to “allow adequate and appropriate means of exercise, labor, and occupation, for

⁴ This account of Muscatatuck’s earliest years as the Indiana Farm Colony for Feeble-Minded Youth is partially drawn from the “Historical Information” essay on the Muscatatuck State Hospital Historical District project available through the Purdue University Ideas Lab website: <http://idealab.tech.purdue.edu/muscatatuck/written.html> (Last accessed August 21, 2012).

these are now recognized as among the most valuable means of treatment (quoted in Bourke, 2010: 57)”⁵

The facility was originally much larger than the current grounds. The Indiana State Legislature purchased 1,814 acres from 13 farms outside of Butlerville in Jennings County for \$125,820 out of a \$250,000 budget, with the remaining \$124,180 used for “building construction and equipment purchases.” When Muscatatuck first opened, three former family farm houses were used to house the men, and four additional buildings were constructed for administrative purposes, Elmhurst being the only structure out of the original seven still standing. The Indiana Farm Colony Board used first “inmates,” along with local prison labor, to build three new dormitories in the mid-1920s. Each dormitory housed sixty residents, allowing for a dramatic increase in the “feeble minded” population. After 1933, two new dormitories, Tyler and Madison Halls, were built for women in the area who were just beginning to be admitted to the farm colony. Steadily growing over time, the population at Muscatatuck housed six hundred residents in 1937, increasing to thirteen hundred in 1941, and eventually topping out at 2,048 in 1963 (Coons and Bowman, 2010).⁶

⁵ On the “rural geography” of asylums for the mentally ill, see Chris Philo’s *A Geographical History of Institutional Provision for the Insane* (2004), pp 568-575.

⁶ Coons, P.M. and E. Bowman. 2010. *Psychiatry in Indiana: the First 175 Years*. Bloomington, iUniverse Books.



Figure 4: Elmhurst Building, circa 1945 [Photo: Muscatatuck State Hospital District Project]; Elmhurst Building, September 2010 [Photo By Author]

The “feeble minded” included not only people with below-average intelligence or mental retardation, but also many of those demarcated as poor—the drunkards, hillbillies, slackers and dim-whits—who fell outside of the writ of a whole moral mythology prevalent in Indiana in the 1910s and 20s. While expelled outside the bounds of *proper* middle-class and Christian grace, the poor and mentally-limited were simultaneously classified and categorized within a powerful grid of intelligibility

that fused together discourses of scientific racism and eugenics with practices of psychiatric “care” in order to classify and categorize those displaced by prevalent economic conditions—namely those economic refugees having a tough time migrating between farms and cities, as well as the mass of unemployed thrown out of work by the Great Depression (Stern, 2007; cf. Phillips, 1968: 469-502). New sensibilities in Indiana were woven between race, the mad and the poor during this time, and the state implemented some of the most severe eugenics laws in the United States. The “dangerous populations” were increasingly institutionalized under the watchful and custodial eye of the paternal physician and caring warden in order to protect—and purify—the social mores and traditions of white middle-class Indiana.⁷

The perceived twin threat posed by wandering pauperism and feeble-mindedness led to the implementation of extraordinarily harsh measures by successive Indiana state governments in the early twentieth-century, including the use of sterilization on “degenerates” to prevent reproduction. In 1905, Indiana passed “one of the first restrictive marriage laws in the country... prohibiting the ‘mentally deficient, persons with a “transmissible disease” and habitual drunkards from [having] marital unions. In addition, in 1907, and again in 1927, the state legislature approved statutes authorizing the sterilization of the ‘insane, feeble-minded or epileptic persons’ in custodial care (Stern, 2007: 4).” Indeed, sterilization quickly became a prominent tool in staving off unwanted progeny both within and without asylum walls. In the almost fifty years between 1927 and 1974, Stern notes, approximately 2,000 inmates in Indiana state institutions for “the feeble minded, insane, epileptic, and delinquent” were sterilized, with 16 to 18-year-olds making up the largest age demographic for sterilization.⁸

⁷ Although she is writing on Dutch and French colonialism in the East Indies, Ann Stoler’s description (2010: 63) of colonial eugenics seems equally apt for Indiana: “[I]n defining what was unacceptable, eugenics also identified what constituted a ‘valuable life’ and ‘a gender-specific work and productivity, described in social, medical and psychiatric terms.’ Applied to European colonials, eugenic statements pronounced what kind of people should represent Dutch of French rule, how they should bring up their children, and with whom they should socialize.”

⁸ According to Stern (2007: 31), of the “1,500 operations performed in all Indiana institutions between 1930 and 1960” there was an “almost 50/50 split between men (265) and women (269).” Stern goes on to write that “there might be a link

Muscatatuck was at the center of Indiana's sterilization program⁹, with the institution's Board of Trustees approving, according to Stern's meticulous count, 144 sterilization orders between 1937 and 1953.¹⁰

Due to the rise of the 1960s anti-psychiatry movement, rising maintenance costs, and the decline of Medicaid and federal funding, Muscatatuck was officially closed in 2000 under the orders of Governor Frank O'Bannon. The last patients were resettled in local Indiana communities in 2005, and the property was transferred in a ceremony to the Indiana Army National Guard in July 2005.

The Muscatatuck Urban Training Center is like a new flesh covering an old skeleton, where paroxysmal artefacts pierce the skin in unexpected places—in the stories embedded in and out of things—in and out of trashed immersion bathtubs, old ward furniture, collapsed roofs, and blasted concrete. The phantom Arab that danced around the wandering sign of the Ishmaelites is somehow revived in the present, in a new staging with its own attendant forms of sterilization: in the counterinsurgent sterilization of life-worlds abroad, in the military death-drive of *stability* operations. Edward Said once wrote that “the idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on

between gender parity and the disproportionate sterilization of minors, especially if eugenic sterilization is understood as a form of medical paternalism enacted by health authorities on specific groups in their and society's ‘best interest.’”

⁹ The day I arrived at Muscatatuck, my first meeting was held in the old Hingley Medical Center, the site where many, if not all the Fallopian tube cuttings and vasectomies took place, which did not come to my attention until later. Every day that I went Hingley, I found myself absorbed in a poster hung above one of my informant's desk featuring the famous Leutze painting of Washington crossing the Delaware. Just below Washington's boat, the punch-line of the poster was captioned with “America: We Will Kill You In Your Sleep On Christmas.” Later, as the same informant took me to my first vignette held at the Power Plant on negotiating energy blackouts in Iraq, I caught my first glimpse of lingering underworld of Muscatatuck when we walked through the doors and passed dispensed immersion tubs on our right before entering the Iraqi stage. “Reality can have metaphorical content,” Rushdie once wrote, “that does not make it less real (Rushdie, 1981: 200).”

¹⁰ The numbers of sterilizations at Muscatatuck is likely much higher. As Stern notes (2007, 28n.86), “I derived the figure of 2,000 by adding up the 1,576 sterilizations reported by the Indiana Department of Mental Health for the period 1936 to 1962, the 308 operations listed in the Fort Wayne annual reports for the fiscal years 1927-1928 to 1935-1936, the 144 sterilization orders approved by the Muscatatuck Board of Trustees from 1937 to 1953, the 35 sterilizations listed in the Logansport annual reports from 1931 to 1943 (when they appear to end), the 7 salpingectomies listed in the Indiana Girls' School annual reports from 1927 to 1933, and several redacted Fort Wayne patient records listing sterilizations dated 1933 to 1975. Although the total comes to 2,072, I use the more conservative estimate of 2,000 *because some of the Muscatatuck inmates were transferred to Fort Wayne for sterilization and it is unclear how these operations were counted* (my emphasis).” According to a remarkably thorough online project on Compulsory Sterilization in 50 American States carried out by sociology students working under Dr. Lutz Kaelber at the University of Vermont, the sterilization facility at Fort Wayne “can be considered the heart of the eugenics movement in the state of Indiana.” <http://www.uvm.edu/~lkaelber/eugenics/IN/IN.html> (last accessed August 27, 2012).

which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate.” Muscatatuck is such a stage, a masquerade of synecdoche, a real illusion where representative figures appear and disappear; figures asked to vanish, then encouraged to remain; forgotten, and then revived again in a play of appearances; a mad masquerade on the brink of delirium.

1.3 The Chic of Araby

I continue down the gravel road, absorbed in the rubble, making my way through piles and piles of cinder blocks and burned out cars. Eventually, I arrive at the road lined with concrete blast-walls, protecting the Embassy. As I walk past the walls, I am reminded of a moment in *The Birth of Tragedy* when Nietzsche, following Schiller, identifies the Greek chorus as the “living wall that tragedy constructs around itself in order to close itself off from the world of reality and to preserve its ideal domain and its poetical freedom (Nietzsche, 2000: 58).” Nietzsche is, of course, referring to the wedding in Greek tragedy of the primordial force of Dionysian contradiction and pain with the Apollonian dream-world of appearances. But, there is an analogy that can be drawn: turn the prism and the living wall of Muscatatuck becomes fertile ground for *another* dream world of appearances, an ideal domain of its own where poetic license is marshalled to animate capacities and dispositions once thought to inhere, perhaps, only to a colonial past but are instead “reaffirmed and reactivated in the colonial present (Gregory, 2004: 7).” For *poetry* at work in Muscatatuck, a poetry of machinations and fluttering phantom figures—the “Arab” and the “Afghan”—who serve as currency in the circulation of militarized cultural stereotypes. MUTC is a *site of exchange*, a walled stage that trades in identities, and involves a highly particular relationship between military and non-military personnel; its an open stage where *everything* is included and counts as an “honest map.” Anything is used as a prop or subsumed

as a representation of (a possible) “reality.” Everything counts as a double movement, at once real and illusion. The closed off world of reality *is* the reality *rendered*.

After passing the Embassy, I decided to take a detour to escape the heat and rest in the shade under one of the permanently failed construction sites. Since the US military took over Muscatatuck in 2005, a host of buildings have been retrofitted to allow multiple agencies to use the facilities: military training exercises for Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) operating in Afghanistan, civilian-military (“civ-mil”) training exercises under the auspices of the Civilian Expeditionary Workforce, and as a training ground for Homeland Security, police and firefighting crews.¹¹ The failed construction sites are one of the more recent additions.

The three under-construction buildings are purposefully “stalled,” half built structures with multiple practical aims: to simulate bombed out buildings, to act as cover for sniper training, and to serve as “unfinished projects” for contract negotiation training in the vignettes. The structures I use for cover stand three to four stories tall, and the incomplete walls, rusted steel I-beams, and sheet metal flooring intensifies the feeling of a demolished city. The half-built structures are a rendition, or rather an instrument for an imaginary Baghdad or Gaza, copied in the Midwest, an aesthetic sampling of urbicide realized and brought to life. They have an ominous presence, overshadowing the buildings and forest immediately behind them. The buildings are positioned in such a way as to be utilized in tandem, giving a participant the effect of being in an opaque and dense area. In order to manufacture an impression of surrounded embeddedness within a larger urban environment, blue, yellow and orange shipping containers are stacked four and five stories high and arranged immediately around the incomplete buildings, hovering over and belittling the observer. Despite the material homogeneity that makes up the structures and its environs, an internal heterogeneity exists within the sites as one walks through them. Abandoned tables, chairs, and refrigerators have been hastily thrown here and there, and

¹¹ On the multidimensional nature of Muscatatuck, see Martin and Simon, 2008; Lowrey, 2009

an old gutted red van, riddled with bullet holes and overgrown with grass, lays dormant under the sun between the buildings. Grey and off-white cinder blocks hang down on iron rods from the buildings' ceilings, an odd accoutrement intended to give the impression of an exploded or demolished space. All sense of place is neutralized from within, and I find myself struck by a crisp sense of abandonment in the air as I make my way through a privileged gateway into the counterinsurgent's dream world.



Figure 5: A Permanently Unfinished Construction Site [Photo By Author]

From these structures, I can see the crown jewel of the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center, the so-called “Arab Street.” I decide to make my way over there for one last walk through. The “Arab Street” is the most jarring feature of Muscatatuck, and one of the first things one sees when driving into the facility. Located near the Administration Building, the “Arab Street” was built as a replica of an “open-air marketplace” as one would imagine seeing in a cinematic representation of the “urban terrain” of the “Arab World”. The Arab Street is made up several compounds, 10 to 12 two

story buildings lining two sides of a street, and are all painted in a bland beige. The road running a hundred meters or so through the Marketplace is full of trash, abandoned trucks, discarded office furniture, broken tables, and, unexpectedly, a functioning Coca-Cola machine. The walls of the Street are covered in tags and graffiti written in Persian and Arabic, and more or less translate into anti-American drivel, like “When someone tries to cooperate with the U.S. they are hypocrites,” or “Fuck America.” Wires criss-cross from building to building, an accommodating volume for the theatre, a fragmented roof for the show.



Figure 6: Graffiti on the Arab Street [Photo By Author]

The Street was not in use today, which allowed me to take a more detailed look around. Like the Indiana Farm Colony, the buildings of the Arab Street were built over a several month period with local prisoners on loan from the Indiana Division of Corrections, and put to work under the supervision

of the Indiana National Reserve.¹² Each building is the same as the other: four garage doors on the ground level allowing access into the inside, and porches lining the second story. The buildings are filled with old office furniture from the former mental institution: bookshelves, office chairs, filing cabinets, remote-less televisions sets with channel dials, and an abundance of desks. The furniture is intentionally not in use, serving instead as training obstacles, something to get around or through when one is on the inside. As I look in each of the buildings, the clutter, this world of shit, has become banal.



Figure 7: The Arab Street [Photo By Author]

I stroll slowly down the street to the end of the block keeping in mind the time so as not to be late for my last vignette at the Iraqi Power Plant. I come to the last garage door on the block, which has bikes hanging all around it. There are three soldiers sitting in the Bike Shop, escaping the

¹² Interview with Lt. Col. Chris Kelsey, MUTC Site Commander, in the promotional video “Muscatatuck Unveiled Episode 1” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c96SP_pj7zE&feature=related (Last accessed, August 30, 2012)

heat like I was. We exchanged greetings, and one of them asked about my tattoos, my unexpected saving grace this entire week in terms of sparking conversation and, more times than not, camaraderie with the soldiers. We talked for several minutes about our “ink,” compared art, and exchanged parlor names. The discussion drifted naturally, as it goes, from tattoos and the heat into stories about everybody’s home state. The soldiers were from Kentucky, Texas, Washington-state, and all were here for PRT training in “full spectrum operations” of a “marketplace scenario.” What was I doing here, they asked. Wondering the same thing myself, I told them I was doing research on this facility and its use in counterinsurgency training, all for my doctoral dissertation. I told them that I found places like this to be fascinating and insightful in terms of the future of war. They did not share my enthusiasm. I asked about their time here, and the soldier from Texas went into stories about how local people from the surrounding community come here some weekends to play “Arab” dress up and hawk goods in the Arab Market, and on other weekends volunteer as available bodies suffering for a simulated bioterrorist attack. In this playground of the apocalypse, very fantasy of violent horror can apparently be acted out. “Playing war is fun,” he said. Perhaps... It was from this brief conversation that I found out that there were plans for the Arab Street to co-exist in the coming months as a real-life functioning Farmer’s Market for the community on the weekends, further enhancing and trivializing the myriad of illusion that make-up Muscatatuck.¹³

After wishing the three soldiers a good day, I started to make my way to the Power Plant. As I walked, I found myself turning the confrontation between the Father and the SEAL over and over in my head, unable to grasp precisely what that moment was all about. Was the Father, a former translator

¹³ As the commander of MUTC, Lt. Col. Chris Kelsey put it in an interview: “I think we’re taking it beyond from [MUTC] just looking like a market; *it will be a market* (my emphasis)... Eventually, this will evolve into an actual farmer’s market, where people can come in and sign up for a booth, and open and it be real live with their material, there will actually be money exchanging hands, and *active participants taking part in the training to fill it out* (my emphasis). The size of it adds to a lot of the complexity, and we will continue to expand this.” At the time of this writing, it is unclear whether the plans to open a farmer’s market at the facility were ever carried out. However, food grown at the Afghan Farm at Muscatatuck is sold at the farmer’s market in nearby Butlersville, Indiana.

for US soldiers in Afghanistan who now lives in Detroit, merely a good actor? Or did the entire staging of a fictional bombing, a staging of the Orient, open up a space, however fleeting, where sincere anger was momentarily sanctioned, when a silence was brought to bear? And, what did it mean at the precise moment when that disconsolate silence was finally articulated, when the Afghan could finally *speak*, that it was immediately subordinated and contained as an appurtenance to the training itself, a welcome piercing of the “real” that was *tout de suite* appropriated as usefully *authentic*, and therefore of value?

Earlier, I referred to Muscatatuck as a “site of exchange,” a site that traffics in identities and stereotypes. Masked Arabs and Afghans dance in the streets of the Market Square, stand outside of the plywood Mosque, tend the plots on the Afghan Farm, pose as soldiers working alongside the US, and sit alone in the relative cool of the undercivilized cinder-block hut. Anybody can don these masks, and whether or not one knows it, everybody is already part of the masquerade as soon as they pass through the gate at Muscatatuck; every movement is a productive *and appreciated* performance. To paraphrase and slightly contort Judith Butler in another light, the Other at Muscatatuck is not the limit of a military imagination in an unreachable alterity; rather, *the Other constitutes the site of the military imagination’s self-elaboration*.¹⁴ In other words, there is an “identity-in-difference,” where difference is presupposed, and hence *excluded*; the Other becomes the *veiled basis* of a particular militarized identity, one that can be put to work and stand in here and now for what a soldier or civilian working in a counterinsurgency may or may not encounter in the battlefields of Afghanistan or Iraq. In this regard, it is probably more useful to refer to the Father as a lack, as the ~~afghan~~, who overcome by emotion thought he had finally found a moment to actually say *something* in this madhouse, but whose appropriated words kept him nefariously in the role of the Afghan Father forever silenced, consigned permanently to reflecting the power of the military imagination. Indeed, the ~~afghan~~ became a “lesson

¹⁴ “This is an Other that constitutes, not the limit of masculinity in a feminine alterity, but the site of a masculine self-elaboration.” (Butler, 1990: 44)

learned,” which underscores the important difference between *being* an identity, and *having* an identity.¹⁵

It is on this stage of Muscatatuck that a whole matrix of behaviours and performances are put to work and function, as it were, like a scratched record repeating itself—everybody plays a part, sucked into the whirlpool despite one’s will, pulled in from around the edges as a “real” or “fake” journalist, soldier, Afghan, crying mother, or even researcher—all become props and participants in the rhythm and melody of playing-war. All are made, as Said pointed out, to stand in for the whole that is the East, the part who is the Arab and Afghan. Identities are circulated and the more stage presence here the better. There’s an insatiable desire for all that hustle and bustle, for the complex, the uncertain, and the unexpected... a desire for the SEAL who doesn’t quite know how to deal with a situation and forgets his lines; a desire for the “Afghan Father” who falls out of character and adds a whole element of surprise to the play, thus making the scene *all the more effective*. It’s a machine that works in fits and starts (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972), and vulnerability is all part of the show; with or without the mask, the pain *works*. This is war. And, it is in this regard that Muscatatuck, whose former lives dwell and persist in the detritus, is a living wall closed off from the real world with, paradoxically, an appetite for constantly *folding in* the real. In this militarized hall of mirrors a lone welcome sign hangs above

¹⁵ I borrow this useful distinction on *being* and *having* from Butler and the conceptual distinction she draws from Lacan on *being* a Phallus and *having* a Phallus. Butler writes:

“‘Being’ the Phallus and ‘having’ the Phallus denote divergent sexual positions, or nonpositions (impossible positions, really), within language. To ‘be’ the Phallus is to be the ‘signifier’ of the desire of the Other and *to appear* as this signifier. In other words, it is to be the object, the Other of a (heterosexualized) masculine desire, but also to represent or reflect that desire... For women to ‘be’ the Phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through “being” its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity. By claiming that the Other that lacks the Phallus is the one who *is* the Phallus, Lacan clearly suggests that power is wielded by this feminine position of not-having, that the masculine subject who ‘has’ the Phallus requires this Other to confirm and, hence, be the Phallus in its ‘extended’ sense... The Symbolic order creates cultural intelligibility through the mutually exclusive position of ‘having’ the Phallus (the position of men) and ‘being’ the Phallus (the paradoxical position of women)... Every effort to establish identity within the terms of this binary disjunction of ‘being’ and ‘having’ returns to the inevitable ‘lack’ and ‘loss’ that ground their phantasmatic construction and mark the incommensurability of the Symbolic and the real (Butler, 1990: 44).”

the door of the counterinsurgency dream world, and it reads: “Abandon *Nothing* All Ye Who Enter Here!”

2 The Afterlives of Counterinsurgency

“Counterinsurgency is another word for brotherly love.”

Quote attributed to Major General Edward Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars*, 1972

“It looks like Afghans were created by God to be killed by human machines. We don’t feel safe anywhere, even at home... I am telling all enemies of Afghanistan, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, to gather one day and use all power against the Afghan people and kill us in one go. That would be kind to all Afghans—they are killing us every day, which is painful—kill us in one go.”

Niamatullah, schoolteacher in Afghanistan, quoted in *New York Times*, August 26, 2009

2.1 Introduction

WHEN the US Army and Marine Corps published the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24* (FM 3-24) in December 2006, Baghdad was burning. For years, while Coalition officials were nested in the Green Zone, scrupulously overseeing a privatization bonanza of the Iraqi oil industry and public sector, a powerful insurgency and civil war was taking root in western and southern Iraq, fuelled by growing popular resistance to the US occupation (Chandrasekaran, 2007; Klein, 2008). Throughout 2004 and 2005, US officials within the Coalition Provisional Authority and Defense Department were left scratching their heads at the unwelcoming animus of Iraqis who never quite greeted the “freedom loving” Coalition soldiers with the rose-filled streets promised to American audiences. While quickly running out of options to stem violence in an Iraq spiraling quickly out of control with civil war, a group of self-described “soldier-scholars” from around the country convened in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas to revive the dead spirit of counterinsurgency doctrine, which had long been repressed in military circles since its strategic failure in the Vietnam era. The *rapprochement* with counterinsurgency was designed by its advocates to address an area where Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s Pentagon had proven utterly inept: the pacification and governance of an occupied Iraqi population.

The governance of occupied populations—which has a dubious track record, and yet is still seen as a basic requirement for any country wishing to play imperial superpower abroad—was famously a secondary concern in Iraq for the post-invasion planners of the Department of Defense and Pentagon. By promising victorious warfare on the cheap, with minimal costs and casualties, Rumsfeld’s Pentagon had oriented its resources towards the experimental excesses of the so-called “revolution in military affairs” (Ek, 2000). A veritable growth industry in its own right, with fantastic visions of decentralized and dexterous ground forces, insurmountable air-war and surveillance capacity, and high-technology combat systems dutifully manned by privatized bands of lansquenets, along with a few thousand techie mil-nerds diligently plotting death for the Long War on their computer screens, the forces within the Pentagon and the Defense Department saw little reason to spend time on questions related to the governance of a post-invasion Iraq. In their minds, Iraq, much like Afghanistan in late-2001, was predicted to be a “quick and easy” stop along the journey to winning the “War on Terror”—a remarkable and deadly fantasy for the victims of such hubris (Gordon and Trainor, 2006; Ricks, 2006).

While the public face of the RMA industry produced wonderfully colorful exegeses and techno-pornographic images of US dominance through the sci-fi weaponry of Future Combat Systems, a more tangible and darker reality was taking shape on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan. A wholesale distribution of death was underway: over 100,000 civilian deaths from Coalition and insurgent forces, a destabilizing refugee exodus, the destructive and dehumanizing urbicide of Fallujah (Graham, 2005), terrorizing night raids on Iraqi homes, walled-off neighborhoods, long lines for gasoline, and a ubiquitous network of checkpoints and roadblocks intermingled with the violent everyday vagaries of the “counter-city” of Baghdad (Graham, 2010; Gregory, 2008a; cf. Foucault, 1977). American officials exacerbated the conflict by superimposing a vulgar orientalist framework to “understand” and govern Iraqis—framing the insurgency as emblematic of a “timeless” internal

conflict between Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish tribes—in order to explain away the rise in turbulent violence. With regard to this ethnically defined orientalist framework, journalist Nir Rosen has written (see also Chapter 3):

Iraqis were adapting to the American view of Iraq as a collection of sects and trying to fit into the political system the Americans were building around that idea. [Outside] observers disregard the fact that the American presence actively created many of these problems and “read history backward” in an attempt to minimize the American role in Iraq (Rosen, 2010: 21).

The botched invasion was giving rise to a reckless occupation and brutal insurgency.

It was around this time in late 2004 that a group of soldiers and officers on the ground in Iraq, and at Fort Leavenworth and the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania began to revisit and retool the principles of counterinsurgency. Engaging in a superficially low form of history—searching for historical analogies to the chaos in Iraq—these “soldier scholars” mined lessons from the Algerian War (1954-1962) and the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) to glean techniques for pacification that could be readily employed in Baghdad and Anbar Province. After reviving an apocryphal image of T.E. Lawrence and his “Twenty-Seven Articles,” and poring through the writings of David Galula (1964), Robert Trinquier (1964), and Sir Robert Thompson (1966), the group of soldiers hosted an unprecedented series of collaborations between officers and soldiers, policymakers, academics and journalists, combining “history” with field experience garnered on the ground in Iraq¹⁶ to produce, after a series of widely circulated and read drafts, the final version of the *FM 3-24* in late 2006 (Clemis, 2009; Michaels and Ford, 2011). Emulating what had become the new institutional *modus operandi* at a Pentagon that was trying to refashion itself as a “learning organization”—personal anecdote and the

¹⁶ Ricks 2006 is the single best source on how field experience figured into the making of FM 3-24.

rehearsal of “fact,” masquerading as analysis—counterinsurgency advocates quickly dubbed their doctrine “the graduate level of warfare” (Ucko, 2009).

The reception of the *Counterinsurgency Manual* in the media in 2007 was nothing less than extraordinary. Deemed the “author and force” behind the manual, General David Petraeus instantly became a star in policy circles, celebrated for both his political prowess and deft use of PowerPoint. Following an intense public relations blitz with Petraeus as the face, the manual became perhaps the most widely read document ever produced by the US military, and certainly the most influential. Published with academic credentials by the University of Chicago Press, the manual was praised by establishment think-tanks and academics for its “humane” and “culture-friendly” approach to war. Indeed, its “humane” image was the doctrine’s primary appeal. No longer would the “shoot and torture first, ask questions later” approach exhorted by Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney be the primary recourse for soldiers. Rather, the strategy was oriented towards “winning the hearts and minds” of occupied populations with development projects and accountable governing structures. Academics, humanitarians and commentators alike fawned over the strategy, with its emphasis on respecting “cultural difference,” and extolling such precepts as “sometimes, the more force is used, the less effective it is” (*FM 3-24*, 1-150). As is well known, and notwithstanding evidence to the contrary (see below), General Petraeus and “his” counterinsurgency doctrine have been credited with staving off a full blown civil war in Iraq, via the success of “the surge” in 2007. Under Obama, the doctrine was implemented in Afghanistan in the late summer and fall of 2009, with little tactical success but, to be sure, with many dead civilians and razed villages scattered throughout the countryside (see Chapter 5).

This introductory chapter begins with an historical account of counterinsurgency, which is divided into two “eras” spanning the twentieth century: (1) classical, and (2) late-modern counterinsurgency. Moreover, I divide the U.S. military’s experience in counterinsurgency into three

stages which span both the classical and late-modern modes, with the first stage beginning at the turn of the twentieth century through the “banana wars” and up to World War II; a second stage in Vietnam and its aftermath; and, a third stage in present-day Iraq and Afghanistan. The chapter then moves on to discuss the two primary methods of counterinsurgency by the United States, identified as *population displacement* and *training territorial militias*. The chapter proceeds to interrogate why counterinsurgency has been revisited in the present, where I argue that it is used as a strategy to stem global instabilities produced by the processes of globalization. This is followed by a review of how counterinsurgency has been critical conceptualized within the social sciences and international relations. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the dissertation.

2.2 What is Counterinsurgency?

Despite the force of the public relations rhetoric around “hearts and minds”, development and governance, this dissertation interrogates what one could call the more practical “technical register” by which the US military conducts counterinsurgency. Counterinsurgency is a theory of internal warfare strongly rooted in the British and French colonial tradition of military-driven pacification. I prefer to draw a distinction between “classical” counterinsurgency as conducted by the British, French and the United States through the Vietnam War, and its late-modern iteration implemented by the US in Afghanistan and Iraq. Classical counterinsurgency is usually attributed to the works of the French officers in Algeria, David Galula (1964) and Robert Trinquier (1964), as well as British imperial officers Sir Robert Thompson (1966), Maj. Gen. Charles Gwynn (1934), and Colonel C.E. Callwell (1996 [1890]), and was a form of military imperial policing devised in the late-nineteenth century and refined in the early part of the twentieth century to quell colonial uprisings and revolutions which threatened the colonial order.

In the United States, one can differentiate between three different eras of counterinsurgency. The first two eras were very much in the “classical” mold of counterinsurgency. The first era comprises the forty-seven year neocolonial US occupation of the Philippines (1899-1946), the nineteen year occupation of Haiti (1915-1934), and various interventions conducted by the Marines in the Caribbean and Central and South America to suppress rebellions and establish “preferred” orders in what are called the “banana wars” (Langley, 2001; McCoy, 2009; Renda, 2001). The hallmark of this era, laid out most succinctly in the 1940 US Marines *Small Wars Manual*, was a constabulary approach to counterinsurgency, whereby military doctrine was more concerned with establishing control and order through methods of martial law, military rule, population disarmament, and “search and destroy” sweeps by Marines in jungle and mountain theaters. US Marines were the primary force used in such “unconventional” settings, and was organized as mobile units that could carry out tasks ranging from establishing a military government to surviving for weeks in the elements. Marines classified such wars as “wars of intervention,” meaning the “intervention in the internal, or intervention in the external affairs of another state (*Small Wars Manual*, 1940: 12).” More times than not, this meant the suppression of popular movements and democratically governments where aspirations of the “have-nots” ran antithetical to the machinations of the United States “good neighbor” policies.

The first era of counterinsurgency also had an attendant form of colonial knowledge. Before the Second World War, the dominant conception of insurgencies was interpreted through a racialized epistemology rooted in the US neocolonial practices of the first counterinsurgency era (McCoy and Scarano, 2009; Kaplan and Pease, 1994). For example, according to the U.S. Marines *Small Wars Manual*, the weight placed on “racial psychology” is foundational for understanding the dynamics of insurgency.¹⁷ As the *Manual* states (1940: 1-13b.):

¹⁷ See Chapter 3 for the partial continuities of “racial psychology” in present-day counterinsurgency with the determination to “decode tribal dynamics” as a means to fighting insurgents.

The knowledge of the people at any given moment in history involves an understanding of their environment, and above all, their past. The influence of racial psychology on the destiny of a people appears plainly in the history of those subject to perpetual revolutions. When composed *largely of mixed races*—that is to say, of individuals whose diverse heredities have dissociated their ancestral characteristics—*those populations present a special problem. This class is always difficult to govern, if not ungovernable, owing to the absence of a fixed character* (my emphasis).

As Mary Renda discusses in her book *Taking Haiti* (2001), the role of counterinsurgents was to adopt a paternal disposition towards the “natives” in order to facilitate the development of a native “fixed” character.

The second U.S era of counterinsurgency begins immediately after World War II and runs through the Vietnam War. Immediately after the Second World War, the United States revisited counterinsurgency doctrine from the French, British, and German experiences in “partisan warfare” in order to gather techniques for conducting guerrilla wars behind (Communist) enemy lines (McClintock, 1992). The primary concern of the United States military was to assemble and synthesize a set of tactics for “special warfare” forces that would be operative on the fringes of otherwise conventional theaters; for example, sabotage, assassinations, hostage-taking, intelligence gathering, and the funding of partisan guerrilla forces deep within “enemy” territories. The perceived (and manufactured) “threat” of the Soviet Union prompted OSS (later the CIA) and intelligence veterans of clandestine operations in Europe and the Pacific during World War II to lobby for the creation of “special forces” to conduct covert operations as a means to prepare the ground for potential conventional force invasions in the Soviet bloc in Europe and Asia (Rudgers, 2000; Carter 2002). The techniques gleaned were forged, tried, and tested by the US military in a host of large (e.g., the Korean War) and small “wars”, as well as covert operations immediately following World War II, particularly in the suppression of the Huk

rebellion in the Philippines, the 1954 overthrow of Guatemalan President Arbenz, the CIA-sponsored assassination of the Congolese independence hero and elected prime minister Patrice Lumumba, and the botched 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion (Odom, 1991).

The second era of counterinsurgency reached its height with the Kennedy Administration's fascination with covert operations in general, and counterinsurgency doctrine in particular (Blaufarb, 1977; Shafer, 1989). The Kennedy administration's turn to counterinsurgency stemmed from the belief that nuclear deterrence only had a limited effect on "containing" the Soviet Union (Carroll, 2006). The greater Communist threat in the Kennedy imaginary was the proliferation of "brush fire" wars that could "nibble away at the fringe of the Free World's territory and strength, until our security has been eroded in piecemeal fashion" (Kennedy, 1950; quoted in Clemis, 2009: 161). Since the "Communist threat" was perceived to be as much a political and economic threat as much as a military threat, a major innovation of the Kennedy Administration was the coupling of civilian-led economic development programs to military counterinsurgency via the "modernization theory" popularized by Walt Rostow, Lucien Pye and Alexis Johnson. As Clemis (2009, 164) has argued,

Nation building and COIN [counterinsurgency] converged during the Kennedy administration. Walt Rostow argued that modernization was the 'grand arena of revolutionary change'. Characterizing Communism as 'a disease' created by the postcolonial transition towards modernity and Communist insurgents as 'scavengers' of the modernization process, he believed that the United States has a 'special responsibility of leadership' in helping underdeveloped nations modernize. If Communism was, as Rostow and others believed, a disease of modernization, and wars of national liberation were the symptoms it produced, nation building and COIN were believed to be the cure... Internal reform policies aimed at political economic, social and psychological development, they

believed, could blunt Communist subversion within the beleaguered societies, and establish natural allies in the fight against Soviet and Chinese expansion (Clemis, 2009: 164).

The first decade of the counterinsurgency doctrine in the Vietnam War mirrored this modernization approach. There were three key innovations developed in Vietnam would factor into contemporary counterinsurgency approaches, particularly the “rural insurgency” in Afghanistan. First, was the “strategic hamlet program” instituted in 1961 and later managed (as the “rural community development program”) by the civilian-military agency Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) headed by Robert Komer. The idea behind the “village hamlets” was to manufacture a “neutral and passive population” in south Vietnam by forcibly resettling thousands of rural peasants in guarded “hamlets,” or what some have rightly identified as concentration camps (Glassman, 1992) (see below for discussion on population displacement as a method in counterinsurgency, including in Vietnam).

A second innovation by the U.S. military in the Vietnam was the use of computers, electronic surveillance, and statistical analysis to “predict” insurgent activity (Gregory, 2011; Harrison, 1988; cf. Deitchman, 2008). CORDS was the first counterinsurgency program to extensively use sophisticated computerized collation programs with punch-card fed databases to track, analyze *and predict* population movement through resource control programs, ethnographic survey data, census survey data, and identification card programs—what was called the “Hamlet Evaluation System” (see Chapter 6).

A third innovation out of the Vietnam War was the knowledge production within the U.S. military on the dynamics of insurgencies, what this work refers to as the “technical register” of counterinsurgency. I mentioned above that prior to the Second World War, the dominant epistemological framing of insurgencies was through a racialized lens. After the Second World War,

insurgencies were characterized in an entirely different manner, marking a real epistemological and ontological shift in their conceptualization, which had important material effects on how they were analyzed and fought. While racial and cultural stereotypes persisted in their own way even up to the present day, the dynamics of insurgencies were interpreted altogether differently. Instead, Military planners began to focus on *modeling* insurgencies, distilling their organizational integrity, and quantifying the more generalized “human factors.” An entirely new set of imagery derived from the biological and chemical sciences was deployed (see Figure 1), with the military now framing functional underground organizations in “compartmentalized cell structures” that were “highly decentralized” and “operating autonomously” in order to “reduce vulnerability” (Dept. of Army, 1965: 19-20). The appeal of a “cellular structure” for insurgents was interpreted to be its built-in “fail-safe” principle: “if one element fails, the consequences to the whole organization will be minimal (*ibid.*: 2). Whole new ways of diagramming insurgencies emerged, as seen below.

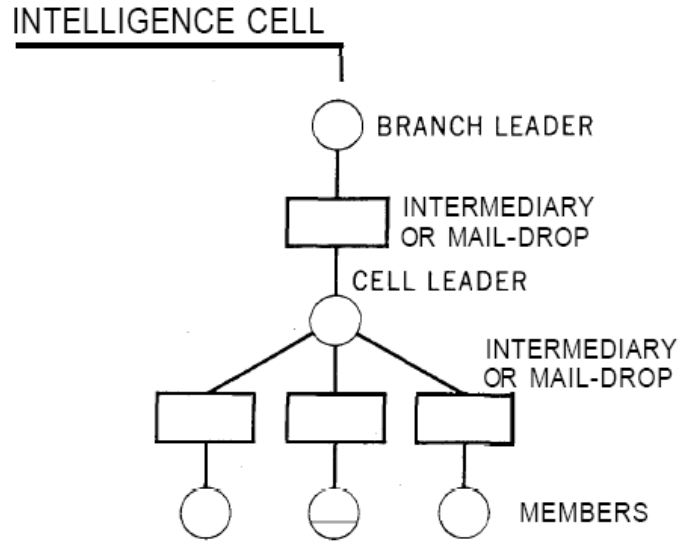


Figure 2. Intelligence cell.

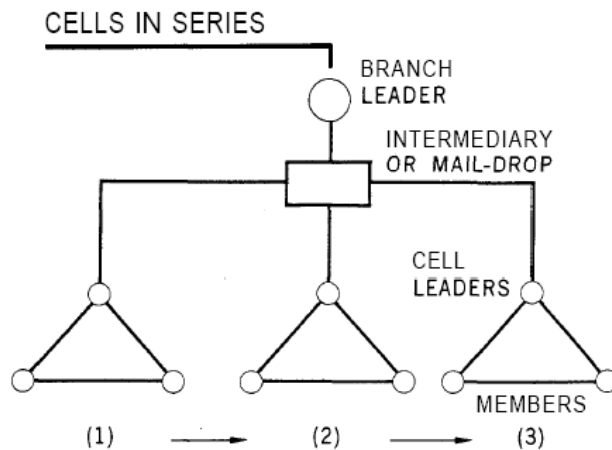


Figure 5. Cells in series.

Figure 8: Interpretation of Underground Insurgencies as Mimicking a Cellular Form (Source: Department of Army, *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies*)

This was the time when governments first began to talk of “terrorist” and “insurgent cell networks.” In this new framing, the power of insurgent organizations no longer lied in their unfixed racial character, but in their networked form, and the unpredictable information, people, and things that circulate in and out of them. In order to combat these underground organizations, a commander had to develop proper countermeasures to tap into the apparent “group behavior” of a population, and work to undermine the

“motivation and behavior” of insurgents that appeals to a broader populace and their environment (i.e., “hearts and minds”; cf. Anderson, 2011a).

I argue that there are as many historical *discontinuities* as continuities between the first two eras of counterinsurgency and the third era, contemporary late-modern counterinsurgency, explored here in this work. While it is easy to draw historical analogies, I suggest in this work that the discontinuities are more important and are marked, if anything, by the profound differences in technologies used between the Vietnam War and the present. In the meantime, it is important to quickly survey the *methods* by which “effective” counterinsurgencies are conducted.

2.3 Methods of Counterinsurgency: Population Displacement and Territorial Militias

Despite the discontinuities between the classical and contemporary counterinsurgency, the United State military has nevertheless drawn extensively on the colonial experiences of Great Britain France and their innovations in developing the contours of the doctrine (Khalili 2010). The French and British approaches to counterinsurgency, despite their differences (see Marston and Malkasian, 2009; Rid and Keany, 2009), were concerned the “asymmetric” character of “small wars,” meaning the disparity between overwhelming firepower colonial armies and the “irregular” approach of “hit and run” tactics used by anti-colonial fighters who could easily blend in and hide among an occupied population. From the perspective of the British and French militaries, the problems they faced were multifaceted. On the one hand, they were facing an adversary that had several advantages: rebels tended to operate in small, mobile bands or “gangs”; they were indigenous to the population, and could thus live among them; they lacked a visual register in the form of uniforms or badges; and they could engage in “spectacular” violence that threw the perception that colonial powers could maintain order into doubt. On the other hand, the rebels and/or revolutionaries were likely giving voice to real

grievances among the occupied population, making the colonial project as much a civil problem as a military one. Indeed, Galula defined an insurgency as “the pursuit of the policy of a party, inside as country, by every means. It is not like an ordinary war—a ‘continuation of the policy by other means’ [Clausewitz]—because an insurgency can start long before the insurgent resorts to the use of force (Galula, 1964: 1).”

As a strategic doctrine, classical counterinsurgency was theoretically devised to (1) separate rebels, revolutionaries, and insurgents from the occupied population in order to “neutralize” them, and (2) to set up functional civil governing structures for establishing legitimacy and control, in order to address and quell the grievances which gave rise to such rebellious tendencies in the first place. Thus, the implication of Galula’s definition of insurgency becomes clear. As Alan Cromartie argues, Galula’s definition understood insurgencies as “violent extensions of local *politics*; they are, in fact, a kind of civil war” (cf. Schmitt, 2007: 14-17).

Galula’s distinctive approach to the military problem was to insist on seeing this conflict from within: to act within the system of local politics through a party he had moulded for this purpose. This insistence on abstracting from the wider political context (composed, for example, by formal or informal empires) was a brilliant conceptual innovation; it lent his thought a *universal quality that eased its intellectual transplantation* (Cromartie, 2012: 96; my emphasis).

For Galula, whose influence on contemporary U.S. military thinking is perhaps only rivaled by his contemporary successor David Kilcullen (see Chapter 4), the essence of counterinsurgency was really about two outcomes: population control and killing insurgents (Belcher, 2012: 260). In Galula’s writings and classical counterinsurgency in general (including the U.S.’s “small wars” approach during the Cold War), the task of the colonial powers was to put forward a political programme that could adequately compete with an insurgency’s political programme for hegemony, which meant a

counterinsurgent “arm[ing] himself with a competing cause” (Galula, 1964: 71). In practical terms, Galula’s approach turned into a mirroring the *perceived* political technologies of the USSR: establishing an “active core of loyal supporters” (a vanguard), setting up a Party, and conducting propaganda and politics by day, while fighting insurgents in a “clinical style” by night. Thus, a victory for Galula was not merely the destruction of an insurgencies political organization, but rather an ideological isolation of it:

We can now define negatively and positively what is a victory for the counterinsurgent. A victory is not the destruction in a given area of the insurgent’s forces and his political organization. If one is destroyed, it will be locally re-created by the other; if both are destroyed, they will both be re-created by a new fusion of insurgents from the outside... A victory is that plus the permanent isolation of the insurgent from the population, isolation not enforced upon the population but maintained by and with the population... Such a victory may be indirect; it is nonetheless decisive (Galula, 1964: 54).

As historians of counterinsurgency have noted, while population control, ideological isolation and the killing of insurgents were the intended outcomes of counterinsurgency, there were two primary and practical innovations for achieving this effect: **population displacement** and **establishing territorial militias** (Glassman, 1992; McClintock, 1992; McCoy, 2009). These two innovations thematically frame the structure of this dissertation. While pioneered by the French in Algeria (Rid, 2010) and the British in Malaysia, Kenya and Rhodesia (Hack, 2012; Sioh, 2010; White, 2004), the practices of population displacement and arming mobile (territorial) militias have been refined and polished by the United States.

Population displacement and training so-called “local defense forces” have two different, yet beneficial effects towards “victory” in the eyes of both classical and contemporary counterinsurgents. Population displacement (or “clearing”) removes a civilian population away from an

“area of operations” theoretically allowing maximum exposure to insurgents (if they have not left with the population) and their infrastructure (see Chapter 5). Moreover, counterinsurgents argue that insurgencies thrive on a population’s support, and that a military’s primary task is to cut off that relation. The British journalist and hawk Edgar O’Ballance described the US tactic during the Greek Civil War this way:

Under American insistence energetic counter-measures were taken... and one of the most effective of these was the systematic removal of whole sections of the population. This was more far-reaching than is usually realized. It removed the people, it demarcated a ‘front line,’ it prevented ‘back infiltration’ and it caused a blanket of silence to descend. Without population to support and succor him, the guerrilla is a fish out of water; he might as well be fighting in a foreign or hostile country. (O’Ballance, 1966; quoted in McClintock, 1992: 13-14)

During the Vietnam War, the United States put this strategy to full effect in a strategy referred to in some military circles as “draining the swamp,” meaning the removal (and terrorizing) of civilian populations in the countryside of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia through a variety of measures, including bombings (Hewitt, 1983; see Huntington, 1972). Population displacement in Vietnam was supplemented by two attendant strategies, ecological destruction (to prevent cover and future farming and livelihoods that were fueling the NLF and PAVN) and the institutionalization of a “village hamlet” program discussed above (Glassman, 1992). In Afghanistan, several villages and parts of towns have been “cleared”—literally—by US forces in Helmand and Kandahar provinces (see Chapter 5), in an eerie replication US “scorched earth” tactics in Vietnam, as well as the Soviet strategy of “rubbleization” during its war in Afghanistan when the Soviets “calculated to destroy villages and basic infrastructure, forc[ing] people to flee in great numbers (Goodson, 2002: 60).” Population displacement is intended to “clear” an area, either temporarily or permanently, in order to “purify” a space, or to

manufacture what could be called a “*tabula rosa* effect,” where a military can create the “start from scratch” conditions to establish a security regime. This form of urbicide/domicide is discussed at length in Chapter 5.

The second innovation, the institutionalization of mobile and territorial militias, while complimentary of population displacement in some instances, has another effect in so far as “security” is established and “held” at the local level. As noted above, the “local” has assumed a position center-stage since Galula’s formulation of (counter)insurgency as a form of “local politics,” thus anticipating Michel Foucault’s (2003) broadening of Clausewitz’s dictum of “war is politics by other means” by equating war with internal pacification (Giddens, 1985; Neocleous, 2008). For counterinsurgents, local defense forces optimally operating at a village level is perhaps the most critical component of a counterinsurgency, comprising an entire chapter in FM 3-24. One of the primary authors of contemporary counterinsurgency doctrine, John Nagl, once wrote that, “If, as The US Army/Marine Corps Field Manual, *Counterinsurgency* (FM 3-24) states, counterinsurgency is ‘the graduate level of war,’ then advisors to indigenous forces are the professors of war (Nagl, 2010: 160).” A high premium is placed on militias because they are trained to be homogenous and partisan, and thus willing (theoretically) to “defend” that partisanship violently on a local level—meaning they are as much political instruments as military. In a context where the power of the state is limited, as in an insurgency, training militias and police forces from the ground-up is framed as an important “stop-gap” measure by counterinsurgents (see Chapter 3 and 4).

Thus, “protecting the population”—which has a highly particular meaning in counterinsurgency either in the form of displacement or through the establishment of local militias—is central to counterinsurgency doctrine, operationally resulting in the blurring of civilian and combat spaces (Khalili, 2010). This blurring is justified as inevitable by counterinsurgency advocates since warfare now happens “amongst the people” (Smith, 2005; Kilcullen 2008). The focusing on population

within counterinsurgency doctrine has an analytical element that focuses explicitly on refining the so-called “kill-chain” and using popular support as a “force multiplier.” Even the “hearts and minds” mantra loses its “touchy feely” connotation when one actually reads *FM 3-24*, “Once the unit settles into the [area of operations], its next task is to build trusted networks. This is the true meaning of the phrase “hearts and minds,” which comprises two components. ‘Hearts’ means persuading people that their best interests are served by COIN success. ‘Minds’ means convincing them that the force can protect them and that resisting it is pointless. Note that neither concerns whether people like Soldiers and Marines (*FM 3-24*, 2006: A-26). In this regard, Christian Parenti offers a useful summation of the doctrine in practice:

Counterinsurgency targets—*pace* Foucault—the “capillary” level of social relations. It ruptures and tears (but rarely remakes) the intimate social relations among people, their ability to cooperate, and the lived texture of solidarity—in other words, the bonds that comprise society. Conventional warfare seeks to control territory and destroy the opposing military. Counterinsurgency seeks to control society. It is thus “population-centric” (Parenti, 2011: 23)

The focus on the “population” is an important indication of how the United States military currently conceptualizes warfare, and helps to explain why counterinsurgency was adopted as a strategic doctrine in Iraq and Afghanistan.

2.4 Why Counterinsurgency?

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, analysts both within and outside the military began to reconsider the contours of power in a world where the heightened mobility of people and things, as well as the circulation and global integration of commodity exchange and markets, seemed to diminish the traditional importance of borders. In the

1990s, when the triumphant geoeconomic discourses of globalization were at their peak, several analysts on the left and right started to give cautionary tales on the nefarious externalities of globalization—namely the proliferation of transnational criminal networks, urban slums, the ease of black-market weapons sales, the arming of child soldiers, and the rise of so-called “new wars” (Kaldor, 1999; Münkler, 2005) in the former Soviet states and global south where the emergence of warlords and paramilitaries was occurring in weak states where the monopoly on violence was faltering (Balibar, 2008; Bauman, 2001; Duffield, 2001; Kaplan, 1994; Hardt and Negri, 2004; Nordstrom, 2004; for a critique of this global North/South construct, see Gregory 2010a).

The apparent decline in power of states in a globalized world seemed to be reified by military analysts like the influential Israeli military historian Martin van Creveld (1991) who argued that most of the wars after World War II were “low-intensity wars” between powerful military states and guerrillas, and that more times than not the powerful states lost; e.g., the U.S. war in Vietnam. With the decline of states, the organization of war changed, with writers like former NATO commander Rupert Smith boldly stating that “war no longer exists.” Instead, a mixture of diffuse actors navigated the multicentric, post-Cold War stage of late-modern war: private security contractors, child soldiers, revolutionary forces, non-state actors, identity movements, religious fundamentalist, warlords, criminal gangs, etc. To underscore the seriousness and unpredictability of this mixture, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates wrote in the major establishment journal *Foreign Affairs* in 2010 that, “the most lethal threats... to safety and security [in the future] are likely to emanate from states that cannot adequately govern themselves or secure their territory.” It is within these supposed “hot spots” (Barnett, 2002; cf. Roberts et al. 2003) where liberal governance and market economies are least stable or non-existent that Western militaries, particularly the United States, are preparing for future battles. Indeed, in many of these places (Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya, Syria, El Salvador), clandestine battles have already begun.

This panoramic worldview has become a common stance among governments, NGOs, and militaries in the global North, and forms what Caroline Croser (2011: 4) has called the “holy trinity” of transformational themes that shape current US military policy: “the importance of globalization and networked societies; the increasing importance of small-scale conflict; and the impact of new technologies on the method of making war.” There have been two primary responses by the US military to these themes: the so-called “revolution in military affairs” (RMA) and counterinsurgency. My concern in this work is the second response of counterinsurgency, although it is important to stress, and as will be clear throughout this dissertation, that it’s a mistake to really differentiate counterinsurgency from RMA (Gregory 2008a). RMA was the first response of “force transformation” to the first theme identified by Croser of globalization and networked societies. In the 1990s, military planners were smitten by the “complex” organizational transformations occurring in the business world (Thrift, 1999), particularly the movement towards modular, networked production frameworks. For highly influential military officers like Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowski (the Director of Force Transformation in the Bush Administration) and John Garstka, a complexly networked world required a network-centric form of war (Ek, 2000; Dillon and Reid, 2000, 2001). In their widely cited essay on the matter, they identified three shifts required for future “network-centric” force transformation: “(1) The shift in force from the platform to the network; (2) The shift from viewing actors as independent to viewing them as part of a continuously adapting ecosystem; (3) The importance of making strategic choices to adapt or even survive in such changing ecosystems (Cebrowski and Gartska, 1998).” The central promise of this “force transformation, Derek Gregory notes (2010a: 160), is to “fight present and future wars with fewer ground troops through the intensive use of high technology.”

It is hard to underestimate the influence of this RMA reconceptualization (Bousquet, 2009; Gregory, 2010a, 2010c; Lawson, 2011); as indicated above it was the foundation of Rumsfeld and General Tommy Franks’s doctrine in invading Iraq. As Stephen Graham has written, these

“technophilic discourses” – although they are *more* than mere discourses – promote an imaginary where “US forces can continually dominate societies deemed to be their adversaries through their increasingly omnipotent surveillance and ‘situational awareness,’ devastating and precisely-targeted aerial firepower, and the suppression and degradation of communications and fighting ability of any opposing forces... US military operations [are imagined] to be a giant, integrated, ‘network enterprise’—a ‘just-in-time’ system of posthuman, cyborganised warriors that utilizes many of the principles of logistics chain management and new technology-based tracking that are so dominant within contemporary management models (Graham, 2008: 29).” Even though the dramatic rise of counterinsurgency doctrine in 2005 and 2006 seemed to be a rebuke of the distanced, computer-centric approach of RMA for a more experiential, hands-on program focused on governance and development, the forms of conceptualizations of “battlespace” attendant to RMA never went away; e.g., conceptualizing insurgencies as networks, the uses of computer-based social network analysis to model insurgent activity, and proliferation of databases and biometrics to produce trackable data signatures of occupied populations in Iraq and Afghanistan (see Chapter 6).

The second response to the “holy trinity” of force transformation themes was contemporary counterinsurgency. In the eyes of the military, what gives the themes of networked globalization, small wars, and the impact of new technologies such power is the degree of *uncertainty* they generate in waging war. In the so-called “complex battlespaces” that have consumed the imaginations for military analysts for over a decade, everything related to a conflict is in constant flux, from physical terrain and weather, to popular loyalties and enemy maneuvers; hence, the premium placed in counterinsurgency upon governance, development and, perhaps most especially, intelligence and information on insurgents. The precarity of information and intelligence in insurgencies is a paramount concern (see Flynn, 2010). For example, one of the most popular essays to circulate within military circles has been an essay called “The Big Suck” by a Marine in Iraq David Morris. The essay

served an important ideological function by reproducing the old canard on uncertainty in the labyrinth Orient, with Morris (2007) writing: “To spend time in Iraq is to acquire a visceral understanding of the flexibility of information and the power of place over knowledge. What is true in Ramadi is not necessarily true in Iskandariyah. What is true in Baghdad is almost never true in Basra. *In Iraq, information is tribal like the people who live there.* It keeps its own company. Things only seem absolutely true in Washington. The closer you get to the killing, the harder it is to know anything for sure.” According to David Kilcullen, whose writings in relation to “complex battlespaces” I explore in depth (Chapter 4), this context of complexity and the need for information to decode the environment is the very stuff of counterinsurgency:

[T]he complexity of insurgency environments seems to be dramatically greater even than in conventional warfare. Counterinsurgency operations, then, invoke a higher than ‘normal’ degree of ambiguity: the traditional concepts of friend and enemy are blurred, with organizations and groups switching sides rapidly, or even operating simultaneously as *both* friend and enemy... populations in insurgency negotiate a complex process of continuously morphing contingent identity, where each person’s or group’s status (friend, enemy, neutral, ally or opponent, bystander, sympathizer) changes moment by moment, depending on the nature of the groups with which it is interacting... thus, identity in insurgency is highly fluid (Kilcullen 2010: 143-144).

From this perspective, intelligence operates as a way of seeing a population, at once a set of existential and computerized procedures (such as those developed under the auspices of the RMA) to establish forms of sensibility and perception, and a powerful mechanism that works through particular modes of cultural iteration and signification to establish transparency within apparently foreign and “opaque” environments (see Chapter 3 & 6). The role of intelligence is *to make visible*, albeit in a highly particular ways, the fluid conditions in “complex environments” that are at once dynamic,

deteriorating, and changing “moment by moment.” One can see that a certain intentionality resides within the practice of intelligence to render a *sustainable repetition of appearance* (see Chapter 4).¹⁸ Indeed, it is precisely this heightened concern within the U.S. military over the ability of insurgents and terrorists to potentially *dissimulate* their appearances, identities, and actions in an area of operations which poses the highest threat. This competence by insurgents in “small wars” to hide, deceive, camouflage, conceal, to blend in as “normal” and inconspicuous subjects within a population—or worse, to masquerade as members of a police or army force (e.g., the recent “green-on-blue” attacks)—that militaries put such a high premium on “intelligence” (see Chapters 4 and 6).

It is important to stress at the outset the perceived uncertainty of “complex environments” in unconventional “low-intensity” wars because *in theory*, counterinsurgency, or what are sometimes called “stability operations,” is intended as an *ordering principle to reign in uncertain elements and generate instead a high degree of certainty and predictability* (that is, “security”) in an area of operations—particularly in “failing” or unstable states that compromise the global order (Elden, 2009; Roberts et al. 2003).

Thus, several premises are built into contemporary counterinsurgency. First, is the (curious) conceptualization of an occupied population as largely comprised of a “neutral or passive majority” undecided about supporting the insurgency or the US military backed “host” government (see Figure 1). The tacit assumption in this conceptualization is that insurgencies are not

¹⁸ Clausewitz was the first to write on how warfare tends to give things “exaggerated dimensions and unnatural appearances.” (*On War* [1968], Book II, Ch. 2, p. 189). And it is precisely this “fog of uncertainty” that invites the Romantic *masculine* gaze of judgment and interpretation to assume center-stage in both classical and contemporary military doctrine. Clausewitz writes, “War is an area of uncertainty; three quarters thins on which all action in War is based are on lying in a *fog of uncertainty* to a greater or lesser extent. The first thing (needed) here is a fine, piercing mind, to feel out the truth with a measure of its judgment (Book 1, Ch. 3).” Dillon and Reid have rightly noted that “placing radical contingency [i.e., uncertainty] at the heart of order many not only engender a new episteme of the contingent; it regularly also introduces the persona of ‘the genius’, defined, according to Kant at least, as ‘the inborn mental trait (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art’ (2009: 158n.2).”

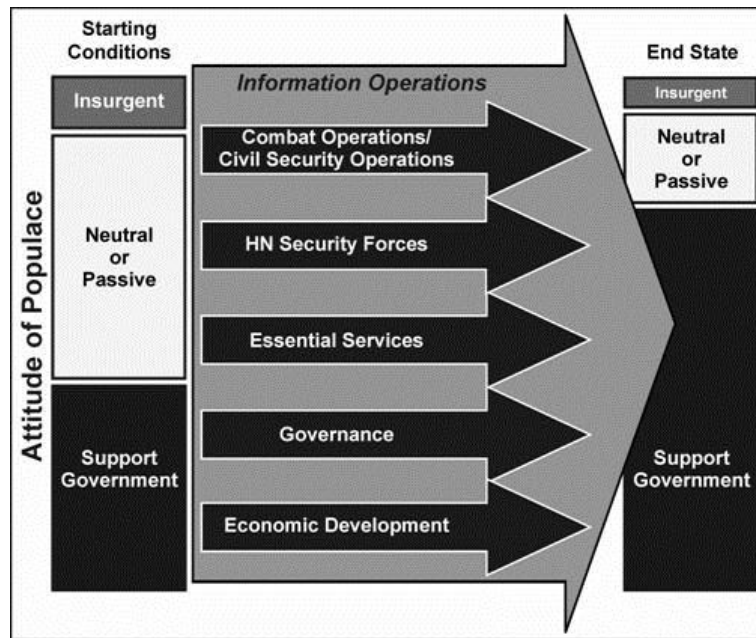


Figure 9: Example of Logical Lines of Operations for a Counterinsurgency Campaign (Source: FM 3-24, 5-1)

authentically indigenous or justifiable in response to U.S. occupation. Rather, the assumption goes, the population only “goes along” with an insurgency because it is coerced into doing so by the insurgents. Population protection, in this regard, is designed to put a halt to that *perceived* coercion. Kilcullen captures (and embodies) this logic: “Convincing threatened populations that we are the winning side, developing genuine partnerships with them, demonstrating that we can protect them from the guerrillas and that their best interests are served by cooperating with us is the critical path in counterinsurgency, because insurgents cannot operate without the support—active, passive, or enforced, of the local population (Kilcullen, 2010: 4). The second assumption or premise after coercion by counterinsurgents is that one can actually find and differentiate between “the population” who are neutral and passive, and insurgents who are monstrous “aliens beyond the pale, meriting whatever fate befalls them” (McClintock, 1992). McClintock traces this assumption back to the post-World War II study by the US military of German counterinsurgency tactics in Russia, where the study “quite extraordinarily [depicts] the German army as the “liberators” of the Russian people,” but whose efforts were too little

too late for the overwhelming “Communist” menace (McClintock, 1992: 63). It is through these two assumptions, a passive and coerced population that can be differentiated from an insurgency, that the second “information operations” column in the – highly schematic – figure above makes sense as the *ideal* technologies for governance in a world of unpredictability, uncertainty, highly fluid disintegration, and radical contingency.

2.5 Conceptualizing Late-Modern Counterinsurgency

In recent years, counterinsurgency doctrine has received a great deal of critical attention and has been interpreted from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Undoubtedly, the bulk of critical inquiry has come from anthropologists and geographers critical of so-called “cultural turn” inaugurated by the doctrine (Bryan, 2010; González, 2009a; González, 2009b; Gregory, 2008b; Kelly *et al.*, 2010; Price, 2011; Wainwright, 2012). In 2006, when it was first revealed that the US military was integrating academics and social scientists in a program called the “Human Terrain System” headed by the military anthropologist Montgomery McFate, a firestorm erupted among anthropologists who had spent the past thirty years attempting to de-couple the discipline and ethnography from its colonial roots. While largely acknowledged to be ineffective, Human Terrain Teams were employed by the US military to put a “human face” on the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as conduct “cultural intelligence” for commanders trying understand the social structure of their operational contexts (see Chapter 3).

In late 2006, a group of critical anthropologists (Hugh Gusterson, Catherine Lutz, Roberto González, among others) formed the Network of Concerned Anthropologists who produced a series of useful pamphlets on “counter-counterinsurgency” (González, 2009; González et al. 2009), outlining the colonial roots of counterinsurgency, and the legacy of anthropologists both working with and against the military in previous campaigns, like Vietnam (cf. Asad, 1973; Deitchman, 1976). In

2007, the Network was able to lobby the Association of American Anthropologists (AAA) to declare that “human terrain” research was an “unacceptable application of anthropological expertise” and “can no longer be considered a legitimate professional exercise of anthropology (AAA, 2007).” In a series of provocative exchanges published in 2007 in *Anthropology Today*, military anthropologists like McFate and Kilcullen nevertheless justified the use of ethnography and social science as a means to mitigate the violence of conventional warfare (Kilcullen, 2007; McFate, 2007). Echoing Lansdale’s famous proclamation that counterinsurgency is a form of “brotherly love,” Kilcullen wrote in response to the issues raised by the Concerned Anthropologists that “field evidence suggests that the more anthropological knowledge is available to counter-insurgents, the more humane their operations (Kilcullen, 2007: 20).”

Despite the importance of this movement, the effects of Human Terrain teams and the so-called “cultural turn” (Heuser, 2007; Porter, 2007) has really been quite limited and miniscule on strategic, operational and tactical levels. Instead, the importance of the “cultural turn” lies, as Derek Gregory has pointed out, in its refinement of the kill-chain by wedding precepts of counterinsurgency to the techno-apparatus of the RMA (2008b: 21). One can already see this, for example, in the recent movement towards “human terrain mapping” and geospatial intelligence, whereby military analysts utilize GIS and remote-sensing technologies to map possible population movements caused by factors such as military maneuvers or natural disasters (Jean, 2010), which to be sure has a long legacy in the US military (cf. Barnes and Crampton, 2011).

Another line of analysis on counterinsurgency has been an abundant and thorough interrogation of the counterinsurgency manual itself (Anderson, 2011a; Ansorge, 2010; Clemis, 2009; Cromartie, 2012; Kienscherf, 2012; Owens, 2012).¹⁹ Despite the differences in how the manual FM 3-

¹⁹ It is important to mention that FM 3-24 has been heavily criticized within the military, and is currently undergoing a major revision. For a good summary of the different positions on this debate, see the bibliography posted for the

24 is read, there is a general consensus that the manual marks a fundamental shift in how the US military understands “the social,” moving away from a hierarchical interpretation of society as structure to a networked concept (see especially Ansorge, 2010; Owens, 2012.) The most influential interpretation of counterinsurgency – which this work ultimately rejects – is the view that the doctrine is emblematic of our era’s “liberal wars” for human security (Dillon and Reid, 2009; Evans, 2011). This position has been most forcefully advanced by Kienscherf, who argues that the doctrine “is a rationality of both rule and warfare whose ultimate purpose is the pacification of recalcitrant populations and their eventual (re)integration into the networks of liberal governance... [the] doctrine forms a response to *both* the biopolitical problematization of ‘human security’ *and* the geostrategic problematizations of US national security (Kienscherf, 2012: 519).” Critical IR theorists have been most enthusiastic with this interpretation, seeing counterinsurgency as the rule for conflict management in the global “post-intervention security terrain” (Bell and Evans, 2010). While my reasons for rejecting this approach will become clear in the other chapters, I will say for now that my rejection lies in the commitment to abstraction inherent in advocates of the “liberal war thesis” interpretation. In their highly particular understanding of “discourse analysis,” these authors have a tendency of not moving beyond the writings of the military, more or less taking the manual(s) at its word. For example, counterinsurgents may rhetorically echo liberal sentiments in field manuals and popular writings (e.g., Sewall, 2006), but in practice counterinsurgency is an entirely different project. It’s a doctrine of conservation and order, not liberal civilization and progress. As I argue in Chapter 3, liberalism is the guiding light for “us”, while “tradition” and stasis better suits the Other. These self-proclaimed “ontologies of war” are sometimes so far away from actual practices that it’s difficult to take them seriously.

2.6 Chapters Outline

Instead, my dissertation takes a different approach by interrogating the “technical register” of counterinsurgency, particularly in the US occupation of Afghanistan. An aspect of counterinsurgency that has been almost entirely over looked in critical studies of late-modern war are the power geometries (Massey, 1992) through which counterinsurgency is conducted. A particularly powerful discursive strategy on the part of the US military has been to use the discursive strategy of *scale* as basis for strategic intervention, particularly emphasizing the “local,” “grassroots,” “bottom-up” disposition of contemporary insurgencies. Chapters 3 and 4 examine this “policing of the local,” and how the “local” is figures prominently in US operations. As Swyngedouw has argued (1997: 140), “concepts such as the ‘local’ or the ‘global’ are often merely speculative, discursive—but eminently powerful—vehicles that are used to order political, social, and economic processes in particularly spatialized kinds of way... spatial scale is what needs to be understood as produced; a process that is deeply heterogeneous, conflictual, and contested.” Indeed, it is the power geometries of scale, and its production and ordering of the social that is the key, I argue, to understanding counterinsurgency’s power in practice.

Despite the conventional presentation of counterinsurgency as an off-shoot of liberal humanitarian intervention (Evans and Bell, 2011; Sewall, 2006), the doctrine in operation relies upon (and produces) a whole set of complicated relationships, actors, and spatial strategies. In Chapter 3, I analyze the training of “tribal militias” by US military forces in southern and eastern Afghanistan. Between 2007 and 2011, the United States and Afghan governments embarked on a security program to form and arm “traditional” community police (known in Pashtun as *arbakai*) and militias (*lashkar*) as a means to establish village security and combat the Taliban insurgency in rural areas where formal security forces were sparse or nonexistent. The former ISAF commander General David Petraeus called

the training and advising program “community watch with AK-47s” (Chandrasekaran and Partlow, 2010). Chapter 3 examines the program by considering the origin and status of the notion of the “tribal,” and its roots as a late nineteenth-century colonial creation. I provide an overview of the tribal militia program within the broader US counterinsurgency campaign, and interrogate why the US sought a “tribal face” for its local defense forces.

I make the argument that assuming the “tribal” nature of Pashtun areas in Afghanistan, and asserting the use of “traditional” policing mechanisms like *arbakai* within it presumes a particular way of knowing Afghan society on the part of the US military,. This military way of knowing is a paradoxical one, for while the “tribal nature” of Afghanistan is treated as a transparent “fact” by defense establishment analysts and commanders, access to that tribal nature is rendered opaque and, most notably, left to the “tribal other” to “handle” and secure. I argue that this form of tribal security is in important ways a highly particular *ethical* relation. For a writer like Emmanuel Levinas (1969), this relationship between the US military and “tribal militias” is a kind of perversion of ethics, for whereas the “tribal” other is in certain sense respected by the US military in its radical and absolute alterity, this radical alterity nevertheless fails to invite what Levinas called an “ethical relation.” Instead of an ethical relation being forged between the two forces, a *martial* relation is formed and instrumentally operationalized. From this perspective, *difference* is the key to the operationalization of local defense forces, a point entirely lost upon analysts who traffic in the abstractions of “liberal war.” Moreover, I argue that tribal militias are operationalized for a particular reason: they are simultaneously viewed as both a weapon and an alternative mode of social organization against the presumed “networked” form of the Afghan (and Iraqi) insurgency. Whereas insurgent networks are conceptualized by military analysts as depoliticized, mutable, transnational, and contingent complex adaptive systems (Dillon and Reid, 2001; Duffield, 2002; Kilcullen, 2009), tribal militias are viewed as a proper antidote because of their timeless, local, and simple cultural character that properly mirrors the so-called “indigenous

essence” of Pashtun society within Afghanistan. Whereas insurgent networks can abruptly emerge at any moment in “event-space,” tribal militias are created because they are trapped in place, persistent and stable in their timeless geographical presence.

The concepts of “networks” and “networked organizations”—from terrorism and insurgencies to the military itself—hold a special place in the military imagination, and not just in the United States. Chapter 4 explores this fascination with networks that stems from an active engagement with complexity theory beginning in the 1990s when “full-spectrum dominance” became the Pentagon’s order of the day. Full-spectrum refers to the aspects of society that were once thought to be outside of the strict focus of the military: politics, economics, culture, information and communications systems, etc. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the US military searched for new justifications for maintaining its personnel numbers and weapons programs, and the perceived (and manufactured) threats attendant with globalization assumed a central place in doctrine (Kaplan, 1994). It was during this time that the military actively engaged with theories of globalization and “information society,” and the impact “spaces of flows” had on (re)structuring new so-called “battlespaces,” from unstable urban environments to the lawless frontiers along the margins of the global south (Graham, 2010; Gregory, 2011). These “battlespaces” constituted the sites of post-Cold War “new wars” (Kaldor, 1999; Münkler, 2005), and military analysts sought to understand, and in many ways mimic their complexity. A novel set of concepts emerged, such as “network-centric warfare” (Cebrowski and Gartska, 1998) and “complex warfighting” (Kilcullen, 2004), with many in the military arguing that “it takes a network to beat a network” (McChrystal, 2010).

Chapter 4 examines the issue of “complex battlespaces” through an interrogation of the writings of David Kilcullen, undoubtedly the most influential military analyst of complex environments and their interpretation in counterinsurgencies. Kilcullen, a veteran of the Australian Army who holds a PhD in politics and anthropology, worked at the U.S. State Department “on loan” during the Iraq War

as an advisor on counterinsurgency, and later took up a post in Iraq as Petraeus's personal advisor. Kilcullen's influence stems, I argue, from his remarkably sophisticated understanding of complex *environments*, the central theme of his work. It also helps that he's a very effective writer.

Kilcullen's work is interesting from a geographer's perspective precisely because of his emphasis on the spaces through which military's operate in late-modern war. In Kilcullen's vision, space is relational, contingent, unpredictable, and nearly impossible to "decode" on an individual basis. Kilcullen has been active in devising a whole compendium of techniques for interpreting "complex spaces," ranging from quantitative metrics to "conflict ethnography". Kilcullen is also well-known for his writings on the "scalar relations" of an insurgency—how "transnational terrorist networks" that operate within global flows can interplay and exploit local insurgencies to particular ends (Kilcullen, 2005). An example for Kilcullen would be the semiosis between al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan or the Shabab in Somalia. My purpose in Chapter 4 is not necessarily to quarrel with Kilcullen's conceptions of space, although I do that at times, but instead to interrogate why his writings are so effective. I analyze two themes in Kilcullen's writings. First, I consider how Kilcullen constructs "complex warfighting" in urban and rural counterinsurgency environments. Second, I work through the recent debates over the concept of "scale" in geographical literatures to examine how Kilcullen weaponizes the concept. I argue that we should take pause at the extent to which Kilcullen's complexity-derived conception of "scale" resonates with poststructuralist perspectives in recent years (Marston et al., 2005; Moore, 2008). Nonetheless, I examine how Kilcullen's focus on "the local" provides the epistemological apparatus that makes the training of "tribal militias," discussed in Chapter 3, as seductive tactic.

As mentioned above, I explore the question of counterinsurgency through two themes: the training of (territorial) militias, and population control and displacement. Chapter 3 and 4 interrogate the "policing the 'local'" element inherent in the first theme, which gives counterinsurgency *in practice*

its force. Chapter 5 takes up the second theme of displacement and control by drawing attention to a US operation code-named “Dragon Strike” conducted in Kandahar Province between September 2010 and June 2011. The Dragon Strike campaign is significant because it marks a stark departure from the “textbook” counterinsurgency approach advocated by General Stanley McChrystal in his infamous August 2009 “Commander’s Assessment” for the Obama Administration, discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Rather, Dragon Strike left a trail of destruction reminiscent of the violent rural counterinsurgency approaches by the US in Vietnam or the British in Malaysia, including the razings of at least four Kandahar villages, hundreds of homes and orchards bombed, and hundreds displaced into refugee camps outside of Kabul and Kandahar City. Afghan homes and orchards had been destroyed many times before by US and ISAF forces, notably in the “Hausmanization” of Sangrin Valley in Helmand province, where the US Army bulldozed entire sections of villages to install “roads” to ease troop and police movement. The carnage in the districts outside Kandahar City was quite different in that the counterinsurgency mantra to “clear, hold, and build” an area was taken in the most literal extent, where villages like Tarok Kolache were “cleared” (with 25 tons of bombs) and then “rebuilt” in a highly particular way—formerly absent property lines were introduced, houses and walls were constructed in such a way as to ease visibility, and displaced villagers had to submit to biometrics and a permit system with the provincial government to access their new “homes.” A stunning justification for the domicile was given by US military officials: bombing the homes and applying for property deeds would “bring the villagers closer to their government.”

In Chapter 5, I am concerned with drawing together the threads of violence, domicile, population displacement and return, as well as property creation. My central claim, following the prescient work of Lalah Khalili (2010), is not only that the destruction of these Afghan villages has the effect of blurring of civilian domestic spaces and homes with abstract “battle-space,” but more that

such destruction constitutes a particular form of political violence: the destruction of lived life-worlds to construct US surveillance-friendly life-forms (Lukács, 1968: 264; cf. Coward, 2009).

In Chapter 6, I return to the theme of networks first discussed in Chapter 4, but I shift the focus slightly by considering the technical register by which insurgencies are analyzed by the US military, meaning the technological and epistemological framings (Butler, 2009; Gregory, 2010b) through which colonized or occupied populations are quantified, managed, and tracked on a daily basis. It is well-known for students of colonialism that the British and French devised a whole compendium of techniques and technologies in the colonial era to effectively rule colonial populations; e.g., taking a census, training police and “local defense forces,” establishing a network of informants, developing a penal apparatus, etc. (Mitchell, 1991; Khalili, 2012). In Chapter 6, I analyze the late-modern cousins to these techniques—biometrics, data-base management, establishing check-points, etc. In this chapter, what interests me is the practice of *data-coding* insurgents, and the US military’s attempt to use this data to construct algorithms to predict and ultimately pre-empt insurgencies. Anthropologists have been emphatic about the use of social scientists and “human terrain teams” in conducting intelligence work, but the role of anthropologists and “cultural intelligence” has largely been exaggerated. The real social scientists are those trained in computer science and behavioral economics (mostly soldiers) who are employing social network analysis to quantify and model insurgent activity (threat intelligence) and population dynamics (mission intelligence). Indeed, it’s algorithms, not anthropology, that are the real social scientific scandal in late-modern war.

In recent years, the U.S. military has increasingly relied on a group of influential data scientists in both the public and private sectors to innovate and develop computer-based techniques for “behavioral modeling and simulation” used to predict the dynamics of networked populations and assess terror and insurgent networks. I analyze a military program deployed in Afghanistan called “Nexus 7” which was developed along these lines, using data such as price increases or decreases in

local Afghan markets to measure “active insurgent activity” in a given area (Shachtman, 2011). The program was theoretically based on the research of MIT Media Lab computer scientist Alex “Sandy” Pentland who was named by Forbes Magazine as the “#6 most powerful data scientist in the world”. Pentland is famous for trailblazing the field of “reality mining” which uses machine-sensed environmental data (from market prices fluctuations to remotely sensed “human signals” in business meetings) to find and shape patterns in human behavior, and he has worked with the US military to develop what he calls “computational counterinsurgency” to put his ideas on data mining to use the US’s counterinsurgency campaigns. His MIT Media Lab and MIT Human Dynamics Laboratory are financially underwritten by the likes of Google, Nokia, Microsoft, the National Science Foundation, the US Army Research Lab, DARPA, among others (over 100 public and private entities). I examine how this kind of research has effected US military operations in Afghanistan, as well as the performativity of data-coding itself, and its consequences for US mission intelligence knowledge practices. If an empirical referent—in this case “insurgent activity”—is both a condition and consequence of knowledge practices as Foucault attests (1969; cf. Daston and Galison, 2007), then it follows that we must ask how *networks* (that is, pattern recognitions) are constructed in southern Afghanistan as a particular kind of militarized way-of-seeing.

As I hope is apparent from above, I choose to call this work *The Afterlives of Counterinsurgency*, because I want to emphasize the point that the effects of warfare live on far after the formal conflict ends, as the public health and infrastructural conditions of Gaza and Iraq lay bare (Belcher, 2011). The mainstream critiques of counterinsurgency begin by asking whether or not it “works successfully.” To ask whether a doctrine is success or a failure is to begin with the wrong question. The question is how do the effects of counterinsurgencies *persist*, such as the village razings in southern Afghanistan, or the eco-cide in Vietnam, or the uses of white phosphorus in Fallujah (Busby et al, 2010). As I argue throughout this work, the primary objective of counterinsurgency is the

destruction of life-worlds and the creation of “life-forms” amenable to military objectives. Therefore, the question is to ask how wars last...

“Every morning the war gets up from sleep,
Afflicted with the purifying fear,
Leaving its memory in the mud of history...
Every morning the war arrives...
All is well.
The slain fill the wilderness and the guns howl
forever”

Excerpted from Fadhil al Azzawi, “Every Morning the War Gets Up from Sleep”

3 “Community watch with AK-47s”

Local-defense forces and the policing of event-spaces in southern Afghanistan

“Pashtuns have long based identity on a nested set of clans and lineages that stem from a common ancestor.” Seth Jones and Arturo Muñoz, *Afghanistan’s Local War* (2010)

“You turn to any TV channel and they are experts on Afghan ethnicities, tribal issues and history without having been to Afghanistan or read one or two books. Afghanistan is less tribal than New York.” Said Tayeb Jawad, Afghan ambassador to Washington (Bumiller, 2009)

3.1 Introduction

ONE of the troubling legacies of academic life after 11 September has been the seeming decline of postcolonial studies and theory. While theoretical interests have been piqued in recent years by rigorous inquiry into the foundations of liberal law and exceptions to it, on biopower, the means by which “life” is governed, theories of “non-representation,” affect, and so on (Agamben, 1998; Foucault 1978, 2007, 2010; Mbembe, 2003; Thrift, 2008), it seems that the once robust questions on (post)colonialism and its cultural legacies have receded more or less into the remit of a few specialized journals. This is not to suggest that the so-called “ontological turn” around problems of liberalism, materiality, and biopolitics have been short-sighted or somehow an unnecessary aberration from more important or pressing questions—quite the contrary. In this moment when the sites and concepts of the social are being reconfigured, and the promiscuous *affaire* between humans and non-humans is coming under closer scrutiny (Braun and Whatmore, 2010; Haraway, 1991; Latour, 2007; Schatzki, 2002; Thrift, 2011; Whatmore 2002), it seems prudent to reconsider the suppositional bases of scholarly analysis and the attendant ways of seeing and interpolating the heterogeneity of our life-worlds and its material relations. Perhaps postcolonial theory was too stuck in its focus on the categorical and representational (Spivak, 1999), on all those discourses and textualities imbued with power, that the

philosophies of and over *things* remained muted or conspicuous.²⁰ Or perhaps “untying the text” (Young, 1981) ran its course and people understandably became *bored* with those “old questions” of power and knowledge, and the discursive productions of subjectivity; some days it seems that when Edward Said died in 2003, so did his project with him. There is still a good amount of valuable work done in this vein, to be sure, but one still senses a shift in tides, with new moons pulling hither and thither away from questions of representation and its reification, turning instead to that *other* old question Heidegger (2008) always insisted we revisit again and again: what is a thing?

For all that, a tragic quality remains as it does in all senses of loss, because Orientalism has never been more resurgent, rife and fraught than in the present. The gaze of the West sits more comfortably now in its benignly interpretative mode of the Other than at any time in the past forty years—from the U.S. and Israeli wars of occupation in Afghanistan and Gaza, to the common Western hysterics towards the “Arab Spring” revolutions being “too Islamist, too fast” (Hamid, 2011). Domestic and international “architectures of enmity” persist in producing their seductive effect of “folding distance into difference,” as Derek Gregory once eloquently put it (2004: 17), elevating the intellectual task of our times to asking how such architectures remain animated and all too alive (Asad, 2007; Butler, 2003).

Given the new epistemological and ontological questions which have arisen in recent years, it is both impossible and undesirable to ask the “old” questions on how Orientalism endures in its privileged sphere. For example, the tired questions over the “heterogenous temporalities” that constitute the *post* of postcolonialism have, for now, been exhausted (Gupta, 1998; Young, 2001); or rather, they no longer carry the capacity for analyzing the more pressing questions of power in the present. Nor can we any longer resort to the sort of “ideology critique” that has the remarkable

²⁰ The research of Timothy Mitchell (1991, 2003) and Derek Gregory (1994, 2004) are notable exceptions. Arun Saldanha (2007) and Anne Laura Stoler (2010) are also doing important work in bridging the gap between postcolonial theory and theories of non-representation and affect.

tendency of circumscribing relations between occupiers and the occupied into external relations between intentional subjects, and thus opening the field to banal questions of domination and resistance. Instead, in this era when redundant violence can erupt invariably into “moments of disruptive and punctual presence” in and through the “slippery spaces” of war that seem potentially everywhere and pervasive, especially in the targeting grounds of the global South (Anderson, 2011a; Belcher *et al.*, 2008; Gregory, 2010b), the analytic task is to ask how the multiplicity of techniques and modes of colonial governance—the ever-refining *technical* registers through which colonial officers divided and ruled occupied societies in the past—have persisted into the present (Cohn, 1996; Metcalf, 1997).

While it is undoubtedly true that the *disposition* of colonialism and imperialism have changed – the epoch of colonialism is indeed over – the techniques and procedures through which Western domination was ensured along the world-wide belt running from the Pacific Islands and the Indian sub-continent through the Hindu Kush, the Maghreb, and into the Congo and the Caribbean, have never remained idle. It is by analyzing these technical registers and the compendium of techniques designed to work within the sinews of occupied societies like Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan that we can get a stronger sense of Orientalism’s enduring effect. The technologies of rule that once solidified French and British colonial power in Africa and Asia – conducting a census, training police and “local defense forces,” recruitment of informants, developing a penal apparatus, delineating property lines, setting and policing the temporal rhythms of everyday life (Cooper, 1992; Mitchell 1991, 2003; Legg, 2007) – have been materially revived to full effect today in the techniques the US military uses to control Afghanistan and Iraq. These time-honored techniques of colonial rule have been supplemented with their late-modern cousins of biometrics, check-points, drone use, and database management, which are used to quantify and track the movements and machinations of occupied populations in order

to sort out, through a series of spatializations, “friendly” populations from insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan (Graham, 2011a; Gregory, 2008a).

In this chapter, which focuses almost exclusively on US operations in southern Afghanistan, I analyze one particular technology of rule that has been the predominant concern of the United States military establishment in both Iraq and Afghanistan: the training of so-called “local defense forces,” or what are frequently referred to as “tribal militias.” When counterinsurgency doctrine was rediscovered in Western capitals and war colleges in the wake of the sectarian bloodletting unleashed in Baghdad in the aftermath of the US occupation in the mid-2000s, the development of “host-nation security forces” became a paramount concern for military commanders. The push for “local security” struck the right key for policy-makers and military commanders alike who were smitten by the idea that warfare now happens “amongst the people” (Smith, 2005)—winning “hearts and minds” of occupied populations was the calling of any late-modern military worth its salt. Indeed, the question was frequently begged at the time as to how hearts and minds could be won if the “population” was not first protected and secured? Perhaps unsurprisingly, the answers resulted in the customary American preference for arming militias, a practice with a long twentieth-century pedigree in places like Haiti, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Iraq, with effects not particularly known for producing happy endings for those under U.S. occupation (Sanford, 2004; Bauer, 2009).

Despite the embrace by military and civilian officials of the “security-first” maxim in Afghanistan and Iraq, providing such security, at least according to the recommendations of official counterinsurgency doctrine, is a tall order. For example, the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24* (FM 3-24) calls for at least twenty personnel for every 1000 persons as the optimal “force ratio” for “success” in any given counterinsurgency theater; to put that number in perspective, that would mean

an occupying force of approximately 608,400 in Afghanistan.²¹ From this military standpoint, training local defense forces is more or less a pragmatic expediency for providing additional numbers to an occupation, since no Western military, including the United States, is willing to commit that many personnel to an occupation or conflict. But, there are other factors at work. In recent years, as the US military has become remarkably well-versed in propaganda and “information operations” (Anderson, 2011b; Holmqvist, this volume)²², it has learned that an occupation needs its own *face*—and that face must be a “native face,” not that of the occupying force. As the counterinsurgent John Nagl has written, having a native face for an occupation is a key advantage:

They know the terrain, both physical and human, and generally speak the language. They understand the social networks that comprise the society and how they are interrelated. In a war in which finding the enemy is harder than killing the enemy, they have the potential to be enormously powerful counterinsurgents (Nagl, 2010: 161).

For analysts like Nagl (a key author of FM 3-24), training a local security force as the intermediary institution between a government and its people is pivotal for a successful counterinsurgency, since such forces are ultimately who are left behind after the United States and its allies have left the area. Therefore, forces must be indigenous *and familiar*, which already places them into a position of difference with respect to their American advisors.

This heightening of the status of local security forces in counterinsurgency doctrine is related to a well-known narrative prevalent in within US military circles about the historical legacy of

²¹ The figure is based on an estimated 30,419,928 population count (July 2012) provided by the *CIA World Fact Book* <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> (Last accessed November 28, 2012)

²² See Barstow (2008) on how the Pentagon used retired US Generals to sell the war in Iraq on various television media outlets, and Javers (2011) on the use US soldiers trained in counterinsurgency psychological operations by the hydraulic fracturing industry to persuade reluctant a reluctant public in Pennsylvania, USA on the virtues of “fracking”.

the military in the Vietnam War. For conservative writers like Krepinevich (1986) and Summers (1982), the US military was too slow in learning how to fight the VNLF in the right way, a puzzle it failed to solve before the US public lost its “national will” for war. It has often been noted in this US defense establishment literature that one of the key reasons the United States failed to “succeed” in its exploits in Vietnam was that it spent too long trying to train a South Vietnamese conventional force that organizationally mirrored the US military; that is, oriented primarily towards combatting territorially external enemies. For these military historians, the US military spent too many years mistakenly advising and training a largely irrelevant force in Vietnam, where an internal police force was instead needed to actively pacify the population (Krepinevich, 1986; Nagl, 2005).²³ Although counterinsurgents underscore the indispensability and importance of local defense forces, they also concede that this is the most difficult and indeterminate element in conducting a counterinsurgency. As Nagl (2009: 160), in his characteristic nescient way, puts it: “If, as... [FM 3-24] states, counterinsurgency is ‘the graduate level of warfare,’ then advisors to indigenous forces are the professors of counterinsurgency.”

Taking Nagl’s hauteur insight as my cue, this chapter analyzes these “professors” at work, as both trainers *and* as “investigating subjects” (Spivak, 1999), focusing on the highly particular ways in which local defense forces have been advised, trained, and most importantly *positioned* in the (now defunct) US-led counterinsurgency campaign in southern and eastern Afghanistan. I stress “positioned” in order to place special emphasis on the spectral figure *and place* of “the tribe” which circulates with great ease within Western military and civilian circles when they set out to translate the “common-sense” social contours of Afghanistan. Unlike Iraq, where social fault lines were largely determined by US and other Western officials as religious in nature (see below), in Afghanistan it has

²³ For a critical rebuttal to this military view of pacification, see Marilyn Young’s *The Vietnam Wars* (1991) and James Gibson’s *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam* (2000)

been the “tribe” that has been identified as the basis for cultural legitimacy and social stability by the US military. As RAND analysts Seth Jones and Arturo Muñoz put it (2010: 53), “the use of the local institutions [i.e., tribes] ensures the legitimacy of the forces.”

Since the FM 3-24 was published in 2006, much has been made by US-based critical anthropologists and geographers on the US military’s uses of social scientists to produce “cultural intelligence” as a means to accessing the “human terrain” in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere (Bryan, 2010; González, 2009a; González, 2009b; Gregory, 2008b; Kelly *et al.*, 2010; Price, 2011; Wainwright, 2012). While this work has been very valuable in revisiting ethical questions on the uses (and abuses) of academic research for intelligence and military purposes (cf. Asad, 1973; Solovey, 2001), it has said little about how such cultural intelligence becomes operational in either Iraq or Afghanistan.²⁴ Indeed, the kinds of “cultural intelligence” that has circulated in theaters like Afghanistan has been so stunningly superficial—even by military standards (cf. Flynn *et al.*, 2010)—that one needs to ask precisely how such “cultural intelligence” is *effective*—or whether it constitutes “intelligence” at all, rather than a mere propagation of vulgar stereotypes and caricatures.

In order to pry open these issues, this chapter proceeds as follows. First, I begin by analyzing the desire by US forces to put a “tribal face” on its local defense forces in southern and eastern Afghanistan, and I provide an overview of the institutionalization of tribal militias between 2006-2012. The present-day security apparatus in Afghanistan can be broken down into four components: (1) the Afghan National Army (ANA); (2) the Afghan National Police (ANP); (3) tribal militias; and (4) the exterior US-led NATO force. Up until late-2007, the United States and NATO focused primarily on advising and training the first two components, the ANA and ANP. That effort

²⁴ One can make the case that the extent to which anthropologists and Human Terrain Teams have affected operations in Iraq or Afghanistan has been exaggerated and negligible at best; indeed, it’s been the use algorithms and computerized social network analysis, not anthropology, that have been the real social scientific scandals in US counterinsurgency operations.

has been universally condemned as a disaster whose ineffectiveness produced such corrupt and abusive security forces that the Afghan army and police were seen as a major contributing factor in the Taliban resurgence in 2006 and 2007 (Giustozzi, 2007a: 161-227). After spending years disarming warlords and their militias, by late 2007 senior officers in the US military were approaching Afghan officials and Pashtun tribal elders to instead arm local community police (*arbakai*) and militias (*lashkar*) to fight the Taliban as a “stop gap” for the lack of US and Afghan government security forces in southern and eastern rural areas (Filkins, 2008). After numerous failed attempts throughout 2008 and 2009 by the US military to create functional local defense forces that could abstain from demanding bribes and abusing residents in their areas, US commander General David Petraeus was pressuring the Afghan government by mid-2010 to help in creating tribal militias to guard villages in rural areas (Cloud, 2010). Petraeus referred to the program as “community watch with AK-47s” (Chandrasekaran and Partlow, 2010).

Second, I interrogate the US *rapprochement* with tribal militias by asking a series of questions about the turn to the “tribal” as an analytical and militarily operational lens. Assuming the “tribal” nature of Pashtun areas of Afghanistan, and asserting the use of “traditional” policing mechanisms like *arbakai* within it, presumes—on the part of the US military—a particular way of knowing Afghan society. This military way of knowing, I posit, is a paradoxical one, for while the “tribal nature” of Afghanistan is treated as a transparent “fact” by defense establishment analysts and commanders, access to that tribal nature is rendered opaque and *left to the tribal other* to “handle” and secure. I argue that this relationship of disavowal between the US military and “tribal militias” is a kind of perversion of ethics which Emmanuel Levinas (1969) found so important in his life work. For whereas the tribal other is in many ways respected in the constraint of its radical and absolute alterity with respect to US forces, this radical alterity fails to invite what Levinas called an “ethical relation.” Instead, a *martial* relation is forged *out of disavowal* and, more importantly, this martial relations is

operationalized. In this regard, *cultural difference* is the key to the operationalization of local defense forces.

Already, this puts my argument in stark contrast to those who argue that counterinsurgency is another instance of that supposed Western proclivity for liberal interventionism, which we are told seeks to remake failed- or state-less voids into market and rights-based regimes based on its own humanitarian image. Liberal interventionism and its attendant concern for “human security” is a universalizing project, utilizing civilizational discourses loosely based on a Kantian cosmopolitanism (e.g., Kaldor 1999, 2007). While counterinsurgency advocates may rhetorically echo these liberal sentiments in field manuals and popular writings (Sewall, 2006), in practice counterinsurgency is a project of conservation and order, not civilization and progress. In counterinsurgencies, liberalism is the guiding light for “us,” while “tradition” and stasis better suits “them” (Gregory, 2010a). This is borne out in the unproblematic (from the view of the military) creation and utilization of “tribal” militias, a wholly illiberal technology of rule.

Finally, I argue that there is a particular reason why the US military has turned to tribal militias as a technology of security: they are simultaneously viewed as both a weapon and an alternative mode of social organization against the presumed “networked” form of an insurgency. In late-modern warfare, insurgents and guerrillas are almost universally conceptualized by Western militaries as networked in organizational form. Indeed, seeing like a 21st century military is to see a world of overlapping transnational and local networks (Kilcullen, 2003; cf. Ansorge, 2010: 363). As the former head of US Central Command, General John Abizaid, said of Iraqi and Afghan insurgents, “this enemy is better networked than we are” (Bousquet, 2009: 1-2), and it is precisely in this form of “being-in-emergence” (Dillon and Reid, 2009) that networks derive their power. Ben Anderson has noted accordingly that “the starting point for current counterinsurgency doctrine, and thus for the imbrication of ‘wars amongst the people’ and the ‘war on terror’ is that the power of contemporary

insurgencies is taken to derive from their networked form... [I]nsurgency [is] understood to oscillate between extended periods of absence as a result of its dispersed, decentered form and moments of disruptive, punctual presence (Anderson, 2011a: 210).”²⁵ Because insurgent networks are conceptualized by military analysts as depoliticized, mutable, transnational, and contingent complex adaptive systems (Kilcullen, 2003), tribal militias come to be viewed (and constituted) as a proper antidote *because of* their timeless, local, simple, and cultural character, with the “tribal” taken to properly mirror the authentic “indigenous essence” of Afghan society (see Table 1).

Networks	Tribes
Mutable	Immutable
Depoliticized	Politicized
Natural/Biological	Cultural/Racial/Divine
Unfixed Subjectivity	Fixed Subjectivity
Evolving, Contingent	Timeless/ahistorical
“Ungovernable”	Governable
Transnational/connected	Local
Complex Adaptive Systems	Simple/Traditional
Event-Space	Cultural Place

Table 3.1 US Military Characterizations of Networked Insurgent Warfare versus a Tribal Social Structure

Tribes are privileged as a structural form, and therefore become treated as a permanent and sedentary presence *in place* at the local level, rather than as a processual flow that can precipitously abrupt into space. In this regard, defensive tribal militias are a counteracting agent to insurgencies precisely

²⁵ It is important to note that advanced militaries have also worked to *become* more networked themselves. As former ISAF Commander General Stanley McChrystal wrote in *Foreign Policy*, “It takes a network to beat a network.”

because they nullify and remedy the problem of unpredictable and contingent “event-spaces” (Croser, 2011; Gregory, 2010b).

3.2 Going “Tribal”

3.2.1 *The Security Apparatus in Afghanistan*

Historians of counterinsurgency have argued that, despite the rhetoric of winning hearts and minds through effective governance and market-based development projects, there have really been two fundamental features of US, French and British counterinsurgency operations: forced population displacement, and establishing territorial militias (McClintock, 1992; McCoy, 2009). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to visit the question of population displacement and resettlement, though the brutality of British tactics in Malaysia (Hack, 2012; Sioh, 2010), and the United States in Vietnam (Glassman, 1992), Iraq (Gregory, 2008a; Rosen, 2010) and Afghanistan (see Chapter 5) are well known.²⁶ With regards to militias, the history of the US occupation in Afghanistan has been a contradictory one, where in some years militias have been disarmed and rejected as illegitimate and corrupt forces, and in other years coddled and embraced as a necessary “stop-gap” to lax security in countryside villages. In the first several years of the occupation, the security efforts by the US and NATO had, if anything, the effect of exacerbating the insurgency, which by 2004 turned into an organized violent struggle against the US-led occupation and its client government in Kabul. Between 2001 and 2006, Western forces focused on building a nationwide security apparatus primarily out of warlord militia units that had been operative in Afghanistan since the civil war in the 1990s, most notably from the Northern Alliance that worked under the CIA and US Special forces to help

²⁶ The influential political scientist and Afghanistan analyst Antonio Giustozzi euphemistically refers to forced internal displacements in Afghanistan as “evacuations” (2007a: 191)

overthrow the Taliban regime in October 2001. The security apparatus during the first six years of the US-led occupation can be broken down into five major components (Giustozzi, 2007a):

- (1) *NATO-led ISAF forces*, comprised primarily of US military personnel, but with sizable contingents from the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and other European countries, plus Australia;
- (2) *Afghan Military Forces*, entailing both Afghan National Army (AMA) and Afghan National Police (ANP);
- (3) *Private militias*, working under the direction of provincial governors, especially as protection forces, which were promoted and sanctioned by the Karzai regime;
- (4) *Private contractors*, such as American contractors like USPI, DynCorp and Xe/Blackwater, as well as Afghan contractors, working as security detail for Western and Afghan officials and private individuals;
- (5) *Village militias and local militias (called Afghan Security Forces [ASF])*, working under the stewardship of US Special Forces to guard villages and conduct operations against the Taliban insurgency.

During this time, US and NATO efforts focused primarily on building a central army, the ANA, out of Kabul which had, at best, very limited capability. The ANA was beset by numerous problems, ranging from high attrition rates and low pay, to ethnic tensions in the officer corps (see Giustozzi, 2007b). Moreover, the more adequately trained ANA units with combat capabilities were sent into battle at a much higher frequency, which meant ANA battalions regularly suffered excessively high casualty rates. As Giustozzi notes, “Several detachments in Paktika lost more than half their men, while Corps 205 in Kandahar in September 2004-June 2005 lost between 1,200 and 1,500 men out of a personnel

chart of 2,400 (Giustozzi, 2007a: 185).” This inevitably led to high desertion rates and, according to Giustozzi (2007a: 184-185), a retention rate of just 20 percent by the second half of 2006.

The Afghan National Police functioned no better as a security force, largely earning a reputation as a corrupt guard prone to preying on the population with informal “taxes” and bribery schemes, physical abuse and violent interrogation methods (such as torture) for “suspected insurgents.” Foreign correspondents and NGOs in the United States and Europe have been remarkably diligent in reporting on the ineptitude and violent tendencies of the ANP since the US invasion in October 2001, with no shortage of stories on bribery, drug trafficking, drug abuse, human rights abuses, and illiteracy (Chivers, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2011; Nordland, 2010; Oppel and Bowley, 2012; Rubin, 2011). In his analysis of the Afghan police, Giustozzi has written, “In terms of the direct impact of the police on the counter-insurgency effort, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the indiscipline of Afghan security services, including police, was a contributing factor to the [growing 2006] insurgency (2007a: 174-175).”

By late 2006, with a revived counterinsurgency doctrine circulating with great fanfare in Washington, DC and European capitals, a renewed commitment to addressing the shortcomings in Western and Afghan security forces became the predominant concern for Western military and civilian officials. For a time it seemed as if the “search and destroy” excesses of the US approach in Afghanistan—from large-scale sweep operations and constant airstrikes on villages to nightly home-raids—would be mitigated for a counterinsurgency strategy that ideally focused on foot-patrols and engaging local inhabitants with market-based development schemes and “effective governance” programs.²⁷ With the embrace of counterinsurgency, the Afghan Military Forces (ANA and ANP)

²⁷ Under the command of General Stanley McChrystal, there was a substantial drop in bombings and overnight home raids. But after he was fired in the summer of 2010, and General David Petraeus of CENTCOM became the top commander in Afghanistan, airstrikes and home-raids spiked to levels higher than at any time since 2001. Between September—December 2010, air missiles were used on 2,550 sorties (Schachman, 2010). For 2007 to 2010 airpower statistics, see

posed a particular problem in the strategic shift because of the centrality placed on local policing and “host-nation security forces” as leading actors in counterinsurgency operations. As FM 3-24 states [6-90]: “The primary frontline COIN force is often the police—not the military. The primary COIN objective is to enable local institutions. Therefore, supporting the police is essential (FM 3-24, 2006: 229).” After the election of Barack Obama, his administration supported three waves of “surge” troops and trainers in June 2009 and a major deployment of 17,000 trainers in November 2009, and his signature “Afghan surge” announced on November 30, 2009 and deployed throughout 2010. With these troop surges, ANA and ANP training initiatives were moved to the front and center of the Administration and NATO’s strategic planning (Baker, 2009).

The security structure noted above in Afghanistan remained more or less intact, with a primary focus on the Afghan Military Forces remaining, but with a renewed emphasis on empowering the fight component of village or “tribal” militias in the southern and eastern provinces. Afghanistan was divided into regional commands headed the United States, Germany, Italy, and Turkey (Kabul province), with each command assuming responsibility for army and police training (see Map 1). By September 2012, the size of the Afghan Military Forces was considerable, with a growth in security force strength to more than 350,000 (200,000 ANA soldiers, and 150,000 ANP police) from fewer than 100,000 in 2007 (Oppel and Bowley, 2012). Despite this growth, both forces have been beleaguered with problems in the four years after Obama’s surge, from physically abusing and “taxing” the Afghan population (Rubin, 2011), to the rise in so-called “green-on-blue” attacks by Afghan forces on NATO troops (Mogelson, 2011), prompting a nigh-total freeze on Afghan training in the autumn 2012. After spending \$50 billion over a decade building the Afghan National Security Forces, the Pentagon reported on December 10, 2012 that only one of the ANA’s twenty three brigades could “operate

http://www.wired.com/images_blogs/dangerroom/2010/12/30-November-2010-Airpower-Stats.pdf (last accessed December 7, 2012)

Prompted by the turn to customary law and the recognition of “local custom” as integral to the ascendant form of “indirect rule” following the 1857 Indian Mutiny, Sandeman followed his contemporaries Henry Maine and Edmund Burke working through the perceived—and *invented*—“tribal” native structures to administer colonial power (Mamdani, 2012; Mehta, 1999; Ranger, 1982). Sandeman’s project was an experiment in martial-cultural knowledge production. “By ‘knowing the natives’” Hopkins and Marsden (2011) write of Sandeman, “Sir Robert believed he could rule them through their ‘tradition’—something more legitimate in the eyes of the tribesman and cheaper for the colonial state... Sir Robert recruited locals into state-sponsored militias to police themselves.” Between 2007 and 2008, with almost identical presuppositions in mind—a “tribal” people should have traditional “tribal” police—the US began to experiment with village militias again as a short-term fix for the lack of ANA, ANP and NATO troops in the rural countryside. By late 2009 and 2010, a full-scale effort to build tribal “local defense forces” was in full swing throughout Pashtun dominated areas.

During this time, no one was more vocal and supportive for reinventing the armed “tribe” than the influential RAND analyst Seth Jones. Jones is recognized as one of the defense establishment’s principal voices on Afghanistan and a strong proponent for counterinsurgency doctrine (see Jones, 2010a), and served as a chief advisor to the US military’s Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command (Cfsocc, pronounced “SIFF-sock”) when it initiated its prominent “community defense initiative” program. In discussing that program, Jones told the *New York Times* that “our idea was to use the Musahiban dynasty as a model... because [former King Nadir Shah and his successors] understood the importance of local power” (Mogelson, 2011). Buoyed by the calm assertions made by former Taliban ambassador Abdul Salem Zaeef in his influential biography *My Life with the Taliban* (2010), which claims the identities of Afghans “lie with their tribe, their clan, their family, and their relatives,” Jones has written extensively on the need to build local police forces that “reflect” apparent traditional social structures prevalent in Pashtun areas in the south and east. In reports and popular

press, Jones has been searing in his indictment of American-Afghan policy approaches that have focused on propping up the Karzai regime in Kabul, arguing at one point in *Foreign Affairs* that “current international efforts to establish security and stability from the center are based on a fundamental misunderstanding of Afghanistan’s culture and social structure (2010b: 122).”

[T]here is a chilling prognosis for those who believe that the solution to stabilize Afghanistan will come only from the top-down – by building strong central government institutions. Although creating a strong centralized state, assuming it ever happens, may help ensure long-term stability, it is not sufficient in Afghanistan. The current top-down state-building and counterinsurgency efforts must take place alongside bottom-up programs, such as reaching out to legitimate local leaders to enlist them in providing security and services at the village and district levels... [T]he well intentioned proponents of the top-down model have survived too long solely on an idealist’s diet of John Locke and Immanuel Kant... The challenge for Washington, then, is to combine knowledge of administrative practices with a *deeper understanding* of local conditions (Jones, 2010b: 121-122).

The proclivity for the “local” nature of politics in Afghanistan is quite common in counterinsurgency circles, captured succinctly by Thomas Johnson and Chris Mason in their widely-cited 2008 essay, “All Counterinsurgency is Local” published in *The Atlantic*. “National government never mattered much in Afghanistan,” they argue.

Politically and strategically, the most important level of governance in Afghanistan is neither national nor regional nor provincial. Afghan identity is rooted in *woleswali*: the

districts within each province that are typically home to a single clan or tribe. Historically, unrest has always bubbled up in this stratum... yet the *woleswali* are last, not first, in the US military and political strategy... Re-empowering the village councils of elders and restoring their community leadership is the only way to *re-create the traditional check* against the powerful network of rural mullahs, who have been radicalized by the Taliban (Johnson and Mason, 2008).

In Congressional testimony given in February 2010, Jones echoed Johnson and Mason's sentiments when he told the Commission on Wartime Contracting: "Stabilization needs to increasingly come from the bottom up, not the top down. The reason is straightforward: politics in Afghanistan is local (Jones, 2010c: 3)."

But, on what basis does Jones make these claims that "all politics in Afghanistan is local?" And what kind of "deeper understanding" is needed to "re-create a traditional check" on the Taliban? Or, perhaps more succinctly, why does a "traditional check" pose itself as the answer? In a RAND report, Jones answers in these questions in the following way: in Afghanistan, "Tribalism is localism" (Jones and Muñoz, 2010: 17). In his 2010 essay featured in *Foreign Affairs*, Jones calls policies that think outside of tribes and tradition in Afghanistan "academic debates," positing instead that "Afghan social and cultural realities make it impossible to neglect local leaders... The old monarchy's model is useful for today's Afghanistan... the local nature of power in the country makes it virtually impossible to build a strong central government capable of establishing security and delivering services in much of rural Afghanistan... Afghans have successfully adopted this model in the past, and they can do so again today (Jones, 2010b: 124-125)." Of course, such arguments present more questions than answers. What are these realities, and how does Jones have access to them? Moreover, under what presuppositions does he identify "local leaders?"

Jones is not unaware that “going tribal” is a controversial proposition and an ultimately an imperial fabrication. In fact, in his writings he concedes that “tribal structures have eroded over the last century for a variety of reasons,” primarily because of civil war and population displacements (Jones and Muñoz, 2010: 18).²⁸ “Natives and settlers,” he writes (with Muñoz, 2010: 19-20), “alike fled in masse during the Soviet occupation and the subsequent civil wars. It is difficult to generalize about tribal structure today, since the structure and inclinations of a tribe or subtribe in one area may be very different from those of the same tribe or subtribe in another area.”

Other identity markers can also transcend tribal structures, such as reputations earned during the anti-Soviet Jihad, land ownership, or money earned through licit or illicit activities (such as drug trade or road taxes). In some areas, Taliban leaders have also elevated the role of mullahs and other religious leaders to assist in the function of sharia (Islamic law) courts (Jones and Muñoz, 2010: 20).

Even with these concessions on the structural precariousness of “tribes”—whatever they may be—Jones insists on both their authenticity and utility for the US. In a RAND report on “building local defense forces,” Jones and co-author Arturo Muñoz pen a whole section on “debating the role of tribes” and mock the anthropologist and counterinsurgency critic Roberto Gonzalez for the assertion that the

²⁸ Other military analysts have shown trouble negotiating the ambiguities that inhere in asserting the “tribal” dimensions of Afghan society. In an influential report within military and think-tank circles written by analyst Carl Forsberg (2009) on counterinsurgency operations in Kandahar province, he writes “Tribal divides, however, are not always the most important distinctions to be drawn in Kandahar, as the tribes are certainly not monolithic entities. Perhaps a more useful distinction than that between Zirk Durrani tribal hierarchy and the Panjpai Durrani and Ghilzai groups, *is the social divide between rural Kandahar and Kandahar City* (my emphasis). This divide overlaps some with the tribal distinction, because the Zirk Durrani tribes did benefit more from their affiliation with the Afghan monarchy, but leadership in each tribe can be highly fractured. There are many Popolzai and Barakzai alienated from their own tribal elites, just as there are Noorazai and Ghilzai who are cosmopolitan and well-integrated into the Afghan elite. Tribal affiliation in Kandahar City is weaker than in the countryside, and Kandahar City has also been home to groups of non-Pashtun Persian speaking Hazaras and Tajiks (the latter are called Farsiwani in Kandahar) and Uzbeks (Forsberg, 2009: 14).”

term “tribe” has little analytical purchase as a concept to describe social relations among contemporary anthropologists. Gonzalez has argued that the concept of “tribe” is being used perversely as “an analytical tool and focal point for the war’s architects (2009: 15),” suggesting that the “recent interest in Afghanistan’s ‘tribes’ appears to stem from an increasingly desperate situation.” For Gonzalez, the resumption of the “tribe” as the focal point for military strategic pursuits is an instance of “neo-Orientalism” that invites a set of lethal consequences, particularly the assertion that tribes assume a “ranked society with a ‘chief’ positioned firmly at the top of the hierarchy,” which stereotype Afghans (and Iraqis) as “traditional or pre-modern people unfamiliar with Western ways (Gonzalez, 2009: 16).”

Unconvinced by this line of critical thinking, Jones and Muñoz dismiss Gonzalez and other critically-inclined anthropologists for failing to “appreciat[e]... the interplay between identity, structure, and culture” in Afghanistan (Jones and Muñoz, 2010: 16). As they write against Gonzalez, “Pashtuns are organized according to a patrilineal segmentary lineage system. This presupposes that the tribe will segment, or split, among multiple kin groups that *will engage in competition* with each other most of the time. *When a common enemy outside the tribe poses an existential threat*, the different segments tend to band together—since they are related by common descent—until the emergency is over. Traditional rivalry among patrilineal cousins is so pronounced among Pashtuns, partly because they compete for the same inheritance, that it has given rise to a term, *tarburwali* [law of the cousins] (Jones and Muñoz, 2010: 16; my emphasis).”

It should be noted that there is no citation by Jones and Muñoz for such confident and composed assertions, and it would miss the point to insist on citations here²⁹ because what we are dealing is not a question of accuracy, but rather an *instrumentalist regime of truth*. For what is of

²⁹ Anthropologist David Price has documented the extent to which FM 3-24 is plagiarized (Price 2007, 2009). While this is a valuable exercise on some level, I nevertheless find myself agreeing with the more nuanced thinking of historian Alan Cromartie when he writes: “[The accusations of plagiarism are] plainly unfair; unlike an ordinary plagiarist, the authors [of the field manual] had an interest in acknowledging their sources, which were, for the most part, found in obvious places. But the uncertainty about citation practice reflects a failure to think through the nature of the authority that they were claiming (Cromartie, 2012: 103).”

interest in “tribes” for Jones is what is of interest for the US military: fomenting a fantasy that a supposed *tribal instinct* to “engage in competition” can orient that competitive spirit in such a way as to produce the unifying force needed to view a “common outside enemy” (the Taliban) as an existential threat. This way of thinking is not an attempt to reflect “academic debates” about the social construction of tribes. Rather, it is an overgeneralized assertion about pre-Enlightenment notions of human nature, assumed to take the form of sportsmanlike or deadly competition depending on whether one is in the West or not—sportsmanlike for the former, deadly for the latter. For Jones, the antidote for the Lockean and Kantian fancies that focus on building a centralized state is a proper dose not even of Hobbesianism, but of straight up *state of nature* tribalism. Jones and Muñoz attempt to perform a scholarly argument, building the case for tribes but their generalizations have one purpose that they openly acknowledge: invoking the orientalist trope of a people bound by place and geography, devoid of history, and mired in tradition in order to justify the reinvention of Sandeman’s signature colonial creation, the tribal militia, and to rule them like Afghanistan’s best king, Nadir Shah. And, such a strategy therefore begs the question: what is the point? To what end is the revivification of the Pashtun tribe?

3.3 What is a Tribe?

3.3.1 Tribes as Administrative Units

What we are contending with here is a far cry from suggestions by critical scholars of “liberal war” who interpret our global condition as one in which all exceptions to liberal “modalities of life” are predisposed as threats, and invariably rooted out and neutralized (Dillon and Reid, 2009;

Duffield 2007; Evans, 2011)³⁰. Rather, the strategy and practice of creating tribal militias in Afghanistan is an active manufacturing of difference through social structures fundamentally *antithetical* to liberal norms—and intentionally so. At the same time, we are also a far cry from what Homi Bhabha once called the *metonymy of presence* at the center of the British desire to create colonial subjects in their own image, capable of mimicking an “almost the same, but not quite” Englishness (Bhabha, 1996: 156). The twenty-second article of David Kilcullen’s “Twenty-Eight Articles (reprinted as the first appendix in FM 3-24, A-43-44) reads: “local forces should mirror the enemy, not ourselves”: “The natural tendency is to build forces in our own image, with the aim of eventually handing our role over to them. This is a mistake. Instead, local indigenous forces need to mirror the enemy’s capabilities and seek to supplant the insurgent’s role (Kilcullen, 2010 [2006]: 42).”

No, we are much closer to what Franz Fanon and Aimé Césaire called “colonization-thingification” (Césaire, 1972: 21; cf. Fanon, 2008: 89). Whereas critics of counterinsurgency (like Gonzalez) typically see merely a refashioning of Orientalist cultural tropes in the institutionalization of tribal militias, it is more precise to argue that US military officials are seeking to “establish a consistent terminology for political groups” for *instrumental* ends—and it is specifically this instrumentality that is at stake (Tapper, 1990: 56). “Instrumentality, rather than reason or will, defines the modern subject,” Foucault once wrote (2007: 8), and this is equally true for the so-called “tribal subject.” For, it is important to emphasize that “tribal militias” currently operating in Afghanistan are a *late-modern creation*, and their assigned attributes of “traditional” and “authentic” is more a reflection of pedantic caricatures of “pre-modern peoples” that dance so typically in the Western imagination, rather than any accurate description of an historical Pashtun “essence.” Indeed, I would contend that the “tribal” other constitutes the site of the US military imagination’s own self-elaboration.

³⁰ As Dillon and Reid have written (2009: 43), “In short, liberal governance requires a constant auditing and sorting of life to determine which life processes themselves work so that you can empower yourself by aligning yourself with them or intervene to pre-empt, prevent and otherwise forestall developments which may on the contrary threaten life.”

What is a tribe? In a recent essay, Mahmood Mamdani posed this question and showed that the category of the “tribe” has historically been an attempt—first by the British, and then by other colonial powers including the United States—to reify indigenous nativism in such a way as to “reproduce difference as custom” for the purposes of *indirect* colonial administration (cf. Ranger, 1983). Cultural anthropologists and historians have been down this road before, emphasizing the constructedness and contingent performativity of when colonial powers classify “tribes” (Ranger, 1982; cf. Perlin 1988, Tapper, 1990). As Tapper (1990: 55-56) has written:

The nature of indigenous concepts of tribe, whether explicit ideologies or implicit practical notions, has too often been obscured by the apparent desire of investigators... to establish a consistent and stable terminology for political groups... Unfortunately, Middle Eastern indigenous categories... are no more specific than are English terms such as “family” or “group”... Most of the terms that have been translated as “tribe” contain such ambiguities, and attempts to give them—or tribe—precision as either level, function, or essence are misdirected. [Tribe is] a construction of reality, a model for organization and action.

The value of Mamdani’s short essay is he focuses not merely on the cultural functions of tribes (Gonzalez, 2009), but on their use as governmental administrative units; that is, as instruments of colonial governmentality (Foucault, 2007). As Mamdani writes (2012), tribes are “very largely a creation of laws drawn up by a colonial state which imposes group identities on individual subjects and thereby institutionalizes group life.” While “tribal characteristics” cannot be conflated with race, Mamdani’s understanding of “tribes” is in line with Stuart Hall’s thinking of “race” as a “floating signifier,” or more precisely as a cultural impulse to essentialize whole groups of people into classificatory systems of meaning based on skin color. For Hall, the problem does not so much lie in

the impulse to identify races, but rather when racial categories become one of the means by which power operates (Hall, 1997).³¹

Did tribes exist before colonialism? If by ‘tribe’ we understand an ethnic group with a common language, the answer is yes. But tribe as an administrative entity, which discriminates in favour of ‘natives’ against ‘non-natives’, most certainly did not exist before colonialism. One might equally ask: did race exist before racism? As regards differences in pigmentation, or in phenotype, the answer is yes. But as a fulcrum for group discrimination based on ‘racial’ difference, it did not... Like race, tribe became a single, exclusive identity only with colonialism (Mamdani, 2012).

In other words, tribes were—and continue to be—a complicated colonial invention and project that is as much of a temporal undertaking as a geographical one, with colonizers shaping the past, present, and future of entire populations through an extensive scholarly, legal, and administrative apparatus (Said, 1978).

Mamdani traces this colonial creation to the Indian administrator Henry Maine who, along with Edmund Burke, wanted to understand the local conditions and customs of the “real India” after the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Maine’s curiosity for “native conditions” in an unfamiliar context marked a real shift in the British colonial form of rule in the late 19th century, creating the conditions of possibility for Sandeman’s “tribal militias” discussed above.

Maine made an eloquent case for the historicity and agency of the colonized, as part of an attempt to reconstitute the colonial project on a more durable basis. In doing so, he distinguished the West from the non-West, universal civilization from local custom and,

³¹ “What is of course important for us is when the systems of classification become the objects of the disposition of power. That’s to say when the marking of difference and similarity across a human population becomes a reason why this group is to be treated in that way and get those advantages, and that group should be treated in another. It’s the coming together of difference, or categorization of our classification and power, the use of classification as a system of power, which is really what is very profound and one then sees that across a range of characteristics” (Hall, “Race, the Floating Signifier,” 1997).

crucially, the settler from the native, thereby laying the groundwork for a theory of nativism. If the settler was modern, the native was not; if the settler was defined by history, the native was defined by geography; if modern polities were defined by legislation and sanction, those of the native were defined by habitual observance (Mamdani, 2012).

Prior to this shift, as Uday Mehta (1999) has written, European liberal thought was confident in its own universality and cosmopolitanism. Up to the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century English liberals and missionaries were unhesitating in their belief that they could produce, as Macaulay in India wrote in his *Infamous Minute* (1835), “a class of persons Indian in blood, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (quoted in Bhabha, 1997: 154). But, after the Mutiny, orientalist like Maine and Burke moved away from the urbane coasts into the “strange” and uncertain Indian interior, where they could more thoroughly “understand” the village roots of their subjects. For Mehta, who is unforgiving of colonial violence associated with what he calls Burke’s “cosmopolitanism of sentiments,” this shift nevertheless produced in the British colonial disposition a sense of humility which, in part, undermined liberalism’s universalizing discourse.

By his openness, which is undergirded by humility and a concern with the sentiments that give meaning to people’s lives, Burke exposed himself and entered into a dialogue with the unfamiliar and accepted the possible risks of that encounter. Those risks include the possibility of being confronted with utter opacity—an intransigent strangeness, an unfamiliarity that remains so, an experience that cannot be shared, prejudices that do not readily fuse with a cosmopolitan horizon, a difference that cannot be assimilated. In accepting these risks and not settling them in advance of the encounter, Burke... shatters the philosophic underpinnings of the project of the empire by making it no more than a conversation between *two* strangers (Mehta, 1999: 22)

Thus, the invention of “tribal” forms that were borne out of this fundamental recognition of non-Western difference had two consequences. First, under the colonial gaze, it interpellated entire populations into “authentic” administrative units for indirect rule—empowering, in the meantime, the hierarchical “tribal chiefs” recognized by colonial governors. Second, this novel colonial project “enacted one of the first ‘fundamentalisms’ of the modern period, advancing the proposition that every colonized group had an original or pure tradition, whether religious or ethnic, and should return to that condition as a matter of course or be obliged to do so by law (Mamdani, 2012).” We should stress that this is a *placed* tradition, conceived as “local” and “indigenous” in nature, and *it must be so* in order to serve as the basis for “customary” law. “Tribes” therefore become a “politically driven, totalizing entity” (Mamdani, 2012) intimately tied to a spatially fetishized conception of place, where “tribes” and their designated area (village) fold into one another, producing “a kind of ‘identity thinking’ in which people are assimilated to the spaces they occupy and are viewed as attributes of these spaces (Collinge, 2005: 191).”

While Mamdani is correct that this is a politically driven colonial project, for our purposes it’s important to emphasize that the invention of tribes is equally a depoliticization precisely because the makeup of social groups is treated as traditional, nonhistorical, and therefore uncontested. Nicholas Dirks (1992) has made a similar argument with respect to “caste” in India, which is still popularly believed to be the cultural core of Indian history. “Much of what is taken to be timeless tradition is,” Dirks writes (1992: 8), “the paradoxical effect of colonial rule, where culture was depoliticized and reified into a specifically colonial version of civil society... ‘caste’ [is] more a product of rule than a predecessor of it. Such an argument need not accord total power to the British, nor suggest that caste was invented anew by them... Rather, salient cultural forms in India became represented as nonhistorical at the same time that these representations were only made possible under the historical conditions of early colonialism” (cf. Dirks, 2001). Nevertheless, Mamdani helps us grasp

that the spatial schemas employed by both colonial officials and counterinsurgency strategists—“village protection”; “local defense forces”; “community watch with AK-47s”—are doubly a masculine desire for hierarchy, order and certainty (Rose, 1996: 73; cf. Collinge, 2005: 193).

3.3.2 *Tribes as Instruments of War*

The history of colonialism and invention of the “tribe” as an administrative unit is pertinent for thinking through late-modern counterinsurgencies for many reasons, not least of which is that the United States military continues to traffic in these colonial discourses which essentialize and instrumentalize social groups (as we saw in Jones’s writings above). As I indicated at the outset, this production of necessary difference is the prerequisite for such instrumentalization, forging a *martial* rather than ethical relation with the (perceived) Other. For historians of American counterinsurgency like Alfred McCoy (2009), this proclivity for cultural instrumentalization is characteristic and typical of the U.S. experience in counterinsurgencies, from the Philippines and Haiti to Iraq and Afghanistan. Whereas the British (and French) are well known for investing in cultural knowledge to learn about, study, live among, dominate and pacify colonized peoples (Mitchell, 1991; Said, 1993), the US approach to counterinsurgency, according to McCoy, has always had a more pragmatic and tactical flare. Writing on the Philippines, McCoy notes:

While American colonial officials in Manila had little time for the classical studies of language and culture that obsessed European orientlists, clearly there must have been some conceptual framework for rule over an island empire stretching halfway around the world... Like all imperialists, Americans needed information. But they seem to have valued a different kind of knowledge... Consequently, American rule in the Philippines was distinguished by its inherently superficial character, by the absence of anything akin to an

American orientalism—that is, of anything approaching the deep study of archeology and philology to inform colonial rule. If the Europeans prized erudition, the Americans preferred information, accessible and succinct. If European imperialists emphasized deep cultural knowledge of oriental societies for their manipulation from within, American colonials amassed contemporary data for control from without. Instead of immersion in a Philippine past informed by archeology or philology, it was an American innovation to adapt its new information technologies for hasty, inherently superficial surveys of the Philippine present through cadastral mapping, census taking, geography, photography, police surveillance, and scientific reconnaissance (McCoy, 1999: 41-44).

This instrumentalist approach was pronounced in Iraq, when the United States began arming Sunni militias in a program commonly referred to as “Sons of Iraq,” or the “Sunni Awakening.” Following the disastrous DeBaathification program implemented by the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, Paul Bremer, which purged the interior and defense ministries of personnel perceived to have been loyal to Saddam Hussein, a large number of former Army and Police officers were purged from their jobs. Left armed, unemployed, and marked as “Sunni,” large numbers of men joined the insurgency against the US and Shiite-dominated government (for background see Gregory, 2008a; Ricks, 2008). As journalist Nir Rosen has repeatedly pointed out (2008, 2010), one of the primary factors behind the violent 2006-2007 Civil War was the U.S. military’s insistence in characterizing Iraqis as hopelessly Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish, which Rosen argues derives from an ahistorical (and deadly) framework.

Outside observers, including American politicians, have a tendency to assume that the current political divisions, violence, and prejudices in Iraq have ‘always been there,’ and the new conflict between Sunnis and Shiites has been conceptualized as ‘timeless.’ But Iraqis were merely adapting to the American view of Iraq as a collection of sects trying to

fit into the political system the Americans were building around that idea. These observers disregard the fact that the American presence actively created many of these problem and ‘read history backwards’ in an attempt to minimize the American role in Iraq... The civil war in Iraq began with the American occupation. The occupation was based on a vision that saw Iraqis has a collection of atomic sects. Even before the invasion, theorizers of the ‘new Iraq’... sought to de-Arabize the country. They blamed Arabism for the ills of totalitarian Iraq and proposed ideas such as ‘regional autonomies’ and federalism as alternatives to a centralized, top down, state-sponsored identity. Prescient critics... warned that if Iraqis ceased to be ‘Arab,’ then they would simply adopt more primordial forms of identity that would not necessarily be less violent or damaging. After the war Iraq was treated as a tabula rasa experiment, and the political institutions build by the occupation reflected these views. They were devised to undermine the idea of Iraqi nationalism that Saddam had tried to promote, and to correspond to the vision of Iraq as a trinational state. This further politicized sectarian forms of identity, making them the only avenue of political action in Iraq (Rosen, 2010: 21-22).

While this instrumentalist approach by the US persists in Afghanistan, there are critical differences, namely the United States always held out a carrot for Sunni militias to be incorporated back into the largely Shiite formal state apparatus, whereas in Afghanistan the US has actively sought to keep Afghan militias operating at the more “authentic” context of the village more or less outside an Afghan government that is viewed as corrupt and inept (see discussion on ANA and ANP above).

Following the September 11 attacks and subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, Derek Gregory noted that “two peculiar cartographic performances” took place: “The first was a performance of sovereignty through which the ruptured space of Afghanistan could be simulated as a coherent state... The second was a performance of territory through which the fluid networks of al-Qaeda could

be fixed in a bounded space (2004: 50).” Over the years, the first cartographic performance has more or less subsided and replaced by another cartographic performance that focuses on a regional mosaic of “population-centers” and villages which barely constitute an incoherent state. But, the second cartographic performance remains as prescient as ever, not so much identified by the mark of al-Qaeda, but more as an insurgent Taliban network bound and moving fluidly through space, potentially erupting violently at any moment. And, it is the “tribal villages,” particularly in the east and south, which are framed as the best chance for security, which is where we shall conclude.

3.4 Tribal versus Networked Insurgency

In an essay on “Monstrosity and the Monstrous” penned in 1962, Georges Canguilhem identified the monster as a “living being of negative value” whose power resides in disrupting what is expected to be the reasonable form and repetitive order of the living. The monstrous only has meaning when there is an aberration from expectation, and it is for this reason that Canguilhem suggests that “it is monstrosity, not death, that is the counter-value to life.”

Death is the permanent and unconditional threat of decomposition of the organism; it is the exterior limitation; it is the negation of the living by the not-living. But monstrosity is the accidental and conditional threat of non-achievement or distortion in the formation of form; it is interior limitation; it is the negation of the living by the non-viable (Canguilhem, 1962: 28-29).

In his magnum opus, Henri Lefebvre (1974) identifies a similar dynamic with respect to the “production of space,” which he frames as an “Hegelian space” opposed to a “Nietzschean space.” These labels are more than philosophical metaphors; Lefebvre is concerned with the attendant forces (energies), times and spaces associated with each analytic, with Hegel identified with form and synthesized order, and Nietzsche the playful, irregular, and unpredictable, that is, the monstrous.

Lefebvre understands this Hegelian-Nietzschian tension as fundamental to the social production of space. Hegelian space “crushes time by reducing differences to repetitions or circularities (dubbed ‘equilibrium’, ‘feedback’, ‘self-regulation’, and so on)... as both the end and meaning of history [by flattening] the social and ‘cultural’ spheres. It enforces a logic that puts an end to conflicts and contradictions (Lefebvre, 1974: 23).” In his characteristically dialectical fashion, Lefebvre argues that this Hegelian desire for spatial identity, for rationality and order provokes an Nietzschean opposition, one in which “makes permanent transgression inevitable”: “These seething forces are still capable of rattling the lid of the cauldron of the state and its space, for differences can never be totally quieted (Lefebvre, 1974: 23).”

In Afghanistan, the United States military is attempting to play both sides of this coin, by producing a “tribal” difference at the village level that is absolute in its non-Western alterity, and yet the serves basis for establishing an order and equilibrium against the unpredictable irregularities of insurgent network-space. In her remarkable book *The New Spatiality of Security*, Caroline Croser has suggested that one of the significant features of “network-centric warfare” has been the rejection by military planners of notions of “fixed subjectivity in the face of an enemy and circumstance... of a ‘real’ [battlespace] that is emergent, relational, and heterogeneous (Croser, 2009: 3).” A disquiet has long run through the US defense establishment over the competence of a networked insurgent “enemy” to potentially dissimulate their appearances, identities and actions in an area of operations. It is precisely because of this competence by insurgents to hide, deceive, camouflage, conceal, to blend in as “normal” and inconspicuous subjects within a population—or worse, masquerade as members of a police or army force—that militaries put such a high premium on “intelligence.” The “monstrosity” of insurgencies, to use Canguilhem’s term, lies in these so-called “militant tricks” (Poole, 2005), especially now that warfare takes place “amongst the people.” As David Kilcullen has written:

“[T]he complexity of insurgency environments seems to be dramatically greater even than in conventional warfare. Counterinsurgency operations, then, invoke a higher than ‘normal’ degree of ambiguity: the traditional concepts of friend and enemy are blurred, with organizations and groups switching sides rapidly, or even operating simultaneously as *both* friend and enemy... populations in insurgency negotiate a complex process of continuously morphing contingent identity, where each person’s or group’s status (friend, enemy, neutral, ally or opponent, bystander, sympathizer) changes moment by moment, depending on the nature of the groups with which it is interacting... thus, identity in insurgency is highly fluid (Kilcullen 2010b: 143-144).

It is from this perspective that we see the utility of tribal militias. Yes, as Kilcullen points out (2010a), local indigenous forces should “mirror the enemy, not us,” but only to the extent that they mirror the “authentic” non-Western essence of the Other. To play on the inverse of Bhabha’s metonymy of presence, the role of tribal militias at the village level is to *make visible*, stratify, and induce stasis in the fluid conditions of the “complex battle environments” that are at once dynamic, deteriorating, and changing moment by moment. Against the unfixed subjectivity of event-ful “networked insurgency”, an immutable fixed subjectivity is produced steeped in tradition. The simplicity of culture and place in the rural Pashtun countryside halt and prevail over the inauthentic complex adaptive systems of a transnational “neo-Taliban” who networked affiliations with al-Qaeda and the Haqqani Network undermine its Afghan legitimacy (Guistozzi, 2007a).

Indeed, the desire for this “authenticity” is partially revealed by Afghanistan expert Antonio Guistozzi, the darling social scientist of counterinsurgency circles, in explaining the title of his book *Empires of Mud* (2009), an informative study on warlords in Afghanistan. Guistozzi writes (2009: 2), “The title of this book, *Empires of Mud*, sums up in a way the impact of warlords on state-formation in the absence of interaction with the other social forces. I borrowed the title from a Nine Inch Nails

song covered by Johnny Cash in order to convey the sense of politics which leave nothing behind in their wake, as well as to pay homage to Afghanistan's omnipresent mud." Any fan of Nine Inch Nails or Johnny Cash knows that the lyrics from the song "Hurt" actually say "You can have it all/ My *empire of dirt*..." (from *Downward Spiral* [1994]). Guistozzi explains the curious change in the lyric in a footnote (2009: 24n.2): "I changed the original 'empire of dirt' to 'empires of mud' to implicitly refer to Afghanistan's typical mud-brick buildings." But, anybody who reads the book knows that "empires of mud" is more than a metaphor; Guistozzi's major theme is that social organization and movement of warlords and/or Taliban fail to authentically reflect, or more precisely *stick* to the desires of everyday Afghans. And this may be true on some level, but it's not an innocent gesture on Guistozzi's part. It is precisely to revive what Carl Schmitt once identified as the "telluric character" of insurgent environments, that is, the terrestrial earth-bound *place-ness* antithetical to a complex environment—one based on "ties to the soil, to autochthonous populations, and to the geographical particularity of the land (Schmitt, 2007: 21)." Only *there* does authenticity and order reside, and the monstrous hybridity purged.

But other monstrosities prevail. On September 2, 2012, over 200 villagers from Kanam in Kunduz province held a protest over the deaths of 11 men from their town who were killed by 20 to 30 "tribal" *arbakai* militia men trained by US Special Forces. (Sarfraz and Nordland, 2012). As Sarfraz and Nordland report, it was the second time Kanam had been attacked by the "tribal militias" as "reprisal killings" for apparent Taliban activity in the area, one month after another *arbakai* group killed nine civilians in a rage through Pashtun villages in Oruzgan province. "He came to save and yet he shed our blood [...] Are we chastised because we wished to save ourselves? [...] The foe demanded that was his/ The blood that I desired to save—I shed." (Rabbi Loew, in H. Leivick's *The Golem: A Dramatic Poem in Eight Scenes* [1921]).

4 Policing the “Local”

The Invention of Complex Battlespace and the Weaponization of Scale

“The scale of the Islamist agenda is new, but their grievances and methods would be familiar to any insurgent in history.”

David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (2010)

“Colonial knowledge was frequently based on misunderstandings that led to an uneasy relationship between knowledge and power. It was often the uneasiness of this relationship that made colonial knowledge, in the end, so effective.”

Nicholas Dirks, *Colonialism and Culture* (1992)

“Another book. Another slain forest.”

John Updike, *Hugging the Shore* (1992)

4.1 Introduction

IN the last chapter, I argued that the U.S. military’s movement to arm and operationalize “tribal” militias in Afghanistan was a strategic maneuver to counteract the (assumed) power of “networked” insurgencies to operate through the indeterminate “event-spaces” in the country’s south and east. Tribes in Afghanistan are viewed by the U.S. military as more appropriately and historically “authentic” to the Pashtun essence in the southern and eastern parts of the country, and thus treated as the starting point for any ordering principle. Tribal militias are conceptualized as embodying a place-bound, timeless, and local character at the village level. From the U.S. military’s perspective, by privileging this hierarchical structure, tribal militias can contravene upon—to the point of prevention—the topological and emergent violence that characterizes networked insurgencies like the Taliban (Hannah, 2006). In other words, the place-bound character of tribal militias allows the U.S. and Afghan militaries, in theory, to harness and preempt networks in their emergence, and prevent their spread beyond the containers of the village, region, or even “the state.”

Within this revived colonial train of thought, a central assumption is at work: that the U.S. military is operating both globally and locally in so-called “complex environments,” opaque and

restricted in nature, and mixed with diverse populations that blur the lines between friend and enemy.

As the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey recently wrote:

The environment in which we conduct operations is characterized by four clear trends: growing uncertainty, rapid change, increased competitiveness, and greater decentralization. Given these trends, our leaders must expect and be prepared to confront a variety of complex problems, most of which will include myriad interdependent variables and all of which will include a human dimension. (Dempsey, 2010)

Among the figures of late-modern war, the term “complex environments” has a strange kind of presence. In formal U.S. military doctrine, complex environments refer to a transformed *conflict context* where physical, political, cultural, and informational processes have intertwined and meshed together in such unpredictable ways that military operations within such environments have lost their traditional and straightforward “cause-and-effect” character. The traditional conception of war, typically imagined as state-based military forces meeting face-to-face on a battlefield in a clash of wills, has been overcome – or better, overwhelmed – by the contexts in which operations. Western militaries are faced with an environment where anything like a “decisive victory” in any given context is increasingly thought to be an elusive fantasy. Any action taken by a military or insurgent force that results in a short-term “victory” in one place can have unforeseen repercussions beyond the initial point of application in time and space, in what are called “second” or “third” degree effects; for example, the displacement of refugees into camps that destabilize a region, like Iraq and/or Syria. This is especially true in a globalized world taken as relationally connected, and where the “explosion of social forces can,” as Mackinder once put it, “sharply reecho from the far side of the globe” in unpredictable ways (Smith, 2002: 11). Clausewitz once famously called war a violently creative act, but it was T.E. Lawrence (1935: 183) who underscored that a violent act in war resulting in death can be like a “pebble

dropped in water: each may make only a brief hole, but rings of sorrow widen out from them.” This is equally true of military actions as terrorist attacks or insurgencies.

Military theorists roaming the halls of the Pentagon and RAND Corporation have increasingly sounded the call on the changed nature of contemporary violence, staged as it is in terrain where physical, social, and informational forces fold into and out of one another with highly uncertain outcomes. The staging is important. Over the past decade, there have been abundant attempts to grasp the *shape* of a transient complex environment within military doctrine. For example, “the city” has become a privileged place-marker in military theory (Graham, 2011), since urban areas are viewed as the sites with greatest degrees of unpredictability. Rapid fire commodity exchange, the proliferation of informal dwellings (slums), the intermingling of diverse peoples, manifest class differences, population density, shadows and back-alleys all raise the possibility for violence. It is assumed that violence can erupt anywhere and at any moment, with erratic and unforeseeable ripple effects. *Complexity* is taken as an active variable within and across all scales, making multidimensionality a fundamental feature at all “levels of engagement,” from the local to global (Dillon and Reid, 2009). In an attempt to theoretically spatialize this new world terrain, Derek Gregory (2011) has called this complex phenomenon the “slippery spaces” of the Everywhere War. Because of their indeterminacy and slipperiness, Western militaries have made it a central task to develop methods and technologies for identifying, verifying, and ordering these spaces with the desire to harness, and perhaps stabilize their complexity—or at least make them more predictable.

For U.S., European, and Australian military planners, the geopolitical implications of urbanization and the unpredictability that can be “excited” within urban populations – especially in their prejudiced views of the global south – have presented cities and other complex environments as the horizon for present and future conflict (Davis, 2006). “Future threats,” writes the protagonist of this chapter David Kilcullen (2012: 32), “will be nested in the complex urban littoral environment, illicit

activities will nest within licit networks, and local threat networks will be nested in networks at the regional and global levels.” (See Figure 4.1) Indeed, cities are special in that they create a “complex, diverse, diffuse, and lethal environment” (Kilcullen, 2004: 4), with forces that can possibly “jump scales” at any moment.

The City as a System

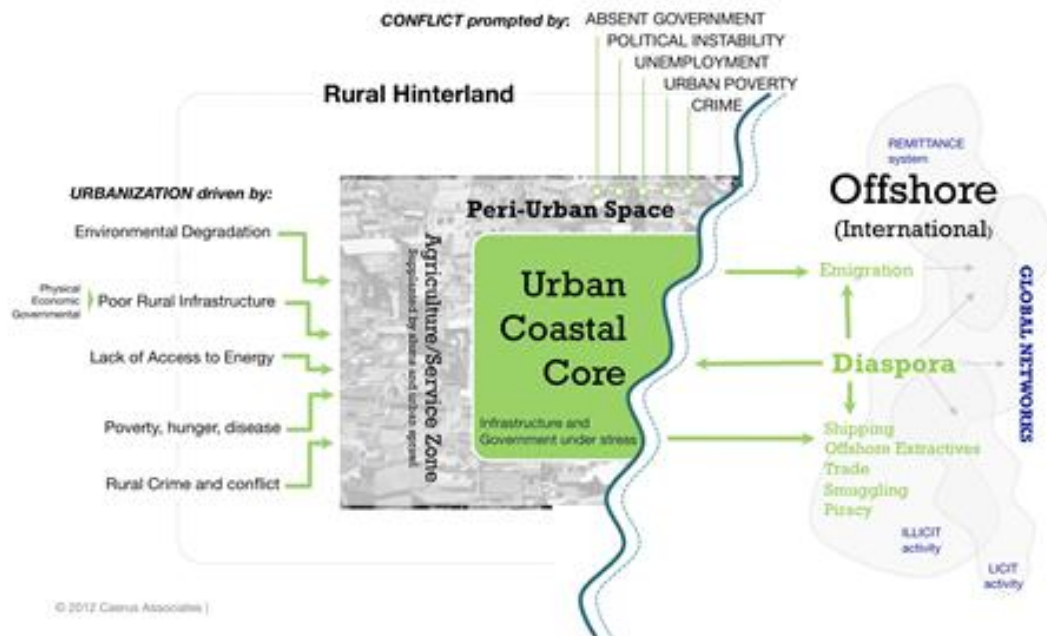


Figure 11: Kilcullen’s Portrait of the “Complex Global-Local Urban System” (Caerus Associates, 2012)

But, that is not the central problem military planners believe they face. What has been challenged within U.S. military apparatuses is the *epistemological framing of complex environments*: how does one “know” the variables and actors operative within a complex environment? How does one paint an functional picture of a context in order to best intervene, with – or without – “precision”?

Traditionally, military planners and commanders would rely upon the personnel instruments producing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) as the privileged means for gaining insights into the “enemy” and (his) activities. But, with the additional emphasis in late-modern war on the *populations and environments* of insurgencies (Anderson, 2011), present-day military planners would be the first to concede that ISR is very limited and hardly a straightforward affair. Internal war within populations and complex environments, rather than between conventional foes on a battlefield, has a tendency of making *comprehensive* intelligence gathering nearly impossible in unfamiliar contexts (Flynn, 2010).³² Intelligence operates as a way of seeing a population. At once a set of procedures to establish forms of sensibility and perception, intelligence is a powerful mechanism that works through highly particular modes of cultural iteration and signification to establish a *perceived* transparency within “opaque” areas or networks. The role of intelligence is to decode and make visible the fluid conditions in “complex environments” that are at once dynamic, deteriorating and changing moment to moment. There is an intentionality at work within intelligence, insofar as it’s a practice that seeks to render a sustainable repetition of appearance—that is, pattern recognition—for both individual and institutional military observation.

But, intelligence has become a difficult task, prompting, at least within the U.S. military, a series of organizational mini-revolutions in methods for gathering intelligence. Because of numerous military intelligence failures in both of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, a sizeable literature has grown on the contemporary difficulties of intelligence gathering. A good example is the U.S. military’s constant frustrations in determining who is a “friend” or “enemy” in counterinsurgency contexts where shifting identities and loyalties are the hallmark of complex “battlespace.” As Kilcullen has written:

³² See Chapter 6 on the novel ways in which military intelligence has tried to overcome these limitations via the use of “big data”.

“[T]he complexity of insurgency environments seems to be dramatically greater even than in conventional warfare. Counterinsurgency operations ... invoke a higher than ‘normal’ degree of ambiguity: the traditional concepts of friend and enemy are blurred, with organizations and groups switching sides rapidly, or even operating simultaneously as *both* friend and enemy... populations in insurgency negotiate a complex process of continuously morphing contingent identities, where each person’s or group’s status (friend, enemy, neutral, ally or opponent, bystander, sympathizer) changes moment by moment, depending on the nature of the groups with which it is interacting... thus, identity in insurgency is highly fluid (Kilcullen, 2010b: 143-144).

This chapter examines the concept of “complex environments” through an interrogation of the writings of David Kilcullen. Kilcullen is one of the foremost military thinkers on contemporary complex “battlespaces.” It is nearly impossible to consider the relationship between complexity and late-modern war without coming across his name, and he has been cited by nearly every military text of consequence over the past decade. With the possible exception of Martin van Creveld, no other writer in the past fifteen or so years has influenced the officer class within the U.S. military as much as Kilcullen. Counterinsurgency’s hagiographer, the journalist Thomas Ricks, has written that “Kilcullen’s influence on how the U.S. military thinks about counterinsurgency cannot be overstated.”

A former Lieutenant Colonel in the Australian Army, Kilcullen’s star rose within U.S. military circles when he served as lead advisor on counterinsurgency for General David Petraeus, as well as two stints in the Department of State as a Special Advisor for counterinsurgency and counterterrorism to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Kilcullen was instrumental in crafting the strategic framework for counterinsurgency taken up by the Bush Administration in Iraq following its 2007 “troop surge.” Kilcullen was also one of the principal architects in writing the U.S. Army’s *Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24*. Kilcullen’s essay, “Twenty-eight Articles: Fundamentals of

Company-Level Counterinsurgency,” a “how-to” guide for company commanders, was likely the most widely read counterinsurgency piece among military personnel fighting in Iraq, and appears as the first appendix to FM 3-24. Not since the hey-days of Sir Robert Thompson and David Galula in the 1960s has a lone counterinsurgency expert held so much sway in formulating U.S. military doctrine, and in garnering large audiences on the topic on the lecture circuit. Now that counterinsurgency doctrine is fading into its second twilight, Kilcullen has pivoted to issues of urban security and “military resilience” in the face of climate-induced wars and migrations, consulting the U.S. military and corporations through his private intelligence metrics outfit, Caerus Associates.

Kilcullen gained experience in counterinsurgency tactics when he commanded two Australian army battalions in East Timor and the Priangan highlands of West Java in the late-1990s. Later, Kilcullen assisted in several missions in both Iraq and Afghanistan, writing many observations on his field experience with the U.S. Army. Given the dearth of experience within the U.S. Army in counterinsurgency tactics during the initial stages of the Iraq and Afghanistan occupations, Kilcullen’s writings immediately had currency within the Pentagon—especially since he fluently spoke the business-language of institutional “innovation” and “adaptation” the U.S. military needed in order to “properly” face its foes. What makes Kilcullen so effective is his ability to paint rich and vivid pictures of insurgencies, always emphasizing their complexity, but never making them seem overwhelming. Instead, Kilcullen’s trick is to turn counterinsurgency into a field of expertise, where he can sit comfortably as headmaster, pinpointing with ease the weaknesses of the “enemy.” Kilcullen’s “complex battlespaces” create the impression that they are places we have visited before, and can contain with the right conceptual tools—his conceptual tools. After all, he is an anthropologist trained in “decoding” cultures and societies.

The chapter begins by analyzing how Kilcullen invokes the image of “complex environments” to justify Western intervention against what he understands to be an ongoing and

growing “global insurgency” of radical jihadists (Kilcullen, 2004b). Kilcullen arrived at a sophisticated conception of complex environments while overseeing both simulated and real operations under his command in the 1990s. Based on his experiences in East Timor and West Java, and in the wake of Australian involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, Kilcullen wrote (2004a) the Australian Army’s highly influential “Future Land Operating Concept” on “Complex Warfighting.” In his early writings, Kilcullen established a typology on complexity on which all his later writings are based: the global “conflict environment”, regional “theaters of operation”, complex terrains (physical, human, and informational), and local disaggregated battlespaces. In his book *The Accidental Guerrilla* (2009), Kilcullen argues for a strategy of “delinking” local insurgencies from “global” transnational organizations like Al-Qaeda. Following this analysis of Kilcullen’s “complex environments,” I examine the organizational responses he puts forward to defeat insurgencies.

I make two central arguments through this analysis of Kilcullen’s work. First, I argue that within Kilcullen’s theory of “countering global insurgency” by violently delinking local and global movements, he effectively *weaponizes scale*. The weaponization of scale cuts through the theoretical debate within geography around the concept of scale, and I argue that its utilization is both an instrument of power *and* a materially violent outcome. Second, I suggest there is an insidious maneuver at work in Kilcullen’s conceptualization of both militaries and insurgent organizations as “complex adaptative systems.” Kilcullen is adamant that in using biological concepts like “complex adaptive systems” to describe networked military and insurgent organizations he is not speaking metaphorically (see below). It is my contention that in importing concepts derivative of evolutionary biology, Kilcullen biologizes “the enemy.” This has important strategic effects, I argue, in so far as there is not an established rights discourse for complex adaptive systems or non-state networks (cf. Ansorge 2010), thus giving militaries *carte blanche* to kill groups rendered as barbaric “viruses” or “diseases” that need to be surgically removed – with precision, mind you – rather than as civil subjects operating under the

laws of war. In other words, employing biological language facilitates the depoliticization of conflict. It is the same logic that justifies indefinitely detaining detainees in Guantanamo, or killing them through “precision strikes” from the skies of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

4.2 Complex Terrain/Disaggregated Battlespaces

Kilcullen pinpoints his interest in “complex terrain” to a three-year stint he spent in the mid-1990s as an exchange instructor at the British Army’s Platoon Commander’s Battle Course, located at Sennybridge in Wales and at Copehill Down on Salisbury Plain (Kilcullen, 2003a). Kilcullen had already been thinking through how global and local political and economic processes affect one another in his dissertation work (2006c), but it was at the Battle Course that this thinking on the problem began to gel. The Battle Course is a simulation course in urban terrain where military units engage in offensive and defense battles with another, which are recorded and then replayed for analysis. Over his three years at the Course commanding several simulation attacks on villages, Kilcullen began to observe in the replays of his attacks a tendency among his troops that ran contrary to the “line formation” tactical manoeuvres Australian officers are required learn in military school.

Watching the video ‘replay’ of these attacks and dissecting them in after-action reviews, I was surprised by the behavior and positioning of my troops in assault. They did not advance by sections or fire teams, clearing house by house and establishing a neat ‘forward line of own troops.’ Nor did they move in a straight line. *Instead, their movement resembled that of a flock of birds—small independent groups working to a common purpose but without a fixed formation.* They would move to a point from which to observe and suppress the next enemy position, then to a point from which the position could be cleared, then to a point from which to observe the next position, and so on. This

cycle of observe-suppress-move-clear-observe was not based on lines of advance, forward lines of own or enemy troops, or indeed anything *linear* at all. Instead it was based on ‘point’—points of observation, firing points, jumping off points for assaults (Kilcullen, 2003a: 30-31).

It is Kilcullen’s observation of *point movement* in battle that forms the epistemological basis for all of his future writings on complex battlespaces. Kilcullen’s early writings (2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b) called for a revision in infantry tactics in the Australian Army, which Kilcullen argued were based on anachronistic “line formations” derived from the Australian Army’s jungle environment experiences in south-east Asia in the 1960s and 1970s.³³ The problem with traditional “line thinking” is that, while it works, it results in a heavy cost of casualties and ammunition, and mistakenly uses firepower in order to support troop manoeuvre into an area. Basically, troops entering into a village in line formation are more easily picked off by their adversary. In his observations of “natural” point-movements, Kilcullen calls for a revision of infantry tactics that takes into account a terrain’s essential *complexity*. Importantly, Kilcullen argues, troop movements *naturally* conform to this complexity in their tendency to manoeuvre in small groups from point to point, or *as points themselves*.

In the close fight, soldiers tend to operate in small, semi-autonomous teams that ‘flock’ or ‘swarm’, rather than move forward in large linear-based groups. Because of the reality of close combat, it probably makes more sense to consider terrain in terms of representing a network of points or nodes, rather than as a sequence of lines (2003b: 68).

In his revision of infantry tactics, Kilcullen calls for “point suppression,” meaning small, semi-autonomous teams that are better tailored to complex environments in order to take out an adversary’s defenses point-by-point, with manoeuvre coming *after* suppression in order to consolidate gains:

³³ Kilcullen later revised this point (2003b) by suggesting that jungle formations more resembled “blob” formations rather than lines, even though the written doctrine reflects a “line thinking”.

“volume of fire is applied to suppress the enemy, weaken his morale and inflict casualties (2003b: 69).”

What matters for Kilcullen is not the positioning of any forward line, but rather “getting to a point (or series of points) from which the enemy can be identified and suppressed effectively (2003a: 33).”

One can already see that this rendering or imaginary of a restricted terrain has a two-sided scale effect. First, the tactical revision Kilcullen calls for is scaled to the level of the individual soldier, working closely with a team, who is confronting a conflict from a first-person perspective. The view is reminiscent of a “first-person shooter” game where the distance one can see is *shorter* than the distance one can shoot; i.e., complex battlespaces *effect* an opacity. An implication of this rendering of battlespace by Kilcullen is that the subject he inaugurates is one with a *limited perspective* and a narrow frame of reference, which can lead to subjective confusion and anxiety.

Anyone who has ever participated in close combat, or debriefed troops after a contact, knows the conundrum that hampers our understanding of battle: ‘If you weren’t there, you don’t know what happened. If you *were* there, you probably can’t remember clearly.’ Close combat in complex terrain is so confusing and fast moving that even people a few dozen meters away do not know exactly what is happening. Meanwhile, those who are on the spot are subjected to the psychology of crisis. Like those people in a car accident, their sensory perceptions are influenced by the expectation of imminent death or injury and the enormous shock of combat. For this reason, everyone remembers a particular engagement differently (2003a: 37)

It is implied within Kilcullen’s analysis that this limited perspective in battle inclines soldiers to move together as small teams, which he stresses is the *natural* formation. Indeed, this becomes *the* privileged sphere for warfighting, and the key scale (“the local body”) for success in counterinsurgency. We will return to this point below.

In the meantime, it is important to make the second point that as Kilcullen scales down to the level of the soldier in order to capture the nuances of complex terrain, he simultaneously scales up to the “god’s-eye view” of the rational commander, who can look down – or rather, look *at* via the playback video – the battlefield, and overlay an intelligibility onto the scene, while inaugurating the “objective” observer. In inaugurating this privileged, rational subject, Kilcullen is immediately inclined to summon “science” as a method for deducing the sequences of conflict as a network phenomenon resembling formations one would find, for example, in “nature” (flocks of birds...). This ideological manoeuvre is important for several reasons, not least of which that it places Kilcullen in an authority position as expert. In itself, such expertise is not necessarily a “bad” thing, but it has important implications when Kilcullen’s star rises within the U.S. military and his writings gain traction; e.g., when he comfortably describes terrorist networks as “complex adaptive systems.”

From his early experiences in both simulated and real battles in the 1990s, Kilcullen turned in the 2000s to developing a scaled typology of the spaces that make up complex warfighting: (1) the conflict environment; (2) regional theaters of operation; (3) complex terrain; and (4) disaggregated battlespaces. This typology (Kilcullen 2004a, 2005) became the foundation undergirding all of his writings, and serves as the grid of intelligibility that makes his writings so influential within the U.S. military.

4.2.1 *The Conflict Environment*

For Kilcullen, the “conflict environment” comprises the *global* processes that effect and are effected by processes occurring at the lower levels. It is the broad context in which conflicts take place. Like the analysts of “new wars” (Kaldor, 1999; Münkler, 2005), Kilcullen identifies two primary determinants, or what he calls “drivers,” that constitute the conflict environment. The first driver is the

post-Cold War intensification of globalization, referring to the increased mobility and connectivity of peoples, commodities, services and information across borders. Kilcullen argues that one of the major consequences of globalization is the production of a field of winners and losers, and the perception by the losers that globalization is a form of cultural imperialism “corroding beliefs, eroding the fabric of traditional societies, and leading to social, spiritual and cultural dislocation (2004a: 3).” The flipside to globalization, however, is that despite its production of inequality, it has simultaneously given the losers “unprecedented tools” with which to respond—namely, global media, the internet, travel infrastructure, and commerce, all of which “facilitate the coordination of diffuse movements that oppose Western dominance.” This is an important point because the inability of Western militaries to *totally* control the “information environment” (i.e., perception control) is a constitutive element of complex warfighting. It is the inequalities borne out of globalization, as well as the globalized environment’s ability to facilitate and diffuse the inputs and outputs of conflict, which create the conditions of possibility for complex battlespaces. The second key determinant of the conflict environment, according to Kilcullen, is the overwhelming dominance of the United States in conventional warfare. Because of this dominance, state and non-state actors are driven either to invest in “weapons of mass destruction” such as nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, or are forced to challenge the United States and its allies with *asymmetric* measures, like terrorist attacks and/or goading the U.S. into drawn-out insurgencies (Kilcullen 2004, 2006, 2009).

4.2.2 *Regional Theaters of Operation*

Within the global conflict environment, Kilcullen divides the world into nine theaters of operation in which Islamists and other non-Western friendly forces are either functioning or planning

attacks on the West.³⁴ For Kilcullen, these regional theaters of operation are the most critical on which Western forces must operate, because they serve as the *linkage points* between nefarious global actors (e.g., Al-Qaeda) and local insurgency movements (e.g., Al-Shabaab in Somalia). In an argument that resembles Thomas Barnett's (2004) infamous new "Pentagon map" (cf. Roberts et al. 2005, for critique), Kilcullen's regional divisions accentuate a core/periphery geopolitical imaginary dotted with "hot spots" (see Figure 2). Underlying these hotspots along the periphery is, according to Kilcullen, the global spread of Islamist movements that are attempting to fulfill al-Qaeda's "master plan" of establishing a pan-Islamic caliphate. "As the map indicates," he writes (2010: 175), "every single Islamist insurgency in the world sits within the claimed pan-Islamic caliphate, while the most active theatres correspond to the historical caliphate. Taken at face value, this map seems to show that Al Qaeda is indeed executing the strategy outlined by Zawahiri: re-establishing an Islamic caliphate and then using this as a springboard to extend Islamic control over the remainder of the globe."

³⁴ The Americas, Western Europe, Australasia, Iberian Peninsula and Maghreb, Greater Middle East, East Africa, The Caucasus and European Russia, South and Central Asia, Southeast Asia.

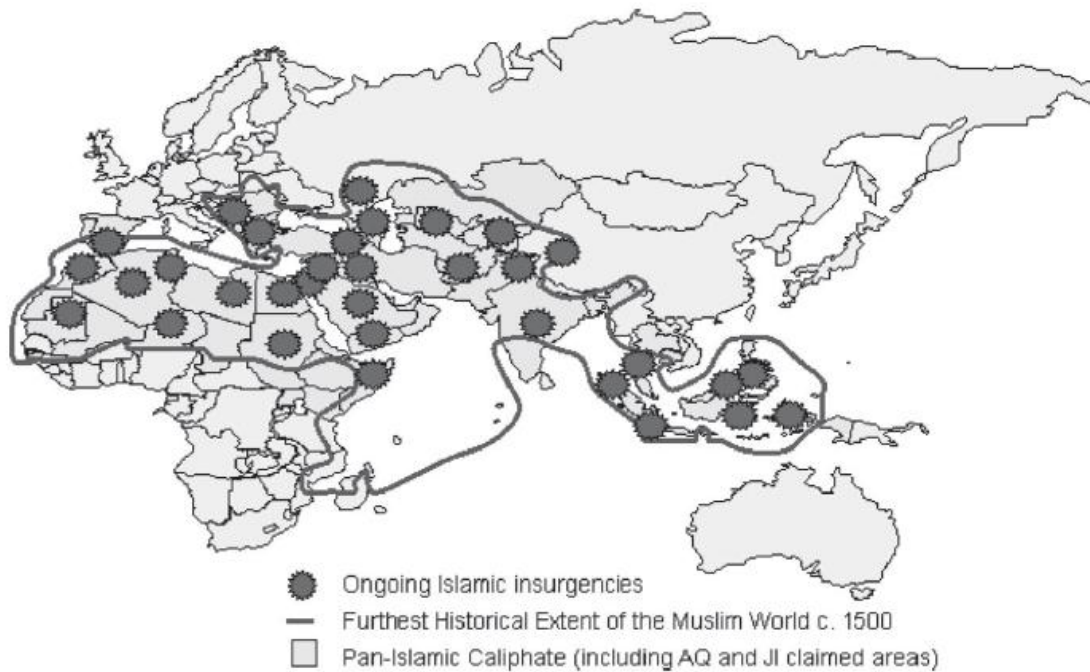


Figure 12: Insurgencies, Terrorism and the Caliphate (Source: Kilcullen, 2005)

Kilcullen readily admits that “the reality turns out to be more complex,” but the way in which it is “more complex” is telling. Kilcullen does not deny that there is a master plan to reestablish a “pan-Islamic caliphate” (for critique, see Watts, 2006). Rather, the paranoia is warranted insofar as one utilizes the right *analysis* to establish this “fact.”³⁵

For Kilcullen, the glue that holds together the possibility for a pan-Islamic caliphate are the regional theaters of operation; more particularly, the *links* the regional theaters facilitate between global and local movements in a global jihad: “the global nature of the jihad actually resides in the links, not the individual groups themselves (2010: 175).” Developing a typology within a typology, Kilcullen identifies multiple links within theaters, ranging from ideological and financial linkages

³⁵ “In fact, the reality turns out to be much more complex. Nonetheless, the map accurately portrays the existence of the global spread of Islamist movements, at least some of which are linked to a broader, globally focused movement that seeks to overturn the world order through subversion, terrorism, and insurgency. (Kilcullen, 2010: 175).”

across space, to personal and familial linkages through intermarriage or individuals who fought together in previous insurgencies (2005: 600). Kilcullen is able to deduce several qualitative features from these linkages. First, Kilcullen turns to his dissertation work in Indonesia, and argues that jihadist movements can be modeled based on “traditional patron-client relationships” (2010: 183). With this model, Kilcullen suggests the military dimension of Islamist movements is *subordinate* to these other linkages, which are actually more personal in nature. “The jihad appears to be more like a tribal group, an organized crime syndicate, or an extended family than like a military organization.” In this way, Kilcullen draws a firm distinction between the West and “Islam,” what he calls the “civilizational frontier” (Kilcullen, 2005: 599), and frames insurgents as ruled by passions and familial relations rather than by Western reason. Drawing then on complexity theory, Kilcullen argues that a second feature of the global and local linkages is that their meeting in regional theaters is what gives the global jihad its dynamism and power to thrive. For this reason, the West must concentrate on *breaking the linkages*, what Kilcullen calls “disaggregation,” that allows these movements to function as global entities. This is what Kilcullen means by the title of his widely-read book *The Accidental Guerrilla* (2009): local grievances and movements “accidentally” become global and identified with transnational terrorist networks through these regional linkages. In order to prevent a pan-Islamic caliphate, the West must focus on this scale of intervention with a strategy of *de-linking*.

4.2.3 Complex Terrain

According to Kilcullen (2004a, 2004b), once a military intervenes at any scale, the participants quickly discover that they are operating in a “complex terrain.” Complex terrains are the sites where actual battles happen, and increasingly these are in cities or areas with dense foliage (e.g., orchards) and difficult terrain (e.g., mountains). What Kilcullen means by “complexity” is not straightforward, and serves as stand-in for several different attributes of a battle context. Kilcullen

basically has two meanings for the term (1) a *perceptual complexity* when one is within a complex terrain, and (2) a *complex material effect* of multiple processes manifesting themselves within a terrain. From the perspective of a soldier or platoon operating, a terrain becomes “complex” when one cannot see as far as they can shoot, or what is also called “restricted terrain.” Kilcullen posits (2003b) that terrain itself is not inherently complex. Rather, complexity is an immanent effect of the actors operating in it, as well as the situated limit of their line of sight or perspective.

Complexity should be seen as a relative term that depends on what reconnaissance assets a force can apply in the field. The distinguishing feature of complex terrain is, therefore, what might be called a *detection threshold*—that is, the point at which a ground force, depending on its reconnaissance assets, is likely to detect the presence of an enemy force (2003b: 73).

The detection threshold of complex terrains is important insofar as it forms the *negativity* around which the dialectic of complex battlespace revolves; that is, the *gap* between any individual soldier’s experience, and the operational environment through which s/he is moving, assaulting or defending.³⁶

The unreliability of perceptual experience is a prominent theme in discussing complex terrains. Kilcullen emphasizes continually the point that participating in combat in complex battlespaces exceeds or renders moot the perceptual and psychological experiences of its participants. Technological control also has its limits: “war will constantly tend to escape human control, unleashing forces that rapidly take any conflict out of the realm of conscious rational policy and into the irrational, edge-of-chaos realm of hatred and violence (Kelly and Kilcullen, 2004: 90).” This theme of perceptual complexity is rooted in Clausewitz’s *On War*, when he wrote of war’s “clouds of uncertainty”: “The great uncertainty of all data in War is a peculiar difficulty, because all action must, to a certain extent,

³⁶ Kilcullen often conflates perception and experience in his writings, both of which he finds to be unreliable in terms of capturing “reality.”

be planned in a mere twilight, which in addition not infrequently – like the effect of a fog or moonshine – gives things exaggerated dimensions and unnatural appearance (Clausewitz, 1968: 189).”

In terms of complex material effects, Kilcullen (2004a) divides complex terrains, like cities, into three intertwined processes: physical, human, and informational. The physical aspect of complex terrain is, as already noted, the restricted view it renders on an individual or group level. Complex physical terrain “typically comprises a mosaic of open spaces (acting as manoeuvre corridors, killing areas, or compartments) and patches of restricted terrain which prevent movement and deny observation (2004a: 5).” The human terrain is the diversity of population groups living within a physical terrain. “The geographical space between... battlespaces is not empty: it contains combatants and uncommitted potential combatants, as well as key infrastructure for population support (2004a: 10).” As is well known, Kilcullen places (2007, 2009) heavy emphasis on linguistic and cultural training in order to “decode” this level of terrain, and minimize any “second or third degree” effects that may result from arbitrary or misapplied violence by an occupying force. In so doing, Kilcullen advances the old canard that civilian populations support insurgent movements only because they are coerced into doing so (McClintock, 1992: 60). Informational processes, such as the use of social networking technologies or propaganda distribution, contribute their own complexity by depriving militaries of total information control. Moreover, the use of media by militaries in “information operations” can have unintended effects. The overarching point Kilcullen wants to emphasize with complex terrain is that the levels of actual warfighting are “being compressed,” meaning that strategic, operational and tactical actions “that happen on one level have a direct effect on another [level] (2004a: 8)” —from the body to the global, from the tactical to the strategic.

4.2.4 *Disaggregated Battlespace*

Disaggregated battlespace is less of a formal scale than “sub-scale” or predominant aspect of operating in complex terrains. What Kilcullen means by the term was hinted at above in that he posits a (natural) tendency of large force groups “disaggregating” or “dissolving” into what he calls a “series of mini-battles” once combat ensues. “If a thousand troops attack a hundred in a complex terrain, what ensues is not one large, single battle, but several dozen individual duels and small group engagements fought over a dispersed area (2003b: 73).” The hallmark of disaggregated battlespaces is what Kilcullen calls *close combat*, where an attack can emerge at anytime and anywhere within a battlespace—what Croser (2009) has called “event-spaces.” Never without his Orientalizing moments, Kilcullen uses “the urban maze of Mogadishu” as the quintessential disaggregated battlespace. Kilcullen deduces an important technology of war out of this sub-scale of complex terrain: the scaling-down of *capability* to the individual level. “A restricted environment demands,” he writes (2003b: 73), “small-team skill and individual capability rather than large-unit sophistication... In [complex terrain], semi-autonomous teams fighting mini-battles in a disaggregated battlespace would effectively become miniature battlegroups.” It is this deduction that forms the basis for his approach to successful counterinsurgency which, Kilcullen argues, takes place at the company and individual level (Kilcullen, 2006). Why? Because complex terrain is dynamic, uncertain and always changing – disaggregating, even; meaning that “success” can only come in developing “locally tailored solutions” with companies who can *adapt* “in an agile way as the situation develops (2010: 27).” Here, Kilcullen advances a second canard, summoning the American entrepreneurial spirit where military companies, if they keep their chins up and adapt, can shape the world to their “imperious will” (Eagleton, 2000).

4.3 Complex Adaptive Systems

Kilcullen's typology of complex warfighting is significant in two ways. First, it marks a departure from "systems thinking" that dominated Western military thought throughout the Cold War (Kelly and Kilcullen, 2004; cf. Bousquet, 2010; Delanda, 1992; Lawson, 2011). Systems-thinking refers to interpretations of an opponent's force as a *closed* command-and-control system of energy flows and nodes. This interpretation treats war as an engineering problem: if an opponent's nodes are smartly targeted, cutting off the energy flows which feed the system, then an opponent's defenses can implode from within. Once the closed system implodes or is on the brink of imploding, so the thinking goes, the opponent will arrive at the rational decision to give up. While never an accurate rendering of "actual" battle conditions, systems-thinking is nonetheless derivative of a realist state-based rationale, where contained territorial entities (states) are engaged in a clashing of interests and wills on an international level.

Kilcullen's typology renders this closed system interpretation moot. Instead, Kilcullen emphasizes (2005, 2009, 2010) that the insurgent organizations operating in complex terrains are *open organic systems* of that terrain, or "complex adaptive systems."

Organic systems (including social systems like insurgencies) are 'complex and adaptive.'" Their behavior results from the interactions and relationships between the entities that make up the *system in focus* and the *environment*, [that is,] the larger system of which the system in focus is a part. For example, the body is composed of subsystems such as the nervous system and cardio-vascular system, while at the same time it is part of an environment with an ecosystem and a social system (Kilcullen, 2010: 194)

Kilcullen (2010: 194-196) draws a variety of conclusions with this interpretation of insurgent organizations as complex adaptive systems: insurgencies are social systems, energetically open but

organizationally closed; they are *self-organizing* systems that never achieve equilibrium due to their dissipative structures; insurgencies are greater than the sum of their parts; they are ecosystems with an adaptational, evolutionary dynamic. Insurgencies are biological systems and, as Kilcullen argues, should be modeled as such: “The argument is not that insurgencies are *like* organic systems or that organic systems are useful analogies or metaphors for insurgency. Rather, the argument is that insurgencies *are* organic systems, in which individual humans and organizational structures function like organisms and cell structures in other organic systems (2010: 194).”

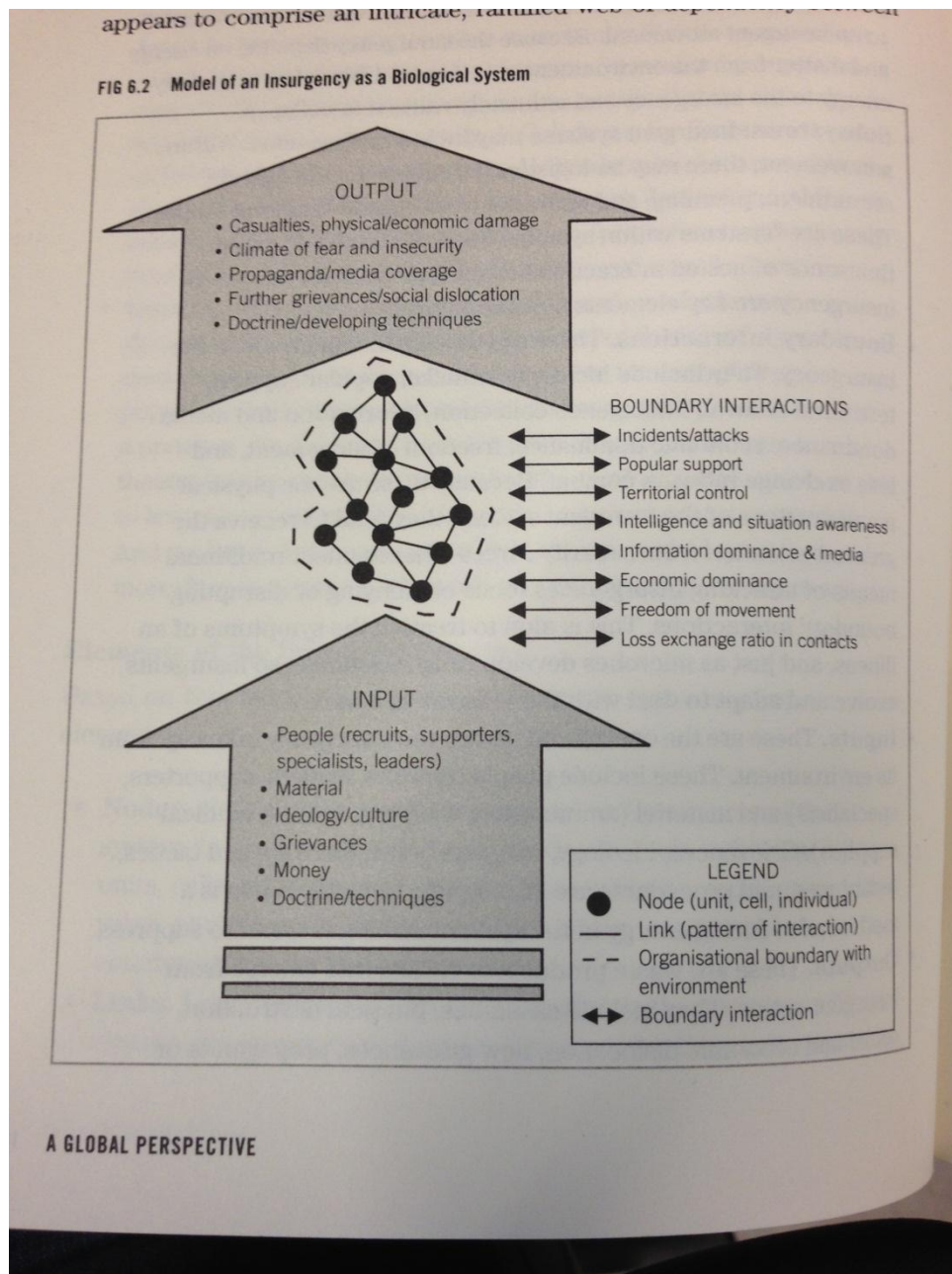


Figure 13: Model of an Insurgency as a Biological System (Source: Kilcullen, 2010)

This move by Kilcullen has many implications, not least of which is the dangerous biologization of conflict. When an analyst considers war and conflict as a *historically constituted* event, one immediately has to contend with the *political and economic* elements as the *primary* stakes in such as

conflict. But, with the move to interpreting war and conflict as an organic, biological problem, Kilcullen effectively *depoliticizes* the conflict, by treating them as mere *inputs* into the system. For example, what rights does a complex adaptive system have? What is the political stake when dealing with *non-state transnational terror networks*? Rightly or wrongly, rights and the laws of war are based on guarantees provided by state entities. But, when an “enemy” is interpreted as a complex network that must be *de-linked* from its constituent elements, the discourse escapes the political and becomes one of biological competition. That is why the re-institution of tribes as discussed in the last chapter is so important, because they are viewed as more culturally *authentic*, whereas complex adaptive systems are aberrations that feed off of local grievances, and adaptive to changing circumstances: “victory consists not in eliminating [local] elements but rather in returning them to a ‘normal’ mode of interaction. That is, if insurgency resides in the pattern of relationships, victory consists in rearranging this pattern into a stable and peaceful ‘system state’ (Kilcullen, 2010: 215).” In other words, victory is a return to state-based containers, a conservative source of stability in the face of unstable adaptive systems.

4.4 The Weaponization of Scale

In order to effectively combat complex adaptive systems, Kilcullen develops an “operational concept”: “The aim in counterinsurgency is to return the parent society to a stable, peaceful mode of interaction—in terms favorable to the government (2010: 216).” As discussed suggested earlier, the mechanics of achieving this stability through military means is done through a project of *delinking* the constitutive inputs and nodes that make local and global interaction possible. In “pragmatic terms” Kilcullen advances a two-step method which I argue amounts to a *weaponization* of scale. Before getting to Kilcullen’s method, it is important to note that the strategic and tactical maneuvers advanced in his writings – and carried out to very real degrees by the U.S. military (see

Chapters 3 and 5) – cut across the so-called “scale debate” that has occurred over the past several years within geography.

Without rehearsing the details of this debate that “never seems to end” (Barnes, 2008: 655), the arguments carried out more or less hinge upon the epistemological and ontological status of “scale”: is it an actual “material condition” or thing where practices, powers and capacities “platform” and “nest” in scaled ways (Brenner, 2001, 2005; Leitner and Miller, 2007; Marston, 2000; Smith 1993, 1996; Swyngedouw 1997)? Or is scale an epistemological construct, a “way of knowing” (Jones, 1998) that unduly “slots processes into structured spatialities (e.g., global, national, regional, local) that are out of reach of everyday spatial life (Marston, Woodward, and Jones 2005; Collinge, 2005; Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008; Legg, 2009; Moore, 2008)? What Kilcullen and the U.S. military have shown is that scale is a *both/and* event; that is, both a “material condition” and structuring epistemology. What has been missing in this debate is the elementary Foucaultian point that *discourses are material* (Kaiser and Nikiforova 2008 are a notable exception). Consider the ways that Kilcullen deduced “complex terrain” discussed earlier, from observations of battles *in practice*—practices rendered into formal concepts (e.g., “disaggregated battlespaces”), and then *acted upon* at particular levels (e.g., the “local” company level). Scales both inform and are produced by the practices, which are interpreted as *links* not containers or “nests.” In other words, for Kilcullen and the U.S. military, it’s the extent of the material link that is important, and even intervened on.

Kilcullen notes in his writings on guerrilla warfare and counterinsurgency in Indonesia that a “power-diffusion effect” occurs at the outbreak of war, meaning the “breakdown or weakening of formal power structures, allowing informal power structures to dominate. [This allows] local elites to develop political and military power at the local level while being subject to little control from higher levels (Kilcullen 2010: 82-83). For Kilcullen, this means that counterinsurgents cannot focus on “solving” or defeating insurgencies at the national or even regional level. Instead, the emphasis must be

on “bottom-up solutions” at the level where the insurgency is “actually” taking place. Since battles are fought and won on a “point-to-point” basis, the emphasis on viable techniques must be on that level, the local level, the company and even individual level (Kilcullen, 2007). Moreover, since insurgencies are constantly *adapting* as “complex adaptive systems,” the only level capable of “keeping up” is the company level:³⁷ “the better a method is, the sooner it is out of date. So constant innovation is needed, and this must largely be generated ‘from the bottom up,’ by practitioners in day-to-day contact with the insurgents. Each local counterinsurgency must be based on a detailed, local analysis—allied to a systemic perspective on how each theater affects the global jihad (2010: 221).” The outcome of this logic is not only a weaponization of scale at the level of the individual or company, but a perpetual, ceaseless and unending war, where the *modus operandi* of the military is to *de-link* the constitutive elements into infinity.

4.5 Conclusion

In this analysis of David Kilcullen’s work, this chapter has attempted to do three things. The first is a deconstruction of “complex battlespaces” as the new arenas of war. My point was not to suggest that these are somehow “fictional” or non-existent, but to show through Kilcullen’s highly influential work how Kilcullen’s conceptualization of war as “complex” has real material effects in how military violence is organized and carried out (see Chapters 3 and 5). My second point was to argue that in framing the “enemy” as a “complex adaptive system,” Kilcullen biologizes his adversary as he de-politicizes the conflict. Instead, broad interpretations are deployed to present late-modern wars as manifestations of “clashing civilizations” à la Huntington. This tendency to biologize the enemy, turning him or her into an animal or wolf-(wo)man has been shown by philosophers to be a supplement

³⁷ “This means the adaptational dynamic (“survival of the fittest”) also applies to us: we must adapt and evolve faster and better than the Islamists in order to survive (Kilcullen, 2010: 220).”

of the political (Agamben, 1998; Derrida, 2005). This is not merely an “academic debate” as the portrayal of detainees at Guantanamo Bay as members of “non-state networks” was central to their deprivation to basic rights of due process, as well as recognition under the laws of war (Gregory, 2006gb). Finally, I argued that Kilcullen’s “operational concept” for battling insurgencies amounts to a weaponization of scale, in so far as he identifies the level of the individual and company as the “natural” scale for adapting to the ever-changing conditions in insurgencies. Moreover, according to his “power-diffusion” model, the effect of insurgencies is to devolve power structures to the local level, like the level of the tribe (see Chapter 3). Therefore, this becomes the level on which to intervene. As we will see in Chapter 5, focusing on the villages can have sinister consequences.

5 “It Takes the Villages”

Counterinsurgency, Domicide, and Operation Dragon Strike in Southern Afghanistan

“The place was completely riddled with evil.”

Lt. Col. David Flynn, *Washington Post*, April 16, 2011

“... and somewhere off in that squalid kingdom of mud the sound of the little deathbells tolled thinly.”

Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (1985)

5.1 Refugee Machines

IN October 2010, the commanding officer of the U.S. Army’s 1-320th Field Artillery Regiment in Kandahar Province, Lt. Col. David Flynn, ordered the aerial demolition of four Afghan villages. Located in the volatile Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai districts just outside of Kandahar City, the four villages – Tarok Kolache, Khosrow Sofla, Lower Baber, and a still unnamed village – were reduced to rubble in less than a week of bombardments; 49,000 lbs. of bombs were dropped on Tarok Kolache alone (see Figure 5.1).



Figure 14: Aerial photograph of Tarok Kolache before and after its destruction in October, 2010 (Source: Paula Broadwell)

The demolitions were the opening act of an offensive operation code-named “Dragon Strike” which began on September 15, 2010 in Kandahar province. Operation Dragon Strike marked a major strategic shift by General Petraeus away from the “by the book” counterinsurgency approach adopted by General Stanley McChrystal who was relieved of duty as ISAF Commanding Officer in June 2010. Described by the *Los Angeles Times* as the “most ambitious military offensive of the 9-year-old war” (King, 2010), the operation deployed over 17,000 US and Afghan soldiers from Obama’s 2010 troop “surge” to the Kandahar districts in order to “disrupt and dismantle” insurgent strongholds located in the agricultural basin since the Taliban resurgence in the area in late 2006. The operation immediately had a devastating effect on residents in the area. Within the first week of the launch of Dragon Strike,

at the height of the autumn harvest, over 900 families were displaced from Arghandab and Zhari districts. Many were forced to move in with relatives who resided in Kandahar City, although most were forced into refugee camps in the suburbs of Kandahar and Kabul, putting their livelihoods as grape and pomegranate farmers in jeopardy (Shoaib, 2010). Refugees International declared in a field report published in December 2010 that 27,000 inhabitants in Kandahar province had been supplanted by the operation (Refugees International, 2010). When the heaviest fighting subsided by December, residents from the destroyed villages were given permission to return only to be dumbfounded by the extent of the destruction, not only on their homes but on their village walls, vineyards, and fields.

Some U.S. officers openly bragged about the destructiveness of the operations to Western reporters. Col. Jeffrey Martindale of the 4th Infantry Division based in Kandahar City boasted to the *Washington Post* that, “We obliterated those towns. They’re not there at all. These are just parking lots now (Partlow and Brulliard, 2010)”. Other military personnel responded to village returnees with scorn for “complaining” about the home destruction. For example, Petraeus biographer Paula Broadwell, who accompanied Lt. Col. Flynn immediately after the operations, pedantically portrayed the “biggest doubter in the village, Mohammad” as engaging in a “fit of theatrics” for inquiring into the destruction of his family’s home. While news stories about the Kandahar operation at the time were either opaque or oblique in their representations of the systematic destruction occurring in the countryside, the extent of the damage caused by Dragon Strike was staggering to any analyst who read between the lines of the hazy accounts (e.g., Partlow and Brulliard, 2010; Shah and Nordland, 2010). Indeed, the logic behind Dragon Strike was distilled in a BBC interview with Captain Matt Petersen, who led similar “clearing operations” for the 3/5 Marines in Sangrin in Helmand province in September 2010, when he said: “I know that most people in the world probably wouldn’t understand, ‘Now, wait a minute. You’re trying to build a country up by destroying it.’ And it seems like it’s a paradox. But those are people who have not been to Afghanistan, and don’t understand that the nature of conflict inevitably includes destruction

before you can start to build it the way it *should be*” (from the BBC documentary *The Battle for Bomb Alley*, 2010).

In this chapter, I want to explore the implications of the “should be” at the heart of Peterson’s comments. This means interrogating the role of *population displacement* as a strategic pillar of counterinsurgency doctrine, which I identify as the destruction (or “clearing”) of life-worlds only to be rebuilt as “life-forms” amenable to the political order of counterinsurgency operations.³⁸ One of the central arguments I have been making throughout this work is that, in practice, counterinsurgencies are marked by two fundamental tendencies: population displacement and the formation of territorial/“tribal” militias (see Chapters 3 and 4). Village (and city) destruction, as well as the strategic targeting of infrastructure and memories, has been explored in recent years as a central method in late-modern warfare employed by world’s most powerful militaries in instances of occupation; e.g., the United States in Iraq (Graham, 2005), Afghanistan, Israel in Palestine and Lebanon (Belcher, 2011; Gregory, 2003; Weizman, 2007) and Russia in Chechnya (Coward, 2009). Collective punishment, population displacement, and the destruction of homes has historically been a “reluctant” but central part of counterinsurgency doctrinal procedure in British, French, and American practice at least since the Cold War (Galula, 1964: 78-79; Thompson, 1966: 53; cf. Glassman, 1992).³⁹ It has only been in recent years, with the turn to a “culturally sensitive and friendly” strategy that such tactics have been downplayed in order to win the “hearts and minds” of American and European publics weary of war; meaning that it has become clear that “winning hearts and minds” is a technique for persuading domestic audiences not those under occupation. Alan Cromartie has noted how US counterinsurgents (his example is John Nagl [2005]) possess a proclivity for avoiding the question of manufacturing refugees in counterinsurgencies, opting instead to remain “noticeably muted on such questions” in their

³⁸ I borrow the term “life-forms” from George Lukács’s valuable – if underread – essay “Legality and Illegality” (1921: 256)

³⁹ Indeed, village burnings have been central to war since antiquity.

revisionist interpretations of the British in Malaysia, French in Algeria, and the United States in Vietnam (Cromartie, 2012; 110n.113). Nevertheless, contemporary counterinsurgency remains in practice what could be called a *refugee machine*, a machine which has been in full effect in Helmand and Kandahar provinces, where more than 120,000 residents were internally displaced in the year 2010 alone due to Obama's "surge," and thus prompting one influential analyst to claim that the public-relations-friendly counterinsurgency had all but been effectively abandoned by the United States by the end of the year (Gopal, 2010).

Population displacement, the production of refugees, and the rebuilding of villages brings into sharp relief the biopolitical project at the heart of late-modern counterinsurgency doctrine. Ben Anderson (2011a) has highlighted that U.S. counterinsurgency is fundamentally an "environmental" battle aimed at biopolitical reconfiguration; that is, it is a strategy which targets the affective dimensions of everyday life in order to shape the "atmospherics" in which an occupied population lives and moves. Moreover, this biopolitical undertaking, which harnesses the targeting, destruction, and particular rebuilding of homes into a singular project of militarized social engineering, underscores the *gendered* dimensions of counterinsurgency. As Laleh Khalili (2010: 4) has argued, "counterinsurgency doctrine and practice directly brings those bodies and spaces previously coded as 'private' or 'feminine' – women, non-combatant men, and the spaces of the 'home' – into the battlefield."

In counterinsurgency, all spaces, and perhaps especially urban quarters, are seen as potential battlegrounds by the counterinsurgents. The conventional privacy measures for homes and the peacefulness of everyday spaces are no longer guaranteed. Spaces often not only coded as feminine but also considered women's domain (homes, hospitals and schools especially) are frequently invaded by counterinsurgents... What counterinsurgency does, however, is to try to transform these spaces without necessarily

destroying them (although destruction, especially in the wake of population resettlement, is often inevitable), thus coopting everyday spaces into the landscape of war. Inevitably, these everyday landscapes are inhabited by civilians who are made to be figures in the ongoing counterinsurgency. The utilization of space in counterinsurgency is directly and intimately tied up with the ways in which counterinsurgency practice makes men and women legible and assigns them to different categories of various utility for combat and pacification (Khalili, 2010: 8-9).

This eloquent analysis on the part of Khalili is important because it shows how counterinsurgency departs from conventional descriptions of the drivers of urbicide in late-modern war that have garnered analytic purchase in recent years (Campbell, Graham & Monk, 2007; Coward, 2009; Graham, 2010). Much of the work on urbicide was born out of the devastation of the former-Yugoslavia, particularly Bosnia-Herzegovina (Coward, 2004), the Israeli destruction of the West Bank (Graham 2003), and the first years of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, especially the criminal bombings of Fallujah (Graham, 2005). The most sophisticated theoretical exposition of urbicide comes from Martin Coward (2009) who draws on Martin Heidegger's account of being-in-the-world (Dasein) to show how late-modern (urban) spatialities *form* the conditions of possibility for heterogeneous encounter(s) and relations between (non/human) beings and things. Furthermore, heterogeneous encounters and relations are political, according to Coward, and emblematic of the democratic struggle, agonism, and interdependency at the heart of any polity (Coward, 2009: 93-94; cf. Mouffe, 1993). For Coward, the sinister aspect at the core of urbicide lies in the destruction of this heterogeneity, either through the violent erasure of the built environment⁴⁰, or through its homogenization of a particular group through displacement,

⁴⁰ Coward is at pains to stress, correctly, that the erasure of the built environment is also an erasure of cultural memory.

dispossession, and/or occupation. This *political* act of homogenization-qua-urbicide allows Coward to draw a strong connection between *genocide* and the destruction of the built environment.

While I agree with Coward's framing of urbicide as an act of political homogenization, what sets the destruction/construction of counterinsurgency in southern Afghanistan apart from type of violence in the former-Yugoslavia, occupied Palestine, or the initial stages of the Iraq War is desire to homogenize the built environment through a highly particular *integration into a political order* rather than (pure) erasure of an/Other order. This is what I mean by the destruction of life-worlds and the imposition of "life-forms"; what is at stake is not solely displacement⁴¹, but also the re/forming of life-ways amenable to surveillance, documentation, and predictability. Thus, I would argue that the form of domicide in Kandahar and Helmand is not a form of genocide, but rather an instance of *colonization* in the way Timothy Mitchell once brilliantly defined it, as "the spread of a political order that inscribes in the social world a new conception of space, new forms of personhood, and a new means of manufacturing the experience of the real (1991: ix)."

Thus, this chapter examines the connection between the practice of counterinsurgency, population displacement, and the destruction and rebuilding of *disciplined* material landscapes in a contemporary "battlespace" (see Croser, 2007). Following Michel Foucault's work on the production of "sight-lines," I interrogate how old material landscapes were cleared, and new ones built to enable an investment in particular modes of seeing, living, and navigating within the physical landscape in the destroyed and rebuilt villages. For example, instead of rebuilding traditional mud-walls around houses and villages that hindered US soldiers' vision, the U.S. military coerced local villagers to use chain link fences, or only allowed mud-walls to be built to a knee-high level. This "organization of objects" enables a particular "encoding" of the eye and disciplining of space (Sioh, 2010: 471; cf. Foucault, 1973: 107-123). As Maureen Sioh has written in the context of the clearing of forests during the

⁴¹ For a discussion on the relationship between urbicide and refugees, see Ramadan 2009, 2012

British-induced “Malaysian Emergency” counterinsurgency campaign, “disciplined space promotes visibility because authorities need to be aware of the activities of those under their power; hence the architectural corollary... that promotes visibility while reducing the potential for congregation through enclosure (Sioh, 2010: 470; cf. Foucault 1977).” In the case of the aftermath of Operation Dragon Strike, the demolished districts of Kandahar were reconfigured to be amenable to the ordering vision of the U.S. military – the way it “*should be*”. What has been accomplished in the re-ordering of Tarok Kolache and other “model” villages are lined row houses and streets agreeable to the conduct of military patrols and the management of movement. In other words, the villages of Kandahar have become another episode in the colonial practice of eradicating visible “disorder” from “Oriental” space, setting the up an “appearance of order” that facilitates what Timothy Mitchell has called an “implicit obedience” (Mitchell, 1991: 69)—in this case, the violent obedience (life-forms) that remains a necessary supplement to counterinsurgency. More than just a supplement, life-forms stress the co-constitutive relationship between the production of space and political order (Lefebvre, 1991; Brenner & Elden, 2009)

5.2 Interlude

Before proceeding to an account of Operation Dragon Strike, the destruction of four villages outside of Kandahar City, and the “rebuilding” aftermath, it is important to take note of just how it is that we know of the village razings in the first place. On January 13, 2011, a minor storm erupted in the U.S. foreign policy “blogosphere” when a research associate at the Harvard Center for Public Leadership named Paula Broadwell published a blog post detailing an episode in her everyday travels with the U.S. Army’s 1-320th Field Artillery Regiment in the agricultural basin of Kandahar province. Indeed, when Broadwell’s name rightly or wrongly emerged as the *femme fatale* at the center of the sex scandal that brought down the distinguished career of by then CIA Director David Petraeus

in November, 2012, it was not the first time she found herself in the middle of a controversy. Writing as a guest blogger for the journalist Tom Rick's widely read *Foreign Policy* blog, "The Best Defense," Broadwell wrote a story on the four demolished villages in a mildly titled entry, "Travels with Paula (1): A Time to Rebuild." Broadwell, it is well-known, was a keen admirer of Petraeus, writing fondly of their fast-paced six mile running interviews with the General around the ISAF headquarters in Afghanistan where she conducted research for her doctoral thesis and widely read biography – the unfortunately named – *All In: The Education of General David Petraeus* (2012). In the fall 2010, during the most violent period of the US war in Afghanistan, Broadwell flew to Kabul to interview Petraeus and get "outside the wire" to see how his counterinsurgency strategy was taking effect in the battlefields of Helmand and Kandahar. It was during this time that Broadwell sparked her first controversy on Rick's blog, setting off alarm bells in military and think-tank circles back in Washington, D.C., who up to that time had marched ingratiatingly to the tune of the "population-centric" public-relations approach pandered by Petraeus and his ilk.

In the piece, Broadwell shadowed the 1-320th and Lt. Col. David Flynn as they returned the site of Tarok Kolache where villagers had gathered to pick through their belongings amongst the rubble. As they stood on the dust field, Flynn provided a justification for the razings, confiding to Broadwell (who uncritically adopts his reasoning) and other reporters in attendance that the villages had been "abandoned"⁴² because they were so "heavily mined" with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) that they were no longer safe for residents or the U.S. military personnel seeking to occupy the towns. We will return to this curious justification below, but one should already sense an ambiguity: if the villages were abandoned, why rebuild them? Moreover, Flynn reported to Broadwell that, "I literally cringed when we dropped bombs on these places – not because I cared about the enemy we

⁴² Reporting on the refugee crisis, Shoaib interviewed a 56-year-old refugee from the area who said, "We had to leave our homes, the Taliban and Americans were all killing us." (Shoaib, 2010)

were killing or the HME [home-made explosives] destroyed, but I knew the reconstruction would consume the remainder of my deployed life (Broadwell, 2011).” And it was this move to – eventually – reconstruct the villages that was supposed to serve as the “feel good” thread in Broadwell’s anecdotal story on the virtues of “clearing, holding, and building” mantra central to the platitudes of counterinsurgency advocates.

In all likelihood, and given the largely uncritical stance towards counterinsurgency in Washington, D.C. at that time, the story would have likely gone unnoticed if not for one problem: Broadwell included an image (Figure 1). The image itself gives one pause, but what made it especially powerful is it gave a rare glimpse into the conduct of counterinsurgency outside of the boiler plate clichés of its practitioners, and immediately evoked the memory of U.S. carpet-bombings in Vietnam. The circulation of the image had the effect of raising questions and doubts within the “foreign policy establishment” on the virtuous image of counterinsurgency; arguably, the image of Tarok Kolache reduced to a dust field was a critical point in turning the same establishment against a “victory” in Afghanistan, with calls instead for a scaled-down “exit strategy.”⁴³ The controversy is indicative of the

⁴³ For the “blogosphere” discussion of Tarok Kolache, see the following: Broadwell, P. 2011. “Travels with Paula (1): A time to build,” *The Best Defense: Tom Rick’s Daily Take on National Security*, *FP.com*, 01/13/2011, http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/13/travels_with_paula_i_a_time_to_build. Last accessed January 24, 2011; Foust, J. 2011. “The Unforgivable Horror of Village Razing,” *Registan.net*, 01/13/2011, <http://www.registan.net/index.php/2011/01/13/the-unforgivable-horror-of-village-razing/>. Last accessed January 24, 2011; Foust, J. 2011. “Revisiting the Village Razing Policies of ISAF in Kandahar,” *Registan.net*, 01/16/2011, <http://www.registan.net/index.php/2011/01/16/revisiting-the-village-razing-policies-of-isaf-in-kandahar/>. Last accessed January 24, 2011; Exum, A. 2011. “Exum and Foust on Tactics in Afghanistan,” *Abu Muqawama*, *Center for a New American Strategy* 01/18/2011, <http://www.cnas.org/print/5559>. Last accessed January 24, 2011; Ackerman, S. 2011. “25 Tons of Bombs Wipe Afghan Town Off Map,” *DangerRoom*, 01/19/2011, <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/01/25-tons-of-bombs-wipes-afghan-town-off-the-map>. Last accessed January 24, 2011; Flynn, D. 2011. “A battalion commander responds to a blogger on how to operate in Afghanistan,” *The Best Defense: Tom Rick’s Daily Take on National Security*, *FP.com*, 01/20/2011, http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/20/a_battalion_commander_responds_to_a_blogger_on_how_to_operate_in_a_fghanistan. Last accessed January 24, 2011; Ackerman, S. 2011. “Petraeus Team: Taliban Made Us Wipe Village Out,” *DangerRoom*, 01/20/2011, <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/?p=39041>. Last accessed January 24, 2011; Foust, J. 2011. “The battalion commander debates the blogger (II): Foust responds to Flynn,” *The Best Defense: Tom Rick’s Daily Take on National Security*, *FP.com*, 01/21/2011, http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/21/the_battalion_commander_debates_the_blogger_ii_foust_responds_to_flynn. Last accessed January 24, 2011; Broadwell, P. 2011. “Travels with Paula (III): Arghandabis like the coalition reconstruction efforts,” *The Best Defense: Tom Rick’s Daily Take on National Security*, *FP.com*, 01/23/2011,

changing nature of political analysis and commentary. Firstly, the image of Tarok Kolache, while generating a lot of noise on popular foreign policy blogs, never appeared in print in any major American or European newspaper. Secondly, while the release of the image and the response to it was serious enough to prompt an unprecedented response by Lt. Col. David Flynn, who wrote three “real-time” response entries to his critics on Tom Rick’s blog, as well as an interview to the highly influential *Danger Room*, the discussion of the village razings more or less died down after a couple of weeks. While it is true that there is an unprecedented amount of “real-time” information produced from warzones, not all of which is favorable to the public relations of the U.S. military, the Tarok Kolache controversy showed, thirdly, that such information is increasingly the remit of a few highly specialized analysts (including myself). Thus, the coupling of highly specialized analyst discussions of “real time” war with the dissipative temporality of the so-called “news-cycle” results in a such controversies missing any sort of wide-spread political discussion of the nature of contemporary U.S. military practices. One has to wonder if an event like the March 16, 1968 My Lai Massacre and cover-up in the Vietnam War would generate the same kind of *sustained* horror that it did when Seymour Hersh broke the story in 1969. The lack of attention to the case of Staff Sergeant Robert Bales, who killed 16

http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/23/travels_with_paula_iii_arghandabis_like_the_coalition_reconstruction_efforts. Last accessed January 24, 2011; Ackerman, S. 2011. “Claim: Afghans Heart G.I.s Who Flattened Their Village,” *DangerRoom*, 01/24/2011, <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/01/claim-afghans-heart-g-i-s-who-flattened-their-village>. Last accessed January 24, 2011; Flynn, D. 2011. “The battalion commander debates the blogger (III): I acted after a great deal of deliberate planning, explains LTC Flynn,” *The Best Defense: Tom Rick’s Daily Take on National Security*, *FP.com*, 01/24/2011, http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/24/the_battalion-commander_debates_the_blogger_iii. Last accessed January 25, 2011; Ackerman, S. 2011. “Why I Flattened Three Afghan Villages,” *DangerRoom*, 02/01/2011, http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/02/i-flattened-afghan-villages/#disqus_thread. Last accessed February 4, 2011; Foust, J. “The many loose ends of Tarok Kolache,” *Registan.net*, 02/01/2011, <http://www.registan.net/index.php/2011/02/01/the-many-loose-ends-of-tarok-kolache>. Last accessed February 4, 2011.; Lawrence, Q. 2011. “Afghan Villagers Return Home to Devastation,” *National Public Radio*, January 31, 2011, http://www.npr.org/2011/01/31/133310979/afghan-villagers-return-h...ation?utm_source=wordtwit&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=wordtwit. Last accessed April 9, 2011; Gall, C. and R. Khapalwak. 2011. “Winning Hearts While Flattening Vineyards is Rather Tricky,” *New York Times*, March 11, 2011; Foust, J. 2011. “The Many Lies of Tarok Kolache,” *Registan.net*, 03/13/2011, <http://www.registan.net/index.php/2011/03/13/the-many-lies-of-tarok-kolache>. Last accessed April 9, 2011.

Afghan civilians in the same districts as the village razings – including families who were once displaced by those razings – would lead to respond, “unlikely.”

5.3 Operation Dragon Strike: Background

Over the past thirty years, Kandahar province has been one of the most heavily bombed places in the world. During the tenuous reigns of Babrak Karmal (1979-1986) and Mohammad Najibullah (1987-1992), the *mujahideen* gained control over large sections of Kandahar, including the districts outside of Kandahar City. Under the Soviet occupation, the Soviets implemented a deadly tactical policy of “rubbleization” against the *mujahideen*, meaning the calculated destruction of basic infrastructure and villages in areas perceived to be under *mujahideen* control, particularly Kandahar (Goodson, 2001). By 1983, as Larry Goodson writes:

The overwhelming firepower of the Soviet forces, coupled with their total air superiority introduced the destructiveness of modern combat to Afghanistan. Villages and civilian populations were targets from the beginning of the conflict; as in all guerrilla wars, the inability to distinguish the fighters from the usually supportive noncombatants fostered an indiscriminate attitude by the Soviets. In addition to the atrocities and horrors this approach engendered, *it created refugees* (my emphasis)... there were nearly 3 million refugees in Pakistan and an unknown number (possibly exceeding 1.5 million) in Iran. The big surge in refugees occurred in the first two years after the Soviet invasion, when more than 4 million fled to Pakistan and an unknown number (possibly exceeding 1.5 million) in Iran. The big surge in refugees occurred in the first two years after the Soviet invasion, when more than 4 million fled to Pakistan and Iran while hundreds of thousands more became totally displaced... Dupree termed it ‘migratory genocide’ in an

effort to capture the impact this terrible dislocation—and the danger and death that produced it—had on the Afghan people and their culture (Goodson, 2001: 60-61)

In a similar perceptual move following the U.S. invasion in October 2001, Kandahar City and the countryside surrounding the city were framed and labeled by Western analysts as “the spiritual homeland of the Taliban,” and were likely the hardest hit areas in the country.⁴⁴ *Toronto Star* journalist Kathleen Kenna reported from the province in the December following the 2001 invasion that “much of Kandahar was bombed into rubble by US-led air strikes that began October 7th (Kenna, 2001). Derek Gregory has argued that “two peculiar cartographic performances” were required to make Afghanistan a *visible* state object of a “conventional military campaign”: “The first was a performance of sovereignty through which the ruptured space of Afghanistan could be simulated as a coherent state... The second was a performance of territory through which the fluid networks of al-Qaeda could be fixed in a bounded space (Gregory, 2004: 49-50).”

In the opening days of the US invasion in 2001, the limitation and *failure* of at least the first performance, the simulation of a coherent state, had the effect of fostering an “indiscriminate attitude” by the US military, which oriented its bombing campaign onto the villages of southern Afghanistan. As Marc Herold points out, “[t]he fact that the Taliban was not a state, but rather a religious-ideological movement, had major implications. This meant that, after the first week, the US bombing campaign has heavily directed at the villages of Afghanistan where the movement derived its strength. The only real exception to this was the spiritual heartland of the Taliban – Kandahar – which was bombed throughout the campaign (Herold, 2004: 215).” According to Herold’s account of the initial stages of the bombing of Kandahar, not only the further rupturing of urban and semi-urban infrastructure ensued – continuing the Soviet policy of “rubbleization” – but the human costs in Kandahar and Helmand were devastating, with an estimated 3,100 to 3,600 civilians killed, 4,000-

⁴⁴ To my knowledge, public disclosure of sortie routes flown over Afghanistan are unavailable.

6,500 injured, as well as an additional 19,000 to 43,000 refugees who died from starvation and/or cold in camps. The US attack on Kandahar also resulted in over 5,000 war widows, plus thousands of orphans (Herold, 2004: 323).

Since the invasion, the most populated districts in Kandahar province – Arghandab, Zhari, Panjwai, and Dand (See Figure 5.2) – have been the target of repeated bombings and operations by the US and NATO forces. In 2006, while U.S. forces, journalists, and policy-makers were tied up with the mounting civil war in Iraq, a growing home-grown insurgency against the NATO occupation in Afghanistan was rooting itself in and around Kandahar City (Forsberg, 2009; Giustozzi, 2007; Rashid, 2008). The makeup and density of the physical and human landscape in this area is important to note, marked as it is by vineyards, walled compounds, narrow lanes, canals, and compact orchards—a terrain famous in military lore for slowing the 1982 Soviet advance into the Panjwai and Zhari (Forsberg, 2009: 24). As we will see, it was the desire to overcome this environmental compactness and density which rendered terrain-into-target through a violent alteration towards *openness* by the US in its counterinsurgency campaign.

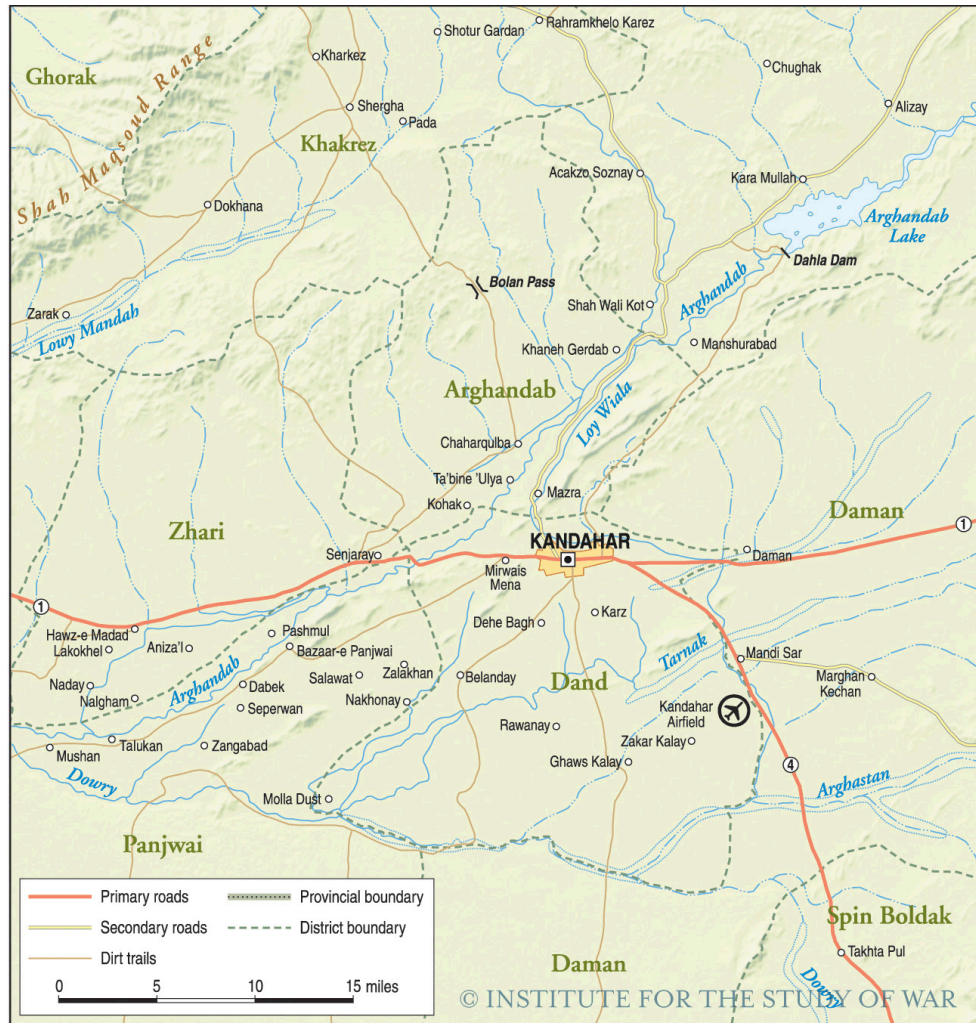


Figure 15: Central Kandahar Province (Source: Institute for the Study of War)

Two major shifts occurred in Kandahar in 2006. In the first shift, Taliban fighters and other insurgents moved to base themselves throughout the Arghandab River valley in order to prepare for an offensive on Kandahar City (Forsberg, 2009). The second shift was a move into the province in February 2006 by a deployment of 2,000 Canadian soldiers from Task Force Orion. Throughout the spring 2006, Canadian and NATO forces responded to the build-up of Taliban strongholds with a series of incursions and bombings into the districts outside Kandahar City. In May 2006, several thousand villagers fled the area into homes of extended families and refugee camps in Kandahar City after towns

in Panjwai were caught between airstrikes and the crossfire of Taliban and US and Canadian forces (Constable, 2006a). On September 2, 2006, Canadian forces launched the massive Operation Medusa into Zhari and Panjwai districts, which forced over 80,000 people to flee the area (Constable, 2006b).

During Medusa, Canadian forces introduced bulldozers into the districts as a means “clear” perceived “Taliban strongholds.” In his analysis of Operation Medusa, Institute for the Study of War analyst Carl Forsberg glosses over the damage caused by the bulldozers, which he suggests that the Canadian forces destroyed bunkers, fire trenches, and “other fortifications.” As it turns out, the “other fortifications” were *entire towns*. In their largely celebratory book on the Canadian approach in Kandahar, *Kandahar Tour* (2010), Windsor et al. describe a scene that became more or less a blueprint for the Operation Dragon Strike razings and its aftermath, as well as bulldozings in Helmand by U.S. Marines. During Operation Medusa, Canadian troops and attached U.S. soldiers “bulldozed much of the hamlet [Lora], flattening houses, water pumps, and surrounding orchards (Windsor et al., 2010: 53).” The villages of Garaj and Ghilzan were also completely destroyed. The Canadian forces also used the bulldozers to build military roads that usually went through the fields of local farmers (Constable, 2006b). Writing in 2010, *New York Times* correspondent Caroline Gall described a scene of “frustrated residents” still bitter over the Canadian-led operations:

‘Not only Lora was destroyed; in Zhare District, two villages were completely destroyed [Garaj and Ghilzan],’ said Hajji Agha Lalai, the provincial councilor from the area. ‘Some got compensation and others did not,’ he said, blaming Afghan officials who he said divided up the money. The Canadian forces have a detailed system of compensation for farmers and villagers who have lost family, property or livelihoods. Afghans can submit claims and have to provide photos or confirmation from a village elder... Yet Afghan officials and rural residents say many farmers have fallen through the cracks, partly because of the continuing war and because many areas remain under Taliban

control, but also because of the corruption and carelessness of local officials. That means that many of the poorest villagers – whether through bad luck, ignorance or fear of retaliation by the Taliban – have missed out on compensation payments and assistance programs (Gall, 2010).

According to Canadian figures, more than 1,000 Taliban fighters were killed.⁴⁵ After Operation Medusa, NATO and Canadian forces adopted a “counterinsurgency approach” in Panjwai and Zhari by adopting lackluster development schemes to employ local men to engage in military development projects. NATO pledged \$8 million to “improve” the districts in the “bricks, bulldozers, and lots of cash” scheme. The local fighters reconfigured their strategy, and adopted covert tactics such as planting IEDs on the newly paved military roads, and by the end of 2006, the Canadians were already losing control of the districts. Forsberg, an advocate for U.S. counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, describes the failure of the Canadian approach this way, “The IED campaign in Zhare and Panjwai had the net effect of taking the initiative away from the Canadians, whose military resources were increasingly focused on force protection and targeting of IED cells, rather than on separating the Taliban from the local population through counterinsurgency operations (Forsberg, 2009: 29).” Moreover, over 1,000 Afghan National Police were killed in the districts throughout 2007.

In 2007 and 2008, the Taliban were gaining ground in the districts outside of Kandahar by appealing to two enemies: the U.S.-led occupiers, and landholding elites allied with the Karzai regime. Not only were local farmers resentful of Western militaries bulldozing roads through their fields, they were increasingly antagonistic towards major militia strongmen and warlords who were “increasing their landholdings by force” and imposing crippling taxation schemes on local crops such as opium

⁴⁵ Figures like these are notoriously problematic because militaries usually have a tendency of treating any male between the ages of 13 and 65 as “enemies”, and lumping them into whatever designated categorical type constitutes the “enemy”—in this case, the Taliban. See Gregory (2006) for an important discussion on the gendering of civilians, enemies and death tolls in late-modern war.

(Forsberg, 2009: 33). Borne out of this dual antagonism⁴⁶, the Taliban offered local farmers protection against NATO forces and landowners alike and, as Forsberg points out (2009: 33), by targeting and assassinating abusive landowners, the Taliban conducted “de facto land reform” in the largely agrarian areas of Zhari and Panjwai. The insurgency was also making headway in the outskirts of Kandahar City in a large slum called District Nine. Due to the incessant and violent displacement of peasants and villagers from the surrounding countryside into refugee camps and Kandahar City, the slums of District Nine had ballooned by over 90,000 people since 2002 (Hutchinson, 2009; Marlowe, 2009) with, according to Forsberg, a police to population ratio of 1 to 1,400 (Forsberg, 2009: 43).⁴⁷

Several events turned the summer 2008 into a critical juncture for the U.S. and NATO occupation in Kandahar. It was reported at the time that the Taliban were in control of 18 villages west of the Arghandab River (Gall and Wafa, 2008).⁴⁸ On June 13, 2008, the Taliban undertook an audacious attack on the Sarpoza prison west of Kandahar City, freeing over 400 Taliban fighters and 1,100 total inmates who immediately fled after the prison break.⁴⁹ The following week, the U.S. Army conducted a major offensive into Arghandab, forcing several hundred families to flee once again, but the offensive was largely unsustainable. Between the summer 2008 and fall 2009, the insurgency in Kandahar went largely uncontested, with the exception of the occasional embellished skirmishes and

⁴⁶ It is important to stress that the insurgency in Kandahar is thoroughly *local* in character (Guistozzi, 2007), rather than the typical depiction of contemporary insurgencies as local movements whose actions are orchestrated by an external sponsor of some sort, such as al-Qaeda or the ISI in Pakistan.

⁴⁷ In his analysis of Taliban strongholds in Zhari, Panjwai, and Arghandab, Forsberg draws the tenable conclusion that the insurgents had a two-pronged strategy: (1) to develop institutions of governance to gain local legitimacy, and (2) to work towards creating a secure pathway from the countryside and slums on the outskirts of Kandahar City from which to attack – and takeover – the city (Forsberg, 2009: 31-41).

⁴⁸ According to a government audit by the inspector general of USAID, over \$5 million was paid to Taliban fighters in southern Afghanistan to provide security for a US development project run by the contractor Development Alternatives Inc., with the fighters charging a “20% protection tax.” The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee also found that members of the Taliban were guarding US bases. In this regard, a strange perversion is revealed, whereby the conduct and contracting of wars creates a dynamic of producing and killing enemies into infinity. See P Richter, “U.S. Government Funds May Have Gone to Taliban” *Los Angeles Times* (September 30, 2010); D Filkins, “US Said to Fund Afghan Warlords to Protect Convoys” *New York Times* (June 21, 2010); J Risen, “Afghans Linked to the Taliban Guard US Bases” *New York Times* (October 7, 2010); Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate “Inquiry into the Role and Oversight of Private Security Contractors in Afghanistan,” (September 28, 2010)

⁴⁹ According to the July 22, 2008 edition of the *Globe and Mail*, the organizers of the jail break had buses waiting outside for the freed Taliban fighters (Smith, 2008).

signature bombings of the countryside. In March 2009, the Obama administration endorsed a plan drawn up by CENTCOM Commander Gen. David Petraeus and ISAF Commander David McKiernan to over 12,000 troops to “stabilize” southern Afghanistan, particularly Helmand, Kandahar, and Zabul provinces.⁵⁰ Over the summer, most of those troops were deployed to Helmand province, but four battalions were positioned in Kandahar City by August 2009, including a US Stryker Brigade, the 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division – named for the Army’s eight-wheeled Stryker combat vehicles. By September 2009, after Gen. McChrystal took over command for ISAF, U.S. military officials pronounced Kandahar City and province “lost” and placed Kandahar “at the top of the list” of U.S. military priority (Chandrasekaran, 2009). Led by the wily-eyed “strike and destroy” Colonel Harry D. Tunnell IV, the U.S. and insurgents battled in Arghandab district over control throughout the fall until fighting subsided for the winter. Canadian forces used the winter to establish a permanent presence in several villages in Dand and Panjwai province with the aim of disrupting Taliban IED cells and logistics through night-time raids. But, overall, both sides were held to a *détente* through 2009 and much of 2010, until the launch of Operation Dragon Strike.

5.4 Haussmannization in the Countryside

In February 2010, the US military launched a highly publicized operation code-named Moshtarak Phase II (Dari for “together”) into a small collection of village farms called Marjah in neighboring Helmand province. The Marjah operation, up to that point the biggest offensive of the Afghanistan war, was intended to be a showcase counterinsurgency operation where U.S. forces occupied a “population center”, unpacked and imposed a “government-in-a-box” template on the population, and established a Taliban-proof zone of effective governance and small-scale economic development. It was also the first major operation of General McChrystal’s tenure as head of ISAF.

⁵⁰ Gen. Stanley McChrystal assumed the position of Commander for ISAF in June 2009.

The operation in Marjah was largely a failure and was notoriously lampooned in foreign policy circles, who pointed among other things that out that the “rural community” of Marjah hardly constituted a “population center” (Porter, 2010). The fact that Marjah was inaccurately portrayed as an urban insurgent hub rather than a sprawling region of farming communities does not diminish the astonishing degree of violence deployed during Moshtarak. Days after the operation began, more than 1,600 families fled the area into refugee camps on the outskirts of the provincial capital Lashkar Gah and Kabul. Those who stayed in Marjah were quickly frustrated by the conflict because food and water supplies were interrupted (Chivers, 2010). Moreover, several areas came under heavy aerial bombardment, including 14 drone strikes in Marjah during the first week of the operation (Drew, 2010). The “reconstruction” element of the operation was hampered by the refusal of the United Nations to participate in NATO’s superficial reconstruction schemes on the basis of refusing to engage in the “militarization of humanitarian aid” (Nordland, 2010).

After the failure of the Marjah operation, it became increasingly difficult for the United States to persuade Afghan officials and local leaders to go along with McChrystal’s counterinsurgency strategy, because the initial stages were too destructive on the everyday lives of people caught in the middle of US attempts to “wipe out” insurgent networks. Between February and September 2010, the US scaled back its counterinsurgency approach in Kandahar, opting instead for more classical “search and destroy” type missions – particularly night-raids⁵¹ – all the while espousing the requisite platitudes of counterinsurgency. With the movement of more US troops into Kandahar, the violence increased dramatically. According to a United Nations quarterly report written by a UN special representative to

⁵¹ While Gen. McChrystal was often portrayed in the press as conducting a “by the book” counterinsurgency strategy which mitigated violence, the role of special operations soared under his tenure. In the famous *Rolling Stone* article/polemic that led to McChrystal’s forced retirement, author Michael Hastings notes how McChrystal’s experience as the head of the Joint Special Operations Command informed his command in Afghanistan: “Even in his new role as America’s leading evangelist for counterinsurgency, McChrystal retains the deep-seated instincts of a terrorist hunter. To put pressure on the Taliban, he has upped the number of Special Forces units in Afghanistan from four to 19. ‘You better be out there hitting four or five targets tonight,’ McChrystal will tell a Navy Seal he sees in the hallway at headquarters. Then he’ll add, ‘I’m going to have to scold you in the morning for it though.’” (Hastings, 2010)

the Security Council, violence in southern Afghanistan during the summer of 2010 spiked by 69% (Rubin, 2010). In terms of numbers, in the six months prior to the launch of Operation Dragon Strike, over 3,600 Afghan civilians and just under 2,000 Afghan policemen were killed or injured in the insurgency, primarily in Helmand and Kandahar. During this time, more than 4,012 attacks by insurgents had taken place (Tolo News, 2010; see Figure 5.3).

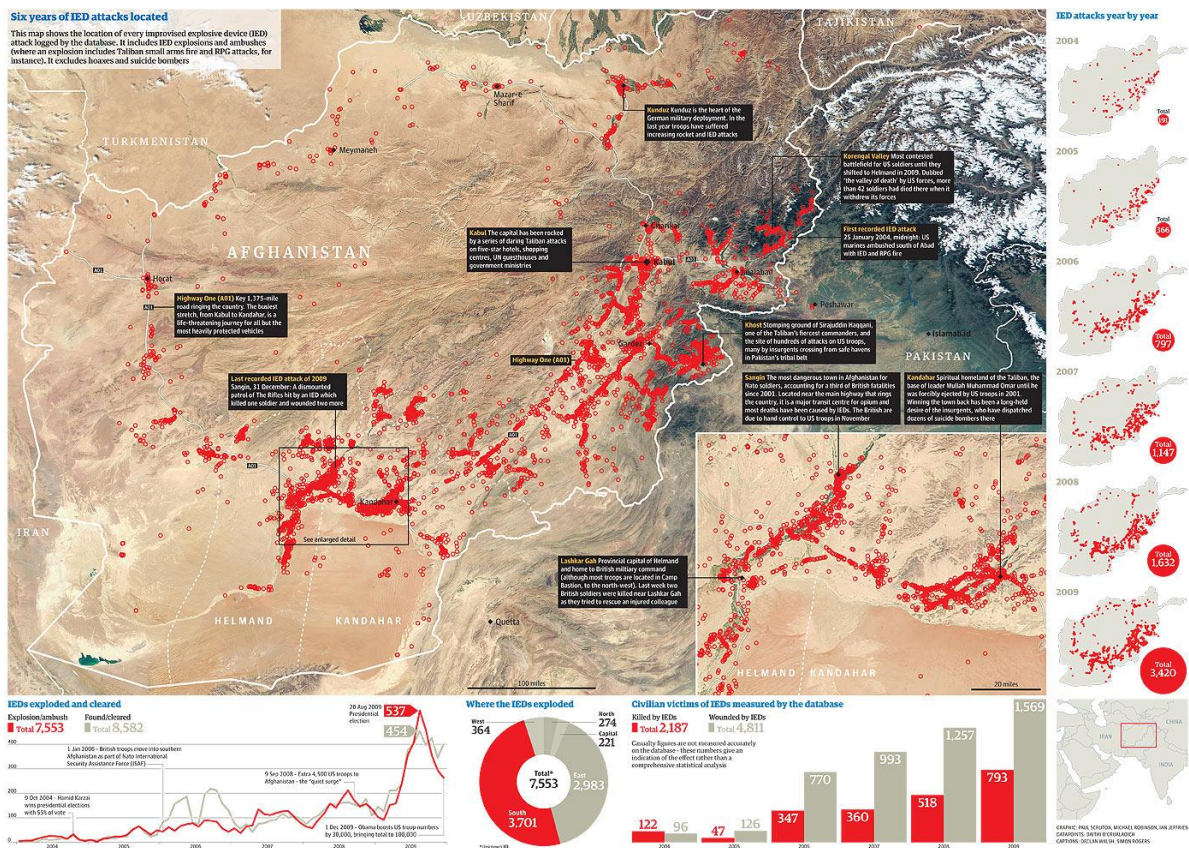


Figure 16: 2004-2010 IED attacks in southern Afghanistan based on Wikileaks data (Source: The Guardian)

Just prior to the launch of Dragon Strike on September 15, the U.S. military conducted a series of preparatory operations into the districts surrounding Kandahar City. After General Petraeus took over ISAF in July 2010, he immediately increased the number of sorties flown in the area, with 2,100 airstrikes reported between June and September, and 700 airstrikes in September alone

(Sengupta, 2010). Throughout the months of August and September, NATO bombarded areas outside of Kandahar City with an air-based campaign, and night raids into Afghan homes were heightened. US and Afghan commando units stormed into homes rounding up all the men and transporting them to a prison in Saidan to be interrogated and have their biometric data forcibly taken and entered into the US military's database. (Cavendish, 2010). Since displacement was now an annual occurrence, those who could afford to flee did, while others were caught in the web of violence.

Arriving in Kandahar City in August 2010, *Washington Post* correspondent Rajiv Chandrasekaran described a city eerily reminiscent of his time in Baghdad, famously documented in his widely read *Imperial Life in the Emerald City* (2008). Kandahar City, mostly comprised of slums like District Nine, had become a landscape of concrete blast walls, U.S. manned checkpoints, and ID cards requiring retina scans and fingerprints. "7,000 concrete slabs," Chandrasekaran writes (2010), were placed "each eight feet wide, around the governor's palace, mayor's office, along major roads, and in front of police stations."⁵² City and village residents were blamed the U.S. forces for the cause of growing instability. In an ominous passage, Chandrasekaran writes that "commanders are wrestling with the option of razing some fields to remove the [IED] bombs, which would eliminate many farmers' livelihoods, or assume more risk by leaving the crops untouched." In less than two months, the military would be opting for the first option of wholesale destruction.

After the launch of Dragon Strike on September 15, US forces penetrated deeply into Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai districts. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, over 900 families were displaced from the area in the first week. During the second week of October, US troops moved into Zhari district in order to secure the strategic Highway One. On October 16, 2010, a little over 800

⁵² As Chandrasekaran was told by Brig. Gen. Frederick Hodges, "If you don't have control of the population, you can't secure the population."

US and Afghan troops moved into Panjwai, with the *New York Times* reporting on October 20 that American forces were “routing the Taliban” in much of Kandahar province (Gall, 2010a).

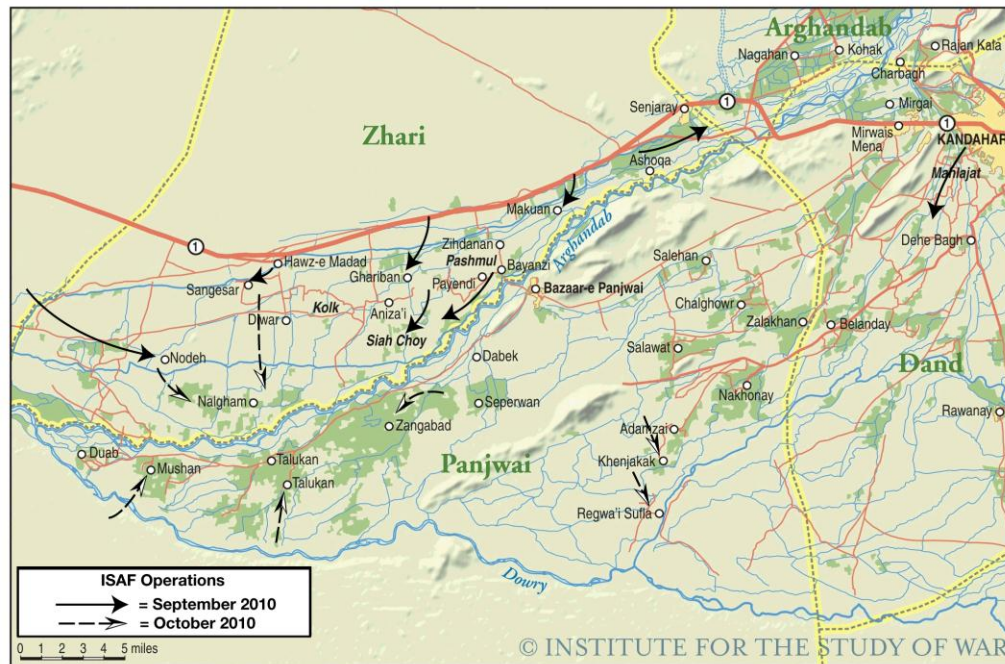


Figure 17: Zhari and Panjwai District, Kandahar Province (Source: Institute for the Study of War)

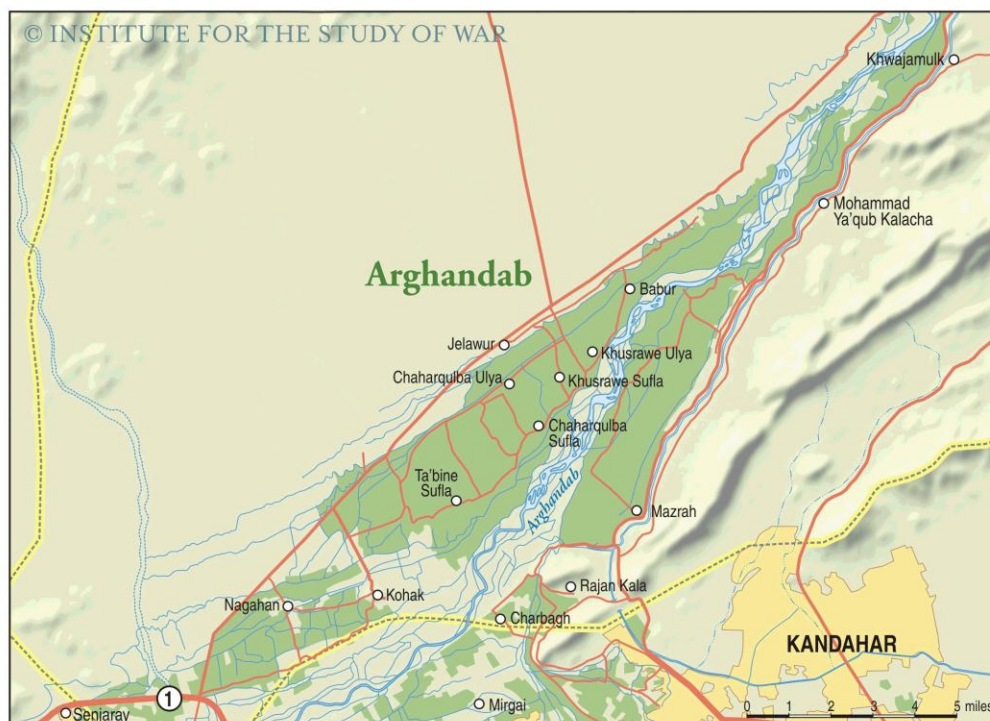


Figure 18: Arghandab District, Kandahar Province (Source: Institute for the Study of War)

One of the most effective weapons introduced during first during Operation Moshtarak but then used extensively during Dragon Strike was the U.S. Army's Assault Breacher Vehicle (ABV). Referred to by U.S. troops as "the answer," and built by General Dynamics, ABVs are a highly effective IED clearing machine—they so effectively clear mines that they also make roads in their wake. The 72-ton vehicle is loaded with over 5,000 lbs. of explosives, and mounted with a rocket-led line carrying C-4 explosives called a "mine clearing line charge." When launched, the line charge soars through the air, and explodes a path 30 meters long and 14 meters wide (Figure 5.6).



Figure 19: M1 Assault Breach Vehicle using a line-clearing charge in Kandahar Province.

Increasingly frustrated by the use of IEDs, and practically unable to use the ABV everywhere at once, U.S. forces began to employ harsh tactics in the area to root out militants. The *Daily Telegraph* correspondent Ben Farmer reports one such incident of collective harsh punishment by the 1-320th in

the town of Senjaray in Zhari district just days before the clearing of the four villages in Arghandab. In Senjaray, U.S. soldiers threatened villagers who were reluctant to snitch on community members supporting the insurgency. As Ben Farmer (2010) writes in an incredible narrative, Captain Nick Stout threatened the entire village if they did not inform U.S. troops of the Taliban presence:

“We’ve got a good thing going on here. Are you going to let five people ruin all this? [...] If people are going to tolerate [the attacks], we’re going to arrest everyone and the governor is going to declare martial law.” As helicopter gunships buzzed overhead in a show of force, Afghan policemen backed by the US soldiers seized shopkeepers and passers-by at random and bound their hands behind their backs. A growing procession of captives trailed the patrol as it filed through Senjaray’s alleyways. A loud speaker carried by a U.S. psychological operations team blasted out the message: “The people of Zhari will now be held responsible for the cowardly actions of the enemy.” A handful of women wailed as a relative was hauled off and a group of children cried as their neighbour’s door was kicked in. After the district governor’s lecture to the captives, Captain Stout added his own warning. He said, “I don’t care who you are, if there’s a grenade goes off [sic.] and I see you around, I’m going to put a black bag over your head and you’re never going to see your family again.” One by one, Karim Jan questioned his captives then either cut their plastic bindings or sent them blindfolded into a police pickup truck (Farmer, 2010).”

This type of collective threat was widespread and became the hallmark of Operation Dragon Strike. In order to maintain the image of a “population friendly” counterinsurgency approach in the area, a silent crackdown on journalism began to occur in southern Afghanistan, the most notorious incident being the ISAF 36-hour arrest of two Al Jazeera cameramen accused of being propagandists for the Taliban (Al Jazeera, 2010; cf. Fekrat, 2010). In spite of U.S. efforts for imagery control, the insurgents nevertheless

carried out a series of spectacular strikes in Kandahar City. On October 4, the deputy mayor of Kandahar City was attacked and killed by gunmen, and 14 police officers were killed and wounded in the city. Over the next two days, major bombings occurred in Kandahar City, five explosions in all on police checkpoints, which killed 9 and maimed 20 more.

On October 6, just three days before the ninth anniversary of the war, Lt. Col. David Flynn initiated the first of many air strikes that razed the four villages in the Arghandab River valley. In his justification for the strikes, Flynn painted a picture of “abandoned” towns whose walls were so heavily mined with IEDs that it was impossible to move, let alone patrol, within them. When asked how he determined that the villages were “abandoned,” Flynn said he used drones and “multiple sensors” to conduct a “pattern of life” analysis for “several weeks” on the villages.⁵³ According to Flynn, the villages were occupied only by militants, who he says were manufacturing bombs within the walls of the village courtyards. In an interview, Flynn said that “it was comforting to know [that the civilians had fled] because we [could] employ the full suite of our weapons systems”—everything from grenades to .50-calibre machine guns to attack helicopters and close air support—“without worrying about the civilians (Ackerman, 2011).” Chandrasekaran notes (2012: 275) that the “full suite” boasted by Flynn helped “set a record: U.S. and NATO aircraft unleashed more than one thousand bombs and missiles that October, the highest tally in any single month since 2001.”

Flynn’s story about the villages being abandoned is highly inconsistent. It may be true that the villages were abandoned by residents at the time of the bombings, but the question is *why* were the villages abandoned? On multiple occasions, the way Flynn has told the story is that the 1-320th “discovered” that the villages were abandoned as his soldiers tried to make their way into them. Yet, it

⁵³ In his book *Little America*, Chandrasekaran writes: “Video from surveillance aircraft indicated that the village had been vacated, save for insurgents who were manufacturing homemade explosives in the walled-off courtyards. Officers in Flynn’s battalion had the aircraft fly overhead for *a few weeks*—to ensure that there were no signs that civilians had returned.”

was reported in the *Daily Mail* that Flynn threatened the villagers to either turn in those making IEDs or he would “blow up their houses” (Pendlebury and Wiseman, 2010). As Pendlebury and Wiseman write (2010):

The villagers have been given until this Thursday to reveal to the Americans the exact location of the multiple Improvised Explosive Devices that are known to ring what was, until very recently, a Taliban HQ. If they don’t, they will be allowed to retrieve what possessions are still left in the ruins. Then, using airstrikes and bulldozers, the coalition forces will wipe Khosrow Sofla from the map. The ultimatum has been issued by Colonel David Flynn, a battalion commander in the 101st Airborne Division – the Screaming Eagles. “I have informed the villagers I am unprepared to tell any more moms and dads that their sons died trying to clear Khosrow Sofla,” he explained to me. “I have told the villagers to consult the Taliban. But they know full well already where the IEDs are hidden. Now they have a few days to decide what to do about it.”

This account already puts into question Flynn’s suggestion that the villages were abandoned prior to the bombings. Instead, this picture very much leads one to wonder whether international laws against collective punishment in war were violated. In his account, Flynn says that the *threats* never happened. Rather, he “told them that if residents couldn’t tell him exactly where the bombs were, he would have no way of disposing them without blowing up the buildings (Ackerman, 2011).” Flynn is obviously not one for splitting hairs. Nevertheless, the picture changes when it looks as if the villages were abandoned *precisely because of Flynn’s threat of annihilation*, and Flynn’s claim that the villages were abandoned beforehand is put into serious doubt. It also explains the disbelief at the extent of destruction by returning refugees. In a story aired on *NPR*, a villager named Muhammad has his house destroyed, and the U.S. built a base right on top of his former residence. “‘Of course, I’m very disappointed and very angry’, says Muhammad. ‘This was the income of my family. We were just

feeding our kids with that, our family with that.’ He says he’s not sure if the Americans had to bomb the area; he thinks with all of America’s technology there must have been a way to remove the bombs without flattening the orchard (Lawrence, 2011).” As months passed, the aim behind the razings became clear. As Chandrasekaran writes of his time travelling with Flynn in his book *Little America* (2012: 276), “Residents... pledged to provide the Americans with information about Taliban infiltration. ‘People understand that if the Taliban come back again,’ Flynn said, ‘that [the razings] could happen again.’”

5.5 Rebuilding Orders

One of the curiously insidious justifications for the village razings by NATO forces was that the bombings create an opportunity for the displaced villagers to better connect with their district governor, particularly through rebuilding efforts and compensation collection. This perverse twist on the counterinsurgency mantra of creating conditions for “better governance” was advanced in a December 2010 interview with Major General Nick Carter, the British Deputy Commander of ISAF:

It’s a no-brainer that it is easier to deal with these significantly booby trapped bomb making plants with high-explosives, rather than laboriously and dangerously trying to clear them by hand. After all, the rebuilding of these properties is a great deal cheaper in terms of blood and treasure than having to clear the compound at very high risk [of] our servicemen. *It also allows the district governor to connect with the population by leading the process of compensating the property owner for the rebuilding costs* (Carter, 2010; my emphasis).

In her initial article on the village razings, Broadwell touted this line as well:

Indeed, clearing operations are a necessary evil to weed out the Taliban, and they often leave devastating destruction in the wake... But what [some villagers] failed to note is the

tremendous effort some units like the 1-320th, have made to rebuild this country. As of today, reconstruction efforts are well on track for Tarok Kolache and others in this [area of operations]. Mosque construction is underway, the irrigation canals and culverts are being restored, and *the local government has been an active participant in the process of assisting the people to the village in rebuilding their homes* (Broadwell, 2011; my emphasis).

Akmal Dawi of the Afghanistan Rights Monitor was more pessimistic pointing out the short-sightedness of this approach, “These are all mud houses, quite humble houses, so they are just taking the easiest way and saying, “We will destroy them and then help them rebuild, give them a couple of hundred dollars and show them we are on their side (Jamail, 2011).”

5.5.1 Drawing Lines

The short-sightedness is multifaceted, but an aspect that immediately stands out is the categorization of the villagers as *property owners*. Broadwell, in her own way, grasped the problematic nature of Western practices of drawing property lines in places they did not exist before, noting that “[c]ompensation for ‘clearing’ operations is not simple. Land ownership is a complex issue in Afghanistan, especially land purchased from the government. Very few landowners or tenants in the rural areas have deeds, and the provincial ministries will not issue a deed unless there is proof the owner paid taxes in the past (Broadwell, 2011).” By December, the 1-320th had already staked out 13 property lines, and promised the villagers in Tarok Kolache \$500,000 for replacing buildings and compensation for losses in the pomegranate harvest (McCloskey, 2010).

Timothy Mitchell (1991, 2003; cf. Blomley 1999) has written extensively on the violent yet productive nature of drawing property lines in introducing new forms of order and new modes of authority. What new forms of order and authority were borne out of the Tarok Kolache razings? There were two primary effects in this creation of life-forms out of the destroyed lifeworlds. First, there was

an individualization of the villagers achieved through the technology of the deed, which occurred in the transference of their custody to local (and notoriously corrupt) officials. Second, the US military in the rebuilding of Tarok Kolache, the US military manufactured a landscape that could be easily surveilled and amenable to future operations, namely by lowering walls, removing foliage from fields, and what could be called a “de-labyrinthing” effect of building numbered row houses lined up in an order instead of the dense mud housing typical of southern Afghan villages; in other words, this was a manufacturing of new *private* villages outfitted with Western friendly sight-lines, or what Mitchell (2003: 59) has called in the context of Egypt, “putting villagers in their place.” Following Mitchell, it is important to note here that this push for private ownership in Tarok Kolache and the other villages via the issuance of a “deed” – which was a fraught process (see below) – was a moment where private property emerged “not as a right won by individuals against the state” but as a form of penalty, a penalty which was not “liberatory” in the sense that private ownership is ideologically thought to be, but instead as an assignment in order to further the means of US population control.

In order to qualify for compensation from the US military, residents from the four villages had to go through a series of steps to “prove” that they were qualified recipients. First, there was a negotiation between the displaced villagers – who must return to the village during winter – and local government officials who were to represent them to the US military in drawing the property lines, in order to arrive at a consensus on who owned what. As analysts like Joshua Foust (2011) have pointed out, this is essentially the first moment where a family must pay out a district governor. A second moment occurs in trying to get one’s hands on an actual deed, a convoluted process distributed by the provincial governor, which is needed to qualify for US compensation (Lawrence, 2011). A village elder has to represent a village individual or family to the district governor (usually located in Kandahar City for “security” reasons) to claim a deed. Either a district governor or his representative has to then go to the heavily fortified provincial governor’s office in Kandahar City to make a claim for

a deed. If the family is able (or lucky or rich enough) to secure a deed, they have to then show the deed to the US Army Task Force official's office also located in the same compound as the provincial governor's office. The Task Force's office then enters into a validation process to ensure the authenticity of the deed and the new owners, which could take weeks. Finally, once everything is confirmed, the Task Force office will either hand deliver or issue the compensation receipt and money through the battalion operating in the area (the 1-320th) to be given to the family without a home. In other words, the entire procedure for a claim involves at least five individuals or offices, in notoriously the most corrupt country in the world. According to the *New York Times*, the US military shifted the custody of villagers over to Afghan officials because they were initially unable to evaluate claims in the face of being "overwhelmed with hundreds of people claiming compensation for damage, some of it done long before the recent fighting." (The same report quotes a Karzai presidential advisor who estimated the damage to the districts to be \$100 million, over \$70 million more than the US military's figure, and puts the paltry \$500,000 fund for rebuilding and compensation into perspective.) Remarking on this transference of custody, the *Times* concluded that "while Afghan officials may be better placed to work out which claims are genuine, members of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission have raised concerns that the local Afghan government lacks the ability and honesty to handle the huge number of claims fairly" (Gall and Khalpalwak, 2011).

The entire process of bringing the "population closer to their government" was certainly an ordering principle, but hardly a rational one. Instead, the victims of domicile were expected to pay their way to make claims on their homes which were inconveniently placed in the pathway of US Army movement. The kind of order that was brought about was what U.S. officials started to call around this time "Afghan good enough," meaning that even if villagers had to pay off officials to get their hands on a deed in order to receive compensation for the destruction of their home, then so be it, as long as a highly particular notion of "security" was established (Cooper and Shanker, 2012). The "security" of

homes was apparently not part of the equation, nor the well-being of the villagers. Indeed, it is worth noting at this point that during this time in late 2010 and early 2011, when displaced villagers were expected to travel between their destroyed homes and refugee camps in order to pay off these officials, they were residing in tents or under tarpaulins without heat in freezing temperatures (Farmer, 2011). By the same time next year, the same refugees who fled from the fighting in Kandahar and Helmand were dying from the cold, including 22 children (Nordland, 2012).

5.5.2 *Sight-Lines*

The second effect of order brought about in the rebuilding was in the construction of the new villages overseen by Lt. Col. Flynn, particularly Tarok Kolache. In a cheery report published in the spring in the *Washington Post*, Rajiv Chandrasekaran (2011) wrote that “signs of change have sprouted this spring amid the lush fields and mud-brick villages of southern Afghanistan.” Chandrasekaran notes that “the security improvements have been the result of intense fighting and the use of high-impact weapons systems not normally associated with the protect-the-population counterinsurgency mission.” Like other places (e.g., Broadwell, 2011), the report discusses the rebuilding of the village, most notably a mosque. During the spring, Flynn and American engineers were in the process of rebuilding several homes (see Figures 2-4).



Figure 20: U.S. Cash-for-Work program rebuilding homes in Tarok Kolache (Source: Defense Video & Imagery Distribution System)



Figure 21: U.S. Cash-for-Work program rebuilding homes in Tarok Kolache (Source: Defense Video & Imagery Distribution System)



Figure 22: Reconstructed mosque with hip-level walls (Source: Defense Video & Imagery Distribution System)

Flynn set up a “cash-for-work” program to hire men from the area (though not necessarily from the destroyed villages) rebuild Tarok Kolache, and claimed that “hundreds” of men had taken part (Flynn, 2011; McCloskey, 2010). In his tour of Helmand and Kandahar provinces, Chandrasekaran is particularly perceptive of the changes in the landscape undertaken by the US military producing what Weizman has called an “elastic geography” which organizes and embeds power relations in space in such a way as to produce effects pliable for military occupation (Weizman, 2007). Chandrasekaran (2011) writes,

In Sangin, the Marines used 24 line charges to tear up a 1,600-yard stretch of road embedded with 52 bombs. In another part of the district, they used multiple charges to demolish tall compound walls that insurgent snipers employed for concealment; Marine officers have told residents that *if they want to rebuild, their walls must be lower than four feet*. The Army has changed the landscape in even more unusual ways in Zhari. Soldiers have sought to block off the western side of the district by building a five-mile long sand berm topped with razor wire. Taking a page out of the military’s Iraq playbook, they also

have installed more than 10 miles of tall concrete walls along roads in the southern half of the district that cut through flat farmland. While some residents find the sight of cement walls running alongside wheat fields to be overly penal, the unsightly measures are aimed at restricting insurgents' ability to drive back into the area with munitions-filled vehicles...Flynn's battalion established an outpost in the village [the first structure built, according to other reports] and hired contractors to resurrect the structures. The local mosque, once a mud-walled edifice, has been rebuilt with brick and concrete; it features colorful minarets and a large prayer room. Laborers are working on a series of long brick buildings to replace the adobe housing compounds. *Flynn is also planning a change to the tall mud walls that Afghans typically use to mark their property. Instead of establishing a height requirement, he has purchased rolls of chain-link fencing* (my emphasis).

Effectively, what the U.S. military did after the bombings was reconstruct a landscape amenable to U.S. war aims. By choosing a particular style of row housing (Figures 20 & 21), the U.S. reordered the everyday material relations, producing a space at once manageable to gathering information (property lines, ownership deeds, numbered housing, biometric data), and pliable for patrol. In this sense, violence becomes a creative rather than destructive act in which the environment is shaped to undermine the conditions of possibility for insurgency (Anderson, 2011; Mitchell, 2003: 54-79). And, in this shaping manifests a particular line of sight, one in which bodies are a transparent mobility in the landscape, unhindered by walls or foliage.



Figure 23: Lt. Col. David Flynn overseeing the construction of Tarok Kolache (Source: Defense Video & Imagery Distribution System)



Figure 24: New lines of sight established in the wall-less villages (Source: Defense Video & Imagery Distribution System)



Figure 25: Afghan soldier standing in front of a field without foliage (Source: Defense Video & Imagery Distribution System)

5.6 Conclusion

The U.S. experience in counterinsurgency operations is marked by one important feature: the internal displacement of rural populations into urban slums and refugee camps. As Michael McClintock has noted (1992: 13), the idea behind forced internal displacement is to use force in order to create a “no-man’s land” or frontier where only combatants or insurgents would remain as actors on the scene. Flynn’s collective threats on villagers had precisely that effect. This tactic was first utilized in the U.S. supported suppression of the GDA in the Greek Civil War (1946-1949). Reflecting on his time reporting on the Greek Civil War, British journalist and defense hawk Edgar O’balance (1966: 214) wrote that:

Under American insistence energetic counter-measures were taken... and one of the most effective of these was the systematic removal of whole sections of the population. This was more far-reaching than is usually realized. It removed the people, it demarcated a ‘front line’, it prevented ‘back infiltration’ and it caused a blanket of silence to descend. Without

population to support or succor him, the guerrilla is a fish out of water; he might as well be fighting in a foreign and hostile country.

It is a particular pattern invariably associated with the conduct of counterinsurgency. The connection between colonial counterinsurgency, forced displacement, and forced urbanization has many historical precedents, making the strategy, in the words of Mike Davis (2006: 55-56), “one of the most ruthlessly efficient levers of informal urbanization.”

As Davis points out, forced urbanization was a hallmark of the U.S. pacification strategy in the countryside of South Vietnam. Indeed, in a famously candid essay by Samuel Huntington that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in 1968, following the Tet Offensive, he argued that the U.S. pacification effort was producing an unintentional but welcomed side effect of violently coercing peasants and farmers into the cities under the Vietnamese Government’s control. While Huntington rejected U.S. counterinsurgency as more or less ineffective at producing a legitimate *political* hegemony among farmers and peasants in the countryside (i.e., “winning hearts and minds”), Huntington found the sliver of optimism in the “massive American effort... producing a *social* revolution in the Vietnamese way of life which will be of far greater consequence to the future of the country (Huntington, 1968: 642).” The “social revolution” Huntington refers to is urbanization. In a rebuke of the eminent counterinsurgency advisor Sir Robert Thompson’s assertion that the Viet Cong were immune to “the direct application of mechanical and conventional power” by the United States, thus making it a short-sighted policy to use it, Huntington wrote instead that such direct application “takes place on such a massive scale as to produce a massive migration from countryside to city, [and thus] the basic assumptions underlying the Maoist doctrine of revolutionary war no longer operate. The Maoist-inspired rural revolution is undercut by the American sponsored urban revolution (Huntington, 1968: 650; cf. Glassman, 1992).” Ever the optimist, Huntington found a bright side in the urban slums which, although seeming “horrible

to middle-class Americans, often become for the poor peasant a gateway to a new and better way of life.”

The rural poor may well find life in the city more attractive and comfortable than their previous existence in the countryside... In an absent-minded way the United States in Viet Nam may well have stumbled upon the answer to ‘wars of national liberation.’ The effective response lies neither in the quest for conventional military victory nor in the esoteric doctrines and gimmicks of counter-insurgency warfare. It is instead forced-draft urbanization and modernization which rapidly brings the country in question out of the phase in which a rural revolutionary movement can hope to generate sufficient strength to come to power (Huntington, 1968: 652).

This insidious form of “urban revolution,” as Davis points out, resulted in a dramatic shift in South Vietnam’s urban population from 15 percent in the early 1960s to 65 percent in 1974, with “five million displaced peasants turned into slum-dwellers or inhabitants of refugee camps (Davis, 2006: 57; cf. Young, 1991: 172-191).”

As shown above, this legacy of domicide and forced urbanization (e.g., District Nine) continues in the countryside of another insurgency over forty years later. The examples are numerous, and “successful counterinsurgency has always meant mass displacement and systematic attacks on homes; indeed, domicide is the tragic structure underlining the “culture-friendly” counterinsurgency doctrine. This tragic structure was bloodily brought to the fore of public attention on March 11, 2012 when Staff Sergeant Robert Bales killed at least 16 civilians, nine of whom were children, in three villages in Panjwai district. In a *New York Times* story on the shooting, it featured a distraught villager named Abdul Samad, who was displaced in 2010 by the massive bombing campaign of Operation Dragon Strike (Shah and Bowley, 2012). Eleven of Samad’s family members were shot, stabbed and subsequently burned by Bales. Samad lost his wife, four daughters, four sons, and two other relatives.

According to the story, Samad and his family had recently returned to what was once their village to live in a neighbor's home near the U.S. army base in Panjwai because "his own [house] had been destroyed by NATO bombardments in the years of fierce battles." As Shah and Bowley write, "some American actions in the area also alienated villagers, like the wholesale destruction of villages that commanders decided were too riddled with booby traps to safely control."

Samad's story is important, insofar as the U.S. Staff Sergeant's actions were *not unconventional*, but rather embodied the logic, albeit on an "individual level," what the U.S. military has been conducting in Helmand and Kandahar since 2010. It would be a gross misrepresentation to consider the shootings as anything other than the rule. These are the law-making spectral forces at work in southern Afghanistan that have long oriented soldiers to carry out the logic to its violent ends (Benjamin, 2002c). The effects are going to be long-lasting and reflect what Foucault (2003a: 267-268) has called *real war*, "not an ideal war—the war imagined by the philosophers of the state of nature—but real wars and actual battles; the laws were born in the midst of expeditions, conquests, and burning towns; but the war continues to rage within the mechanisms of power or at least to constitute the secret motor of institutions, laws, and order."

In a story published in the *New York Times* two days after the Bales shooting, an unnamed European official perniciously posited that "the most important thing now [in the wake of the shootings] is the messaging." And that is true. The messaging of the U.S. war crimes in Afghanistan needs to be relentless, now more than ever.

6 Computational Counterinsurgency

Big Data and Data-coding the Insurgent in U.S. Military Intelligence

“2 were the haunted vessels that miraculously aimed
3 were the holy carcasses that started up in flames
1 and 2 had a patsy that was factually plane
7 out of envy must have wanted just the same
And in 6.5 seconds science floated out to space
On the most virginal of physics drifted to a truly wondrous day
And if the party tells me 5 fingers then 5 is what I’ll say
No matter that the 4 displayed are waving in my face.”

“Run the Numbers,” El-P, from *I’ll Sleep When You’re Dead*.

“Big Data can be used for good or bad, but either way it brings us to interesting times. We’re going to reinvent what it means to have a human society.”

Alex Pentland, “Reinventing Society in the Wake of Big Data” (2012)

“The mathematical is... a project of thingness which, as it were, skips over the things.”

M. Heidegger, from “Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics”

6.1 “Renaissance of Wonder”

ON April 1, 2012, Team Crowdsanner won the US State Department-sponsored “Tag Challenge” contest to find and report pretend “suspects” located in five cities across the trans-Atlantic divide: Washington, DC, New York City, London, Stockholm, and Bratislava. The thrust of the contest was for individuals or teams to devise innovative ways of locating and photographing suspicious characters navigating in a city’s everyday spaces: walking the streets, riding public transportation, sipping coffee in a café, enjoying a park. On March 31, at 8am local time of each city’s respective time zone, a “mug shot” was posted on the Tag Challenge website of a suspect voluntarily donning neon-green event T-shirt. Contest participants were given twenty-four hours to locate all five suspects in Europe and the United States. Each of the volunteer suspects was instructed by contest organizers to stroll along a “predetermined path through public locations” enjoying lattes or reading books to pass the day.

Since locating a suspect was an impossible endeavour for a single individual, participating teams were encouraged to devise methods to entice as many people as possible into participation through the use of internet-based social networking technologies. Most of the teams relied on the popular sites Facebook and Twitter to tweet and retweet hash-tagged #messages calling for people to post any sighting of a photographed suspect. However, the winning team, MIT-based Team Crowdscanner, devised an entirely different method, highly innovative in its intended effects. Using what they call a “recursive incentive mechanism,” Team Crowdscanner crafted a two-pronged compensation structure to attract participants into the role of voluntary informant for spotting the “suspicious” characters. In order to attract as many participants as possible—employing the inclusive terminology of “team members”—Team Crowdscanner first paid a US\$1 recruiting prize for each recruit a person signed into the five-city hunt, up to US\$2000. Second, a participant received a \$500 money reward out of the general prize pool of US\$5,000 for a successfully uploaded image of a suspect on the Team Crowdscanner website (see Figure 1). Then Team Crowd-

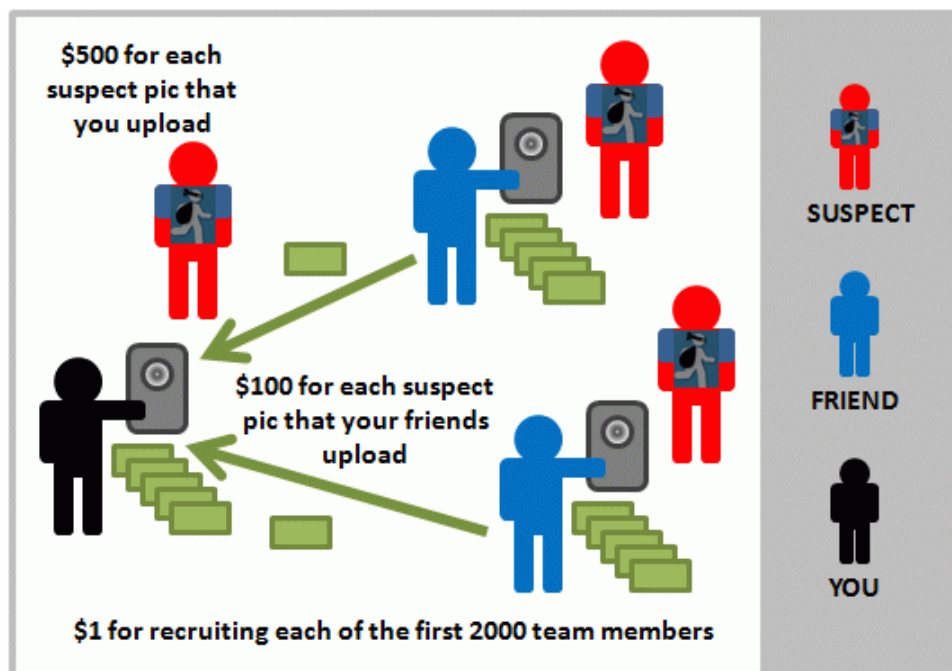


Figure 26: Depiction of Team Crowdscanner’s “recursive incentive mechanism” Source: Team Crowdscanner

scanner used various social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) to create an ad hoc network of participants to seek – or perhaps better, *swarm* – the suspects. After twenty-four hours, Team CrowdsScanner won the Tag Challenge contest by finding three out of five suspects in New York City, Washington DC, and Bratislava. In the State Department’s press release, project organizer Joshua DeLara discussed the feat, “Here’s a remarkable fact: a team organized by individuals in the U.S., the U.K. and the United Arab Emirates was able to locate an individual in Slovakia in under eight hours based only on a photograph.” Delara went on to boast, “The project demonstrates the international reach of social media and its potential for cross-border cooperation.” Perhaps. The press release ends with a promise for a full report “examining the strategies and possible applications for law enforcement and public safety.”⁵⁴

The Tag Challenge contest was inspired in large part by a similar contest organized by the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in December 2009 called the “DARPA Network Challenge.” Indeed, most of Team CrowdsPotter’s members were on the Network Challenge’s winning team as well, Team MIT based out of the highly renowned MIT Media Lab. On December 5, 2009, the DARPA Network Challenge planted ten red weather balloons in different cities across the United States, and contestants were challenged to locate the latitude and longitude of the balloons within twenty four hours through the use of social media (see Figure 2). Team MIT was the only group to locate all ten red balloons in an astonishing time of nine hours. Team MIT used a snowball technique very similar to the financial incentive mechanism used in the Tag Challenge, although volunteers were given their own webpages where they could submit their findings and publicize their work through social media (again, Facebook and Twitter). In a press statement following the Challenge, then-DARPA director and current Google executive Regina Dugan wrote: “The Challenge has captured the imagination of people around the world, is rich with scientific intrigue, and, we hope, is part of a growing ‘renaissance of wonder’ throughout the nation.”

⁵⁴ At the time of this writing, the report has still not been published.

It would be a mistake to write off Dugan's excitement for a "renaissance of wonder" as another run-of-the-mill moment of self-congratulatory pomp familiar to readers of governmental public relations announcements. The "renaissance" to which Dugan refers is a profoundly influential sea-change that has occurred over the past three decades in academic and private sector research programs around themes of "complexity" and "networks," spanning both social and natural science and the humanities, and which has taken a seemingly interconnected world replete with vacillating "flows and networks" of humans, non-humans, and things (both material and virtual) as the privileged field of analysis. The deepening of thinking around "networks" and "complexity" is due to a re-evaluation of "systems thinking," which emphasized the connections of command-and-control structures, a paradigm that dominated thought in both the social and natural sciences after the Second World War. Complexity researchers of all stripes have instead begun to be attracted to self-organizing and self-reinforcing dynamic systems marked by their information-rich non-linear dimensions and *emergent* properties (Cilliers, 1998; Urry, 2003). This rich intellectual activity has spawned many faces—some critical, others not so much—but what captures the imagination of people like Dugan is what some influential researchers in the sciences have called the *small world phenomenon*: a particular science of networks, interdisciplinary in scope (spanning applied sciences and mathematics, psychology and political science), which first captured popular attention in the 1990s when it was "discovered" that everybody in the United States—and possibly the world—had "six degrees of separation" from the actor Kevin Bacon (Watts, 2003). That "discovery" was based on the famous letter-chain experiment pioneered by a Harvard University social psychologist Stanley Milgram, who coined the "small-world problem" when he attempted to establish "a certain mathematical structure in society" (Milgram, 1967: 62) by establishing the probability that any two people in the United States – perhaps the world – could be connected through acquaintance chains. Based on his findings, Milgram concluded that we are all bound together "in a tightly knit social fabric" (1967: 67).

Since Migram wrote those words, a veritable torrent of empirical work on the “topology of interconnectedness” has been carried out in the social and natural sciences (Gleick, 2011: 423-424). In many ways, over the past fifty or so years, the “small world problem” has crystallized into a new *Weltanschauung*, a secularized cosmological vision novel in its pursuit to explain the entirety of the human and non-human chain-of-being as one wholly comprised of networks and dynamic relational systems—agents, clusters, lattices, and randomness abound. Indeed, the extent to which disparate phenomena across the culture/nature divide are assumed capable of taking on the form of a network is really quite breathtaking (cf. Haraway, 1992: 67; Latour, 1991: 77-78)⁵⁵. In their famous letter to *Nature* in 1998, then-Cornell University mathematicians Duncan Watts and Steven Strogatz set the perimeters of network science as comprising *everything*, finding that the “neural network of the worm *Caenorhabditis elegans*, the power grid of the western United States, and the collaboration graph of film makers are shown to be small-world networks (Watts and Strogatz, 1998: 440).” This kind of network-thinking has had a profound resonance in popular culture, where popular science books that wax on the structural networked congruity across beings have flown from shelves into bestsellers (e.g., Barabasi, 2002; Christakis and Fowler, 2009; Johnson, 2002; Strogatz, 2004; Watts, 2003). Critical analysis has been equally indulgent in the “network condition” (Castells, 1996), with one of the more popular series of books in the past decade expounding the virtues of self-organizing networks for radical politics (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004, 2009), a trope emphatically employed during the 2011 Occupy protests.⁵⁶ So apparently widespread is this ontological condition that troubles the divide

⁵⁵ In recent years, Latour has revised his position on the extent of networks. See Latour 2006

⁵⁶ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri frame late-modern forms of (biopolitical) power and imperialism as working through networks, as opposed to older forms of sovereignty and war (which they identify in a chapter “Network Power: U.S. Sovereignty,” Hardt and Negri 2000: 160-182). Since in their sociological descriptivism they reproduce the dominant worldview of the social-as-networked, they cannot seemingly imagine a form of radical militancy outside of the networked-form: “The telos of the multitude must live and organize its political space against Empire and yet within the ‘maturity of the times’ and the *ontological conditions that Empire presents*” (407): “Resistance is linked immediately with a constitutive investment in the biopolitical realm and to the formation of cooperative apparatuses of production and community... [Militancy] knows only an inside, a vital and ineluctable participation in the set of social structures, with no possibility of

between organisms, machines, physical systems, and the social (Cresswell and Craig, 2012), that nothing seems to be capable of escaping its reach, not even literature; “What about plot,” Moretti asks (2011: 80), “how can that be quantified?”

To be sure, network-thinking is hardly singular—there is a remarkable range of ideas about networks, how to identify and understand them, and perhaps most importantly, how to *see* them (see below). Nevertheless, a host of underlying qualities that make up the warp and woof of network-thinking percolate across a range of analyses, whether in the quantitative sciences or in a more critical qualitative register; for example, the insistence upon a tendency towards self-organization by disparate, non-linear elements into an architecture resembling a network or networked “organism”; or the assertion that social and natural processes arrive at a (networked) form “through continuous deformation” (Massumi, 2002: 184). Grahame Thompson has noted that there seems to be a “single logic to all natural and social life forms” in this literature, a “universal choice of network architecture that is no mere coincidence but the confirmation of universally influential effect (Thompson, 2004: 413-414):”

This arises spontaneously but not accidentally... [and] at a fundamental level – once again, it must be said – it is the imagery of physics and mathematics that is being directly imported into the social sciences to bolster its analytical credentials. But this imagery is not being used metaphorically. In the case of complex networks... social aspects can be accessed immediately by considering them as mathematically specified systems directly analogous to physical ones. There is a single architecture that informs all complex networks (Thompson, 2004: 414).

transcending them. *This inside is the productive cooperation of mass intellectuality and affective networks*, the productivity of postmodern biopolitics (413).”

For government agencies like DARPA and the US State Department, it is the mathematically specified systems that form a “single architecture” which piques their interest – and not only governments. It is well known that corporations and social media sites (such as Facebook and Twitter) take user-based data and information as the new terrain for capital accumulation and the extraction of surplus value. Private corporations have been harbingers and the primary facilitators in building the infrastructure for “network culture” (Terranova, 2004), from the development of a plethora of information technologies, to the material reorganization of home and work spaces as networked-spaces of accumulation (e.g., Apple TV, the proliferation of wifi, etc.; cf. Martin, 2005). Importantly, these new forms of capital accumulation are infiltrating all areas of life, particularly the affective dimensions of the body, turning everyday haptic practices and (micro)movements into a new mobile “fabric” (Thrift, 2011) that is both the condition and consequence of value extraction; e.g., the proliferation of smart-phones and tablets, and their uses and configurations of finger movements, the new forms of world-navigability, with their attendant ways of seeing and feeling. As Anderson has written (2012: 33), ““affect itself” is now bought and sold, including affective labour in the service sector and all the forms of bodily labour that feminist work has long recognized. More than this... affective capacities are harnessed across production processes.”

This is the world which intrigues the organizers of the “suspect finding” contests; the kind of being assumed in this line of research is an actor at once assumed to be self-organizing and techno-environmentally interconnected.⁵⁷ The renaissance of wonder that Dugan evokes revolves around this field of “network-thinking” and everyday affective possibilities, a world of moving parts and the meaning *between* those moving parts. That “betweenness” has everything to do with user-generated data, traces of information and code and, most importantly, a user-generated voluntarism in socially-

⁵⁷ On this tension between an actor or organisms self-organization and its relationship to any environment, see Clough 2008

based media (Graham, 2007; Wilson and Graham, 2013; Kitchin and Dodge 2013). The computer and social scientists who led the teams that won the State Department and DARPA contests constitute a vanguard at the forefront of a radical rethinking of the relationships between the social and physically networked world. Facilities like the MIT Media Lab are at the forefront of this kind of research into affective production processes, underwritten as it is by over one hundred major corporations and government agencies, from Google, Microsoft and Nokia to the National Science Foundation, the US Army Research Laboratory, DARPA, and the Office of Naval Research. By working closely think-tanks, private companies, and the U.S military, data scientists have begun to produce novel epistemological questions around the significance of movement, connection, data, social mobilization, economic growth, efficiency, and indeed the very meaning of “human nature” embedded within a technologically-mediated and networked environment. What is becoming possible in this new science of networked spaces is the mining and aggregating of troves of highly distributed data (“big data”) taken across space and time that can be distilled for information patterns in order to identify and track patterns of human activity left by bits of digital information, and orient that activity towards certain ends—i.e., “crowdsourcing”. The winning contest teams call this type of user-information based data analysis “reality mining,” which is the subject of this chapter. Critical analysts have begun to show the extent to which the affective dimensions of bodies are subsumed within the reach of political economic capture—“informatics-based products” (Clough, 2008)—giving shape to a novel form of biopolitics that extracts value out of bodies and human-machine assemblages (Ahmed, 2004; Anderson, 2012; Clough, 2008; Connelly, 2008; Cooper, 2008; Thrift, 2005).

This chapter analyzes the deployment of these affective strategies – particularly in Afghanistan – but also raises a different set of questions and concerns. While recent scholarship into affect has been especially helpful in bringing to the fore how “background” relations between humans (Dasein), non-humans “and” machines constitute everyday life in such a way that the world can “hang

together” in and through practices (Anderson and Harrison, 2010; Dreyfus, 1991; Schatzki, 2002; Schatzki, Cetina, and Savigny, 2001; Thrift, 1996)—without recourse to a representative apparatus to “access” those background relations (“nonrepresentational theory”)—it has a tendency to assign “representation” and visualization a secondary importance. For example, very little work has been done to help explain *why* a recourse to representation remains a *derivative mode of intelligibility* borne out of being-in-the-world—a *tendency towards representation persists*. Of course, it is not enough to say “representation persists.” Instead the work lies in asking how the tendency towards representation remains a paramount activity for and with negotiating the “world” (Heidegger, 1977). While one cannot discount the ways in which the affective dimensions of bodies are captured into power (virtual) machinic-assemblages (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011), an important attribute or aspect of late-modern modes of power are the manifold ways in which late-modern modalities of power rely upon an array of visualization and representational techniques (Galison and Daston, 2007).⁵⁸ For example, it has become commonplace to (re)present data or relationships in the sort of visual analogue seen below (Figure 2): in the iconic, and really, ubiquitous

⁵⁸ Derek McCormack’s interesting new work on abstraction (2012), where he argues that abstraction “can be affirmed as a necessary element of understandings of lived worlds in the making” seems to be fruitfully heading in this direction of analysis and critique.

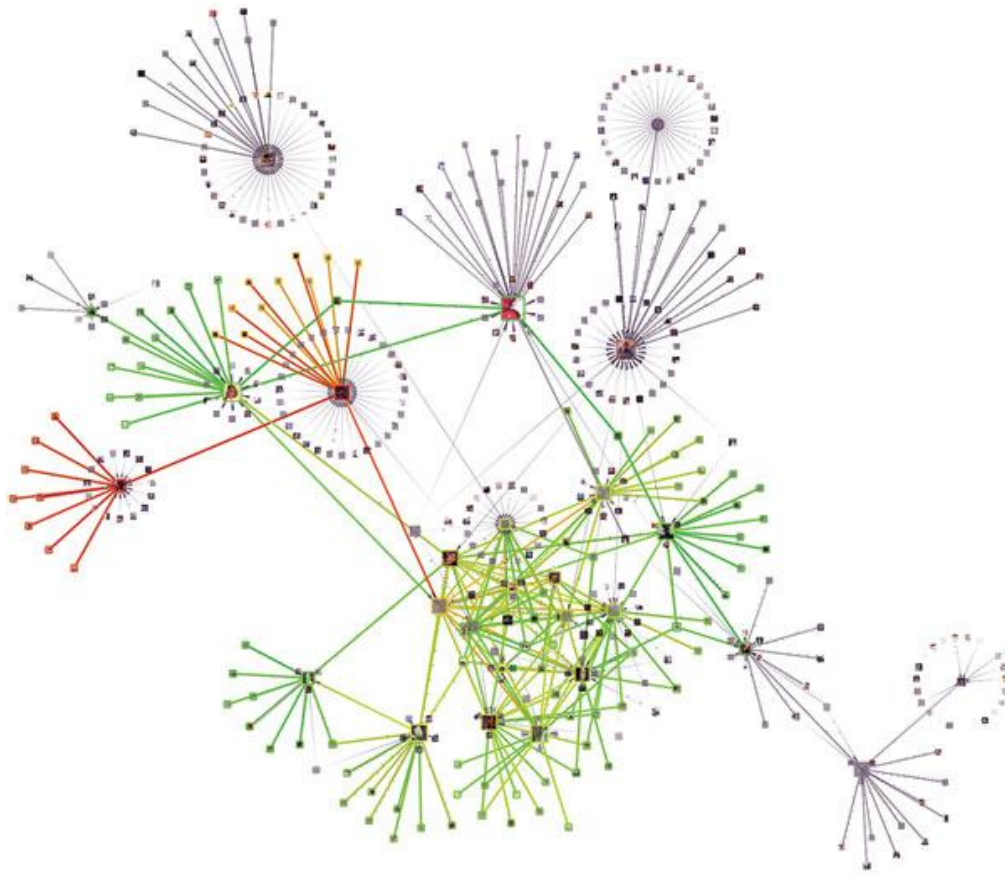


Figure 27: A map of an online social network by Dietmar Offenhuber, MIT Media Lab (2008)

images of sprawling nodal landscapes, tethered by strong and weak connections, dense in some places, disparate along the edges, stretching potentially into infinity. Importantly, these diagrams or abstract renderings can simulate phenomena that need not necessarily exist (as extant or as substances), but instead may represent ideas present in theoretical physics or mathematics loosely related to theories of chaos or complex dynamical systems (e.g., the Mandelbrot Set). Richard Wright has argued (1996: 220) that such visualizations “may provide the only tangible evidence of the mathematical object being studied... [These kinds of images give visualization] the function of creating the ‘object’ of what may be pure research, objectif[y]ing an idea to the extent that it can enter the general economy of signs as an image of itself.” Due to computer simulations, scientific objects of knowledge are now in a form in

which they can function through media without any additional information, finding a new life for themselves in the maelstrom of signs. Indeed, as Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have written in their extraordinary study of scientific atlases, the creation of simulated and situated object-images—or what they call “working objects” is an essential function for all sciences, especially late-modern sciences like chaos and complexity, since object-images necessarily assume a sort of visual hallmark or index *through which* empirical work can traffic.

All sciences must deal with the problem of selecting and constituting “working objects,” as opposed to the too plentiful and too various natural objects. Working objects can be atlas images, type specimens, or laboratory processes – any manageable, communal representative of the sector of nature under investigation. No science can do without such standardized working objects, for unrefined natural objects are too quirkily particular to cooperate in generalization and comparisons. Sometimes these working objects replace natural specimens... Even scientists working in solitude must regularize their objects. *Collective empiricism*, involving investigators dispersed over continents and generations, imposes still more urgently the need for common objects of inquiry (Daston and Galison 2007: 21-22).

Thus, a series of difficult questions arise, some “old” but others not so much: Why do working-image-objects emerge in the way that they do? What is the relationship between these “working-images” and the “world”? How does “the real” figure into representation(s) as an *index*? Are digital object-images – like the network-image above – indexical?⁵⁹ And if so, what are the terms of that indexicality (Bryant

⁵⁹ “Indexicality” is defined by Griselda Pollock in the following way: “Indexicality, known to a fairly restricted circle of students of American logician and philosopher C.S. Peirce’s semiotic theory, in which Peirce categorizes the sign as icon,

and Pollack, 2010)? How does representation emerge from “background” practices themselves, as a mode of intelligibility in which Dasein comports itself towards itself and the world (Heidegger, 1962)? In other words, what needs to be interrogated is the relationship between digital technologies that produce object-images of networks, and ask how those visualizations or images relate to – or are derivative from – the affective dimension of bodies circulating in their everyday activity in-the-world; that is, how these object-images and their platforms (mobile or desktop devices) are situated *within and towards* the world, and moreover have effects on that world.⁶⁰ In terms of the military, this means analysing the “instrumental phenomenology” (Thrift, 2011) by which data is created, coded and stored, as well as the means by which that data is rendered into visual markers or diagrams which are made actionable (“threat intelligence” in military jargon). Indeed, data and the making of object-images such as network-profiles are immanent to the practices and technologies that facilitate it: “Types of machines are easily matched with each type of society—not that machines are determining, but because they express those social forms capable of generating them and using them (Deleuze, 1992: 6).”

I examine the affective dimensions and object-images of “network analysis” through a consideration of the technical register by which the insurgency in Afghanistan has been analysed by the U.S. military. By “technical register,” I mean the technological and epistemological framings (Butler, 2009; Gregory, 2010b) through which a colonized or occupied population such as Afghanistan is quantified, managed, and tracked on a daily basis through a sociotechnical machinic-assemblage (Delanda, 1991). By “machinic-assemblage,” what I have in mind is something more concrete than

index and symbol, re-emerged in cultural theory, notably around photography and cinema, precisely because of the shift from analogue to digital photographic technologies. The index is a sign by virtue of a relation to its object, grounding the signifying relation in existential or indicative relations to real processes or things, in contrast to the icon, which works by resemblance, and the symbol by convention or rule (Pollock, 2010: xvii)

⁶⁰ Nigel Thrift (2011) has provocatively called this emergent relation between digital object-images and everyday activity *Lifeworld, Inc.*, which he defines as the “first stirrings of a phenomenology machine, one which has been rebuilt from the ground up to be able to produce phenomenal awareness through an orrery of surfaces understood as flows brought about by an economy which organizes “the system of energetic exchanges... within an ecosystem with the system of sociocultural devices which make it possible to reproduce these flows,” a phenomenal awareness made to appear through the art-science of appearance, thus echoing phenomenology’s prehistory as a theory of appearances (2011: 15).”

Deleuze and Guattari's abstract category (1982); rather, I want to refer more to what Foucault called "patterns of correlation" in which "heterogenous elements – techniques, material forms, institutional structures and technologies of power – are configured, as well as the redeployments through which these patterns are transformed (Collier, 2009)." Specifically, I analyse the practice of data-coding, and the U.S. military's attempt to use this data to construct algorithms to predict and ultimately pre-empt insurgencies. As I noted in my introduction, much attention has been paid by anthropologists and other critical social scientists on the use of "human terrain teams" in conducting intelligence work, but the role of anthropologists and "cultural intelligence" in military operations has largely been exaggerated. Little attention has been paid to the social scientists trained in computer science and behavioural economists who are employing dynamic social network analysis to quantify and model insurgent activity (threat intelligence) and population dynamics (mission intelligence). Indeed, it's algorithms, not anthropology, that are the real social science scandal in late-modern war.

The chapter proceeds by looking at a program called "Nexus 7" in Afghanistan, innovated by DARPA, along with David Kilcullen's Caerus Group. Nexus 7 collects massive amounts of data on market prices in various towns markets and businesses in Zabul, Kandahar, and Helmand provinces in order to track the effects of insurgent activity on local market activity. The idea is to deploy U.S. troops to areas where market participation may be jeopardized by an insurgent presence. My central argument is that the database technologies used rely on a particular aesthetic protocol to render social relations into legible nodes and relationships in a network. I move on to analyse the type of research that forms the basis for projects such as Nexus 7, namely "reality mining," "dynamic network analysis," and behavioural modelling and simulation. Importantly, projects such as Nexus 7 rely upon a whole compendium of biopolitical interventions as their condition of possibility, namely practices of biometric database management and check-point intelligence gathering. In this way, I emphasize the materiality of so-called "networked-practices." I conclude with a discussion of the future biopolitical

implications for this kind of warfare driven by a network-centric paradigm. But, first, I look a little bit more at the “network-centric” approach.

6.2 Bandits and Balloons

It is hardly novel to identify social relations as “networked.” That said, it is difficult to identify the origins of the “banal consensus” that today depicts social relations as such. Some have pointed to the early work of Georg Simmel as a precursor to network-thinking when, in 1890, he drew a distinction between cohesive “groups” and “webs of affiliation” (Grabher, 2006; cf. Simmel, 1890). For my part, the earliest conception of social relations as “networked” that I can find is in the first volume of *Capital*, when Marx first discussed the money relation in the circulation of commodities:

We see here, on the one hand, how the exchange of commodities breaks through all the individual and local limitations of the direct exchange of products, and develops the metabolic process of human labour. On the other hand, there develops a *whole network of social connections* of natural origin, entirely beyond the control of the human agents (Marx 1867 [1990]: 207; my emphasis).

It’s important to underscore the *separation* that must first occur in Marx’s formulation for social connections (or natural processes) beyond “local limitations” to be conceived as networks; i.e., the moment when social labour and activity is first objectified and crystallized into a form that, upon analysis, is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties: the commodity. That process of commodity circulation exceeds any individual actor. It is not so much the association between network-thinking and market commodity relations that needs bearing out as the *moment of metamorphosis* when social and/or natural phenomena are translated into object-images of contemplation (i.e., abstractions), and put into conceptual relation as object-forms of equivalence and/or resemblance (Marx, 1867 [1990]: 129; Deleuze, 1967: 270)—in this case, networks. There is

thus a peculiar aesthetic to thinking through network, or rather, thinking as networks, which enable human and non-human elements to be rendered into a flat and generally connected terrain of equivalence. As Morgan Robertson (2012) notes, it is precisely at the moment when working objects “cooperate in generalization and comparison,” that measurement and alienation become intertwined. That moment of alienation is marked by a fundamental separation between the circulating representation and the object (Benjamin, 2002c; Gregory, 1994), the abstraction from the index, however the index inheres and acts upon the re-presentation.

What are the universal attributes and elements at work in this representational world which captures the fascination of network thinkers? The primary supposition at least within the kind of formal network sciences discussed here is that the world, both living and non-living (e.g., physical systems, computers, machines), is comprised of dynamic self-organizing systems. Within self-organizing systems, particular attention is paid to the connectivity, relations, or what some call “ties” between sets of nodes or actors determined by a researcher (Granovetter, 1973). Once the relations or ties are established the “ties interconnect through shared end points to form paths that indirectly link nodes that are not directly tied” (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011: 1169); e.g., the degrees of separation discussed above in the Milgram experiment. Ties can be weak or strong, and the competence of a network is determined by those ties. Once a pattern is determined between ties—pattern recognition—a network “yields a particular structure, and nodes occupy positions within this structure (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011; 1169).” The small-worldness that drove Watts and Strogatz into a fit of pique is a network structure, a structure that can be identified within and across phenomena—animate, inanimate, human, non-human, and machine. For researchers interrogating the science of networks, special features within network models are analysed, especially when dealing with three or more nodes. Particular attention is paid to clusters and clusterability of nodes, balance between ties, centrality and degrees of centrality, topological connection, organizational structure, subgroupings, outcomes and

diffusion of agents or nodes within a network. Network can be intensive or extensive, connected or fragmented into components, and they are most certainly dynamic—that is, subject to intensifying change or break down (dissipation) over time and space.

Analysis of scientific networks (both physical and social) is carried out primarily through linear and matrix algebra, factor analysis, as well as graph theory (Borgatti 2005; Knoke and Yang 2007; Newman 2010; Wasserman and Faust 1994). For popular science writers and military personnel alike, what becomes possible in network analyses based on mathematical models is that “some nodes may have distant links, and some nodes may have an exceptional degree of connectivity... [and] it takes astonishingly few of these exceptions—just a few distant links, even in a tightly clustered network—to collapse the average separation to almost nothing and create a small world (Gleick, 2011: 424).” In network analysis, as Gleick points out, it becomes merely a matter of *tracing the path* between nodes within the small world—which, to be sure, is not an easy feat without a calculator. It is precisely this tracing of paths that has become the driver of military intelligence in contemporary counterinsurgencies. However, in its doctrinal orientation towards being “population-centric,” the central question has become the scope and scale of the intelligence endeavour.

6.2.1 *Threat Intelligence versus Mission Intelligence*

The U.S. military has begun to incorporate these techniques of analysis as a means of intervening into the “event-spaces” of war, where the rise of databases and mobile computer technologies have become central in producing and orienting military objectives (Croser, 2009; Gregory, 2010b). The U.S. military has deployed several different programs based on computerized network analysis into the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq. Derek Gregory has discussed some of these systems in Iraq, including the Army’s Command Post of the Future used by the 1st Cavalry Division in Baghdad, a “networked visualization and collaboration system, a sort of super GIS, that

allows commanders to see ‘anywhere in the battle space’ and their subordinates to see their own courses of action within the evolving operational situation (2010b: 269).” In 2011, a similar system called “Nexus 7” was deployed in Afghanistan (Shachtman, 2011). According to DARPA’s Budget Item Justification sheet (February, 2011), the program’s intent is to “develop techniques for simulation, visualization, inference, and prediction of social network dynamics (DARPA, 2011).” Since the invasion of Afghanistan, the U.S. has accumulated massive amounts of intelligence data on Afghans through traditional means (informants, soldier accounts, police and army reports), as well as through novel technologies refined over the past ten years of war (biometrics, cell phone data, remote sensing, pattern-of-life analysis, database management, etc). *New York Times* correspondent Thom Shanker has captured the pervasiveness of data collection in Afghanistan:

What makes [biometrics] different from traditional fingerprinting is that the government can scan through millions of digital files in a matter of seconds, even at remote checkpoints, using hand-held devices distributed widely across the security forces... A citizen in Afghanistan or Iraq would almost have to spend every minute in a home village and never seek government services to avoid ever crossing paths with a biometric system (Shanker, 2011)

The idea behind the \$30million Nexus 7 project is to extract such data streams across military and civilian intelligence agencies to “produce ‘population-centric, cultural intelligence’” (Shachtman, 2011). In DARPA-speak, this is called “Knowledge Bases to Bridge Cultural Divides.” From these massive databases, Nexus 7 enables analysts to use cluster and dynamic network analysis to get a sense of the daily rhythm and movement of the insurgency in and through the everyday activity of the Afghan population. For example, David Kilcullen’s Caerus Associates is deeply involved in developing “indirect metrics” for Nexus 7, such as tracking local market prices for commodities. Such prices are used as surrogates for “general confidence and security... In particular, exotic vegetables—those

grown outside a particular district that have to be transported further at greater risk in order to be sold in that market—can be a useful telltale marker [for insurgent activity] (Kilcullen, 2009b: 11).” For Kilcullen, the development of these kind of metrics is the best way to track “progress” in a counterinsurgency campaign.

What Nexus 7 is setting out to do is develop metrics by drawing on the kind of network connections discussed above across the “complex, conflicting, and incomplete data sets” of disparate intelligence agencies. Why data network analysis? The project description sums it up nicely: “For the military, social networks provide a promising model for terrorist cells, insurgent groups, and other stateless actors whose connectedness is established not on the basis of shared geography but rather through the correlation of their participation in coordinated activities such as planning meetings, training/mission rehearsal sessions, sharing of material/funds transfers, etc. The Nexus 7 program will develop and apply emerging methods for edge finding and cluster analysis to detect, characterize, and predict the dynamics of social networks (DARPA, 2011).”

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan do not mark the first time the U.S. military has tried to develop such predictive technologies and techniques to undermine a “networked enemy.” Immediate following World War II, postcolonial insurgencies and revolutions were increasingly characterized as functional organizations with “compartmentalized cell structures” that were “highly decentralized” and “operating autonomously.” During this time, military planners began to focus on modelling insurgencies, distilling their organizational integrity, and quantifying more generalized “human factors” (Dept. of Army, 1965). An entirely new set of imagery was derived from the biological and chemical sciences.



Figure 28: Soviet Espionage Apparatus Network (Source: Special Operations Research Office, 1963)

For example, during the Vietnam War, the United States built a civilian-military program called Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) which focused on economic development and security as a means to “pacify” hamlets in the South Vietnamese countryside. CORDS personnel used a computer-based Hamlet Evaluation Survey system as a way of ordering, categorizing, and classifying populations and groups in the countryside deemed amenable to “modernization”. One of the novel features of CORDS was its use of computer-generated statistics

based on the Hamlet Surveys to generate statistics and models to predict insurgent and civilian movement and activity in “real time”. The U.S. war in Vietnam marked the emergence of the “electronic battlefield” with a proliferation of sensors, sophisticated radar systems, and new computer databases (Gregory, 2011).

But the novelty of Nexus 7 lies in the project’s intention to address a perceived problem in the utility of military intelligence in Afghanistan, particularly a common confusion between “threat intelligence” and “military intelligence.” Whereas “threat intelligence” focuses on individual actors and networks who (potentially) pose a threat to U.S. or NATO forces (e.g., an IED network, or the movement of militant vehicles), “mission intelligence” looks more broadly at aggregate factors in an “operational environment” (Kilcullen, 2010b). This confusion has become a major source of consternation within the U.S. military. For example, in a damning indictment on the state of military intelligence in Afghanistan written by then Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence in Afghanistan, Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn argued that “our intelligence apparatus finds itself unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which we operate.”

Analysts painstakingly diagram insurgent networks and recommend individual who should be killed or captured. Aerial drones and other collection assets are tasked with scanning the countryside around the clock in hope of spotting insurgents burying bombs or setting up ambushes [threat intelligence]... But relying on [these tactics] exclusively baits intelligence shops into reacting to enemy tactics at the expense of finding ways to strike at the very heart of insurgency [military intelligence] (Flynn et al., 2010: 8).

There have been two fundamental methodologies for military imagery analysts performing the kind of threat intelligence Flynn criticizes and which Nexus 7 project managers seeks to move beyond. The

first methodology is a kind of war-game *forecasting*, whereby battlespaces are conceptualized as ecological arenas modeled on concepts derived from evolutionary biology. The basic idea behind forecasting is mobilize data to track the pace of insurgent violence in order to estimate the rate of *potential* attacks in one or various locations, allowing the military to orient forces towards those potential areas (Bohorquez, et al., 2009; Johnson, et al., 2011; Turnley, et al. 2012). The working assumption behind this type of intelligence analysis is that insurgent actors *adapt* to the operational environment—from counterinsurgency measures used against them, to harnessing the availability of (new) technologies (IEDs, cell-phones, etc.), to adjusting to the moods of local communities. According to this kind of analysis, insurgency environments mimic the Red Queen hypothesis in evolutionary biology (Johnson, et al. 2011, 81-84). The hypothesis goes like this: the Red Queen must continually adapt and evolve to an environment in order to survive and gain “reproductive advantage” in the face of a host of environmental hazards and oppositional organisms (Blue Kings) that are “counter-adapting” to the Red Queens every move. In this complex adaptive system model, insurgents are constantly filtering into “low pressure” areas and exploiting the lack of security as a means of not only organizational reproduction and survival, but also using attacks to undermine the legitimacy of the Blue Kings (the U.S. military). Thus, threat intelligence along these lines seeks to forecast this potentiality, in order to mitigate *in advance* any conceivable attacks (“adaptive management strategies”). While burgeoning, this intelligence approach has largely been a failure.

The second and much more successful methodology in threat intelligence has been *dynamic network analysis*. The most influential representative figure from this methodological approach has been the computer scientist Kathleen Carley from the Institute for Software Research International at the Carnegie Mellon University. Carley’s team has been integral for developing counterterrorism computer programs for the military, such as DyNet, to identify terrorist cells and structures, as well as creating simulation systems to predict insurgent and terrorist activities. The

primary objective of this form of counterterrorist network analysis is to assess levels of uncertainty underlying dynamic networked and cellular organizations. Like the forecasting form of threat intelligence above, DyNet, a military “reasoning support tool” seeks to “see how [networked organizations are] likely to evolve if left alone, how its performance could be affected by various information warfare and isolation strategies, and how robust those strategies [are] in the face of varying levels of information assurance (CASOS, undated website).” The premise behind the program is that terrorist and insurgent networks are constantly evolving and shifting shapes. Typical social network analysis only captures a network in a snapshot in time. However, Carley’s research programme seeks to capture networks as in their transformative states; e.g., how does a network respond and reconstitute itself – if at all – after a critical node has been removed from it?

The purpose of a program like DyNet is two-fold: First, it seeks identify the “vulnerable” nodes in a network, and destroy that node. For example, let’s assume there are eight agents involved in a terrorist organization, and a program like DyNet wanted to identify the most vulnerable node [agent] in that organization over a period of time. You would map out the network, identifying as many agents as you can, and then from that network identify its vulnerability based on the *most connected agent* (see Figure 6.4):

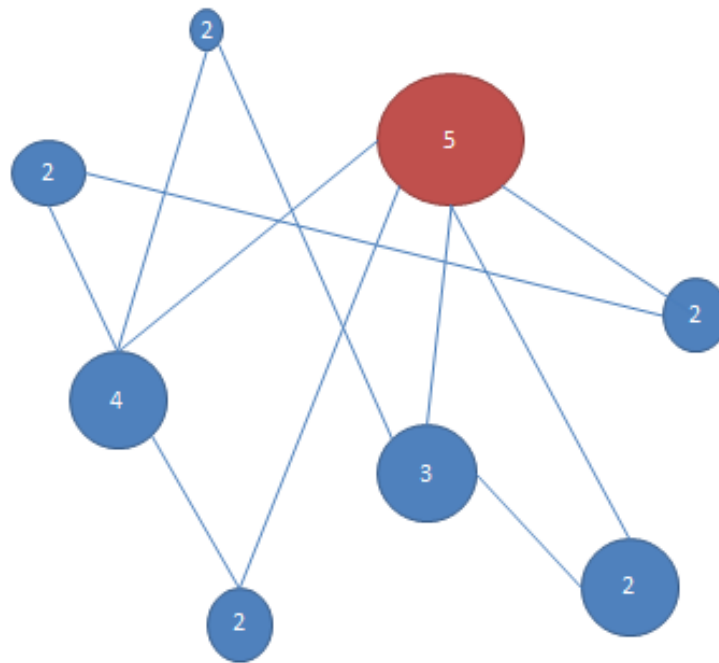


Figure 29: The Red Agent makes the network vulnerable due to the degree of its connectivity (Author Illustration)

Military analysts relay that information, and a military and/or counterterrorism unit targets that node; in the case of Figure 4, the targeted node would be “5” because of its degree of connectivity (5 links). Second, Carley and her team go a step further by seeking to determine how the network would change *after* that node has been removed: maybe Node 4 would strengthen as the network adapts, or perhaps the entire network would dissipate. This kind of threat intelligence is the most commonly used within the U.S. military, and is a strong driver on Pentagon-funded dynamic network analysis research at places such as Carnegie Mellon, and the Laboratory for Computational Cultural Dynamics at the University of Maryland in College Park (Weinberger, 2011). Research programs such as DyNet have been used extensively in Afghanistan and Iraq, with some of Carley’s students running computer-based

network analysis in the battlefield (Gjelten, 2010), as well as teaching network analysis to cadets at the Network Science Center at West Point and other military institutions.

6.2.2 Reality Mining and Human Signals

“I believe that the power of Big Data is that it is information about people’s behavior instead of information about their beliefs.”

Alex “Sandy” Pentland (2012)

Threat forecasting and dynamic network analysis have been highly effective in targeting and killing insurgents; indeed, some military analysts have argued *too effective* because the results tend to target highly connected mid-level insurgent fighters who are most likely to be at any negotiating table, which can unnecessarily prolong a conflict (MacGinty, 2010). But, as Flynn and Kilcullen have pointed out, threat intelligence tells military analysts very little about the actual populations and contexts in which the U.S. is operating, what the military refers to as the “human terrain.” It is well known that the U.S. military has made a bid to become more “culturally versed” in recent years, and that the Pentagon has taken controversial steps towards integrating social scientists into counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (Gregory, 2008b). Despite the limited use of social scientists in actual day-to-day operations, there has been considerable movement in corralling human terrain intelligence for three purposes: to gather “cultural intelligence” for commanders; to provide a supporting role for disrupting connections between local insurgencies and transnational terrorist networks (Kilcullen, 2009); and increasingly to develop statistical algorithms that predict insurgent activity with an increased reliance on geo-spatial intelligence. Given the loud public row over the use of anthropologists in the U.S.’s two wars (Der Derian, 2010), there has been a particular emphasis on geo-spatial intelligence, which marks a real move towards conducting human terrain intelligence “at a distance” within strategic centers of calculation in Washington, D.C. and Virginia (Matthews, 2011).

Nexus 7 also is a movement in this direction of “intelligence at a distance” (Barnes, 2006). The purpose of the program is not to target specific individuals, but rather to track the aggregate movement of the *entire* Afghan society in its activity, or as much as possible. For example, the analysts working on Nexus 7 use massive data sets such as soldier reports called SIGACTS (Significant Activities; what Wikileaks leaked in its huge “War Logs” batch) and GMTI information (Ground Moving Target Indicators) to track anything from the progress of development projects to the vehicular movements of insurgents, officials or everyday people over time (Shatchman, 2011).

The intellectual godfather behind this form of Big Data military research is Alex “Sandy” Pentland. Named by Forbes Magazine in 2011 as the #6 “most powerful data scientists” in the world (Perlroth, 2011), Pentland directs the MIT Media Lab and the MIT Human Dynamics Laboratory which produced the two teams who won the DAPRA and State Department contests discussed at the beginning. Pentland specializes in two fields: what he calls “human signals,” and “reality mining.” A computer scientist by training, Pentland is famous for his theory of “human signals” which focus on the affective dimensions of everyday life in order to maximize organizational and society wide efficiency (Pentland, 2008). Human signals (he also refers to them as “honest signals”) are all the bodily mannerisms, quirks and affectations that are alive in conversations and human-machine interactions, and which exceed what is thought to be formal language exchange. Pentland identifies four primary “honest signals” that makeup the woof and warf of everyday life: mimicry, activity, influence, and consistency (Pentland, 2010). Pentland strongly suggests that these signals are biologically determined, likely having “roots in the biology of our nervous system (Pentland, 2010: 205).” Pentland and his MIT team have developed a series of technologies designed to track these signals as they occur in everyday activities in order to tap into what he calls “collective intelligence.” For example, the MIT Media Lab developed electronic badges that a person or group of people can wear around their neck. Equipped with infrared sensors, Bluetooth location measurement hardware, and accelerometers, the badges have

been experimentally (and voluntarily) used in several meetings (such as conferences and workshops) and inside major corporations, such as Bank of America, to measure bodily activity and record the pitch and pace of voices. With the data, Pentland's team determined that social cohesion rather than individual isolation – that is, an office space of meeting tables rather than cubicles – was far more economically productive, and that “we are social animals and that our connection with our peers at a local level is vitally important (Pentland, 2010: 207).”

Pentland's primary aim is to utilize his “insight” into the apparent nature of humans and “scale up” into full-scale social organization and intervention. To do this, Pentland's two labs have developed a technique called “reality mining,” which is the theoretical infrastructure underlying Nexus 7 which employs his former students. Based on his research on “human signals,” Pentland (2012) argues that the “sort of person you are is largely determined by your social context... You can tell all sorts of things about a person, even though it's not explicitly in the data, because people are so enmeshed in the surrounding social fabric that it determines the sorts of things that they think are normal, and what behaviors they will learn from each other.” Within this social context, Pentland and his team draw connections from what they call people's “digital traces” or “data breadcrumbs” from “machine-sensed environmental data” (e.g., cell-phones, online purchase interactions, geospatial location, etc.) The idea is to map social relationships based on human-machine interaction and patterns in order to create what Pentland has many times referred to as a “God's-eye view” of human activity—in other words, the “reality” in reality mining (e.g., Greene, 2008):

Data mining is about finding patterns in digital stuff. I'm more interested specifically in finding patterns in humans... I'm taking data mining out into the real world... We've studied human behavior, and now we're learning how to shape it. (Pentland interview, in Greenberg, 2010).

In tracking the everyday data of Afghans (biometrics, census data, vehicular movement), Pentland's students who work for Nexus 7 (such as Galen Pickard and Chris White) seek to take these ideas and find the structural patterns underlying the Afghan population and insurgency, and then orienting military resources based on those data patterns. After his team won the DARPA red balloon contest, Pentland enrolled himself in with the U.S. military, positing a project he called "computation counterinsurgency" which called for using data mining to predict human behavior in counterinsurgency campaigns.⁶¹ In a 2011 presentation on "Computational COIN: Sensing Characterization, and Shaping Human Social Behavior," Pentland told his audience: "We have developed robust models of how social network dynamics shape human behavior. These models are constructed by use of data collected by my research group's unique 'reality mining' sensor platforms, which allow us to track the behavior of hundreds of people in great detail over long periods of time, and provide accurate predictions of human decision making performance across a wide range of network sizes.... [I] describe how they have to be used to effectively shape social behaviors (Pentland, 2011)."

This line of research has been avidly taken up in recent years by military scientists keen on fabricating "similarity measures for human networks," which is the basis for the not-so-fruit-loop ideas like the Air Force's chief scientist Dr. Mark Maybury's calls to develop a "social radar" to forecast and predict revolutions like Arab Spring using social networking data (see Figure 5) from sites like Twitter and Facebook (Murphy, 2012; Shachtman, 2012). For example, Pentland serves on the advisory board of Aptima, a "Human-Centered Engineering Firm." A leading scientist at the firm is the highly

⁶¹ In a research proposal titled "Similarity Measures for Human Networks" to the Navy submitted by Aptima Corporation, Jean MacMillan, Alex Pentland, and Kathleen Carley call for the creating of "large behavioral datasets" that can be calculate "measures of similarity" between entities in a data set. Under the section heading "Benefits," the three write: "The tool to be developed in Phase II will combine multi-dimensional measures of human network similarity into a single scalar measure. We see four major markets for the technology: (1) intelligence analysis for national security; (2) law enforcement; (3) business intelligence, marketing and consumer analysis; and (4) public health. Each of these markets has a need to analyze large quantities of behavioral data to find patterns, and this requires a method to measure the similarity between a pattern of interest and the myriad of possible patterns that exist in the data (MacMillan, Pentland, and Carley, 2009)."

influential Jean MacMillion, who has worked with Pentland on network science research for the Navy. MacMillion is renowned in military social science circles, and she was a lead author on the US Air Force commissioned book on *Behavioral Modeling and Simulation* (2008), where the authors worked with the military in “using models of the behavior of humans, as individuals and in groups of various kinds and sizes, to support the development of doctrine, strategies, and tactics for dealing with state and nonstate adversaries, for use in analysis of the current political and military situation, for planning future operations, for training and mission rehearsal, and even for the acquisition of new systems (Zacharias, MacMillan, and Van Hemel 2008: 1).”

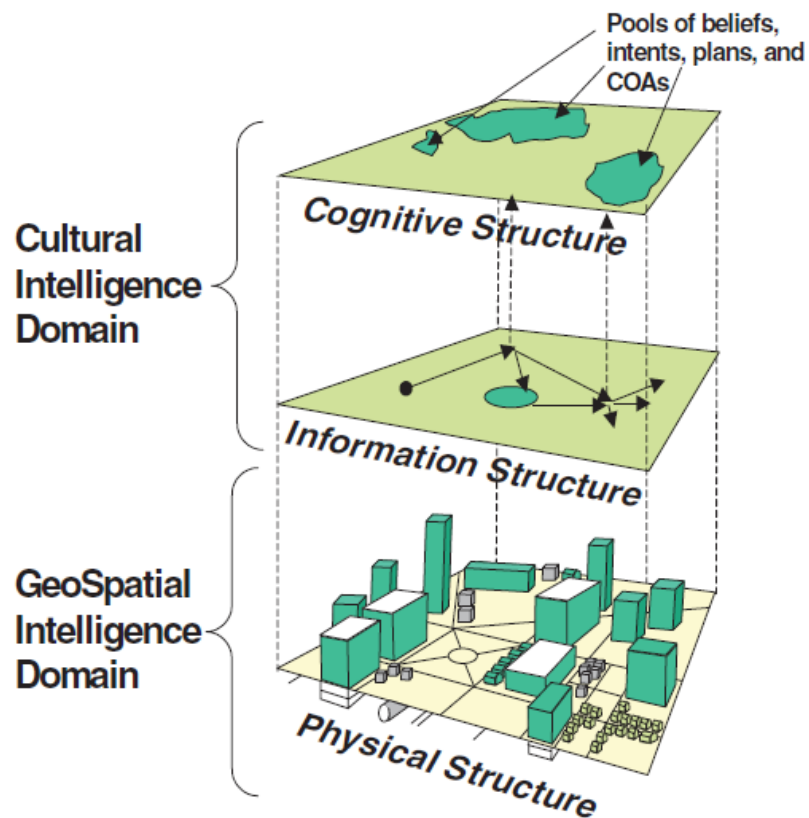


Figure 30: The “heterogenous network structures” and intelligence domains that make up an insurgent urban environment (Source: Zacharias et al., 2008: 33)

In many ways, this a moment when history has proverbially come “full circle” in that these research programmes serve as an updated version of many early Cold War machinations to use social science for national security purposes, including the research of early developers of social network analysis like Ithiel de Sola Pool and Manfred Kochen (Pool and Kochen, 1978 [1958]; cf. Pool, 1963)

6.3 Postscript on the Societies of Control 2.0

“There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons.”

Gilles Deleuze, 1992

Gilles Deleuze wrote his infamous “Postscript on the Societies of Control” (1992) on the eve of the internet. The short task Deleuze set out for himself was to “update” Foucault’s model of “disciplinary” power for the current (neoliberal) epoch of “control societies,” where social enclosures are replaced by modulating control mechanisms, factories by services, and social masses replaced by “dividuals” who circulate in and out of deforming, computerized machine-spaces. As Deleuze put it (1992: 5-6), “The disciplinary man was a discontinuous producer of energy, but the man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network,” coded figures who are trained to “surf” in transformable spaces. Many of the themes Deleuze underscores in control societies – structural modulation, the human production of its own “data doubles,” perpetual (re)trainings of the self in order to “keep up” – still resonate, but they are borne out of a “command-and-control” systems framework that is outdated, or does not quite capture the texture(s) of big data and the instrumental phenomenology at work in contemporary network-thinking.

What has changed is the extent of what could be called data-relations, where any and every aspect of individual or social activity is productive of compounding sets of data information. Every transaction, social network update, phone call, or simply moving while carrying a GIS-enabled phone is a data-stream, dutifully catalogued in opaque and privatized data-bunkers. Indeed, it should

give one pause the extent to which this is voluntarily produced, from constantly updating Twitter feeds on crises to actively helping contest teams find “suspects”—digi-snitching. But, what is also changing is the ontological understanding both what it means to be “human” and/or non-human, and how knowledge practices can access “the real” to answer those kinds of questions—most importantly, in its “visual” register. Jean-Francois Lyotard presaged many of these challenges when he wrote that “the nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation (Lyotard, 1979: 4).” In a particularly provocative prognosis, Pentland captures the technological-knowledge problem when he criticizes both Adam Smith and Marx in the following way: “Adam Smith and Karl Marx were wrong, or at least they only had half the answers. Why? Because they talked about markets and classes, but those are aggregates. They’re averages (Pentland, 2012).” Right or wrong, Pentland captures an increasingly dominant way of thinking, what I call a secularized cosmological vision where “we’re entering a new era of social physics, where it’s the details of all the particles—the you and me—that actually determine the outcome (Pentland, 2012).”

What I have tried to argue in this chapter is that this data-driven science is predicated on an ensemble of visual and technical registers and machines that make it possible. As Aronova et al. (2012) put it, “data is immanent to the practices and technologies that support it: not only are epistemologies of data embodied in tools and machines, but in a concrete sense data itself cannot exist apart from them (cf. Steigler, 1998).” The kind of being assumed, or better, put to work in these practices is one that is simultaneously connected and self-organizing. Moreover, those activities are framed in a representational regime that readily interpolates social relations as *networked*. As I have argued, this has had the effect of refining the physical and epistemological violence carried out by the U.S. military in Afghanistan.

7 Conclusion

“The good historian is like the giant of the fairy tale. He knows that wherever he catches the scent of human flesh, there his quarry lies.”

Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (1954)

In this dissertation, I have attempted to make three central arguments. First, I argued that counterinsurgencies as they are carried out are fundamentally about population control and killing insurgents, a claim that runs counter to the platitudes that such campaigns are about winning so-called “hearts and minds.” Population control is achieved through two primary drivers: organizing local police forces, and population displacement from the countryside into (policed) urban areas. In the case of the U.S. military campaign in southern and eastern Afghanistan, these two “techniques” have had devastating effects on the local population. In the mobilization of police forces, the U.S. military has continually cut deals with local warlords, strongmen, and “tribal elders” in order to achieve tenuous and unsustainable forms of “security” and order. Police and militia forces have not only been abusive of villagers⁶², but their role as a police force capable of establishing stability and order has proven to be incompetent, even by mainstream observers. This incompetence invariably leads to more violence. As discussed in Chapter 5, the multiple operations and village razings between 2006-2010 by U.S. and Canadian forces in the Arghandab River Valley have had the negative achievement in producing a refugee crisis of great magnitude by clearing a large area in Kandahar Province of its population in order to remove the Taliban insurgency of a key rural constituency, or what Samuel Huntington once called an insurgency’s “base of accommodation.” I have shown that counterinsurgency in practice is a remarkably effective slum-making machine, with makeshift shacks and refugee camps ballooning in the outskirts of Kandahar City and Kabul. These two techniques utilized by the U.S. military have been

⁶² It should be noted that the Taliban’s crackdown on warlord and police corruption and abuse has historically been the basis of their legitimacy among local populations, especially in southern Afghanistan (Giustozzi 2009).

carried out with a phenomenal degree of violence inflicted on the civilian populations caught between the NATO forces and the Taliban insurgency.

As I show in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5, the U.S. military operates with an especially narrow definition of what constitutes violence, a concept usually limited to metrics of civilian deaths that result from any given operation (which is not to say that the U.S. *keeps count*). I argue that there are two much more profound kinds of violence—aside from killing insurgents—involved in the U.S. counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan. In Chapter 3, I demonstrate how the identification of “tribal” representatives is itself a form of violence founded on a martial relation between US and Other, a violence that classifies (other) people and communities as particular “types,” as bounded in changeless traditions and in need of patriarchal structures to establish order, an inherently violent process. Moreover, in Chapter 5, I discuss the case of village razings in the Arghandab River Valley in Kandahar Province. The razings were justified by the U.S. military as ultimately benign operations because there were apparently no civilians killed in the operations. I argued that this highly particular understanding of what counts as violence overlooks a deeper violence: that “life-worlds” were demolished in order to build “forms-of-life” amenable to U.S. military aims, particularly the establishment of property lines, as well as lines of site conducive to surveillance.

I advanced a second central argument in Chapter 4 that counterinsurgency theorists utilize scalar concepts (such as “global”, “regional”, and “local”) in order to decipher particular sites for intervention, a process I call the “weaponization of scale.” The weaponization of scale cuts through the theoretical debate on the concept of scale within geography by arguing that “scale” is both an instrument of power *and* a materially violent outcome. I argued that this material outcome – which can also be an erasure, like the village razings in Kandahar – is facilitated by the conceptualization of insurgencies as “complex adaptive systems.” This has the unwelcome effect of restoring the kind of socio-biological categories associated with social Darwinism à la Herbert Spencer and Ludwig

Gumplowicz, and thus enables particular forms of violence. The derivative act of interpreting violence through categories of biology and complexity theory *depoliticizes* conflict, as it represents insurgent actions and U.S. reactions as problems of “adaptation,” “resilience” and “competition” (e.g., Kilcullen 2013), rather than a historically constituted conflict rooted in global economic disparities and colonial legacies.

The arming of tribal militias outlined in Chapter 3 is a case in point. As I discussed, there has been on the part of the U.S. military an appropriation and imposition of the old colonial logic of “tribal rule.” The institutionalization of tribal governing structures and militias has been a novel technique developed by the United States, insofar as tribal structures are intended to disempower and localize what is seen to be a networked insurgency that can emerge at any moment. Because insurgent networks are conceptualized by military analysts as depoliticized, mutable, and contingent complex adaptive systems, tribal militias come to be operationalized as a proper antidote to networked insurgencies because of their timeless and local character. This results in the institutionalization of patriarchal hierarchies and top-down violence as a “necessary” trade-off for reestablishing predictability and order. Importantly, I suggested that these tribal militias only work when they are predicated on an unbridgeable cultural difference between Pashtuns and the U.S. military.

With regard to so-called “tribal militias”, I draw on postcolonial theory to make a central argument, which is in variance to those who interpret counterinsurgency through the lens of “liberal war,” by claiming that counterinsurgency is actually a program of apparent or Orientalist cultural conservatism, in which local native tribes are enrolled and assisted in resisting an insurgency conceived as a threat to authentic local culture. Importantly, this is a *Western vision* of “local culture” at work in the imaginaries of U.S. Army’s practitioners of counterinsurgency and, importantly, *not* the “actual” local groupings (see also Chapter 1). This critique of counterinsurgency discourse places the doctrine squarely in the tradition of colonial indirect rule, with its vision of authentic local (but actually

invented) sheikhs, chiefs, “elders,” etc. By examining how counterinsurgency conceives and understands “locals” in theory, and how this understanding is reflected in the wider conceptions and legitimations of a broader Western project, I have drawn inspiration from postcolonial literatures which have sought to trace the connections between Western power/knowledges and Orientalism. I have been particularly drawn to those writers who argue that colonialism was primarily a cultural project (e.g., Said 1978; Cooper and Stoler; 1996; Dirks 1992; Driver 2001; Gregory 1994; Metcalf 1997; Nash 2002; Sharp 2009; among many others), and much more than mere the projection of political power or economic wealth—although colonialism certainly was that too. It is the “cultural character of colonial influences” (Dirks 1992: 11) that interests me, and the ways in which colonial “constructions fold distance into difference through a series of spatializations” (Gregory 2004: 17)—a case in point being the U.S.’s circulation of “tribal” categories to warrant local interventions. I do so by interrogating what Bernard Cohn once called the “investigative modalities” by which colonial and neocolonial powers “collect the facts.” As Cohn defines it, “[an] investigative modality includes the definition of a body of information that is needed, the procedures by which appropriate knowledge is gathered, its ordering and classification, and then how it is transformed into usable forms such as published reports, statistical returns, histories, gazeteers, legal codes, and encyclopedias (Cohn 1996: 5).” Marshaling “tribal knowledge” is certainly one investigative modality produced and utilized by the U.S. military. But I go one step further than Cohn by showing how these investigative modalities are the condition *and consequence* for the types of violence visited upon Afghanis caught in the crosshairs of counterinsurgency.

In my third argument, I go yet another step further than Cohn by asserting that “representations” and “forms of knowledge” in late-modern war are themselves derivative modes of intelligibility rooted in the technocultural practices through which counterinsurgency is conducted, or what Pickering (1995) once called the “mangle” of human-machine assemblages. I follow Ted Schatzki

(who draws upon Wittgenstein and Heidegger) to argue that practices are the “site where understanding is structured and intelligibility articulated (Schatzki 1996: 12; cf. Schatzki 2002).” Whether it is a “staged” Orient built within the residues of a penal colony in Indiana (Chapter 1), or the biometric checkpoints and Nexus 7 data-codings that seek to capture what occupied populations do in their everyday activity (Chapter 6), the performance of re-presentation is never far behind. This is often lost on those who draw on Foucault to examine merely the dialectic between forms of knowledge, representation, and power structures (whether centralized or dispersed). Instead, I draw upon Timothy Mitchell and his novel corrective of Foucault in *Colonizing Egypt* (1991) by asking what gives power relations the *appearance* of an external structure, a two-dimensional effect of an “artificial machine?,” a machine which has no “independent existence?” As Mitchell argues, external structure “is an effect produced by the organized distribution of men, the coordination of their movement, the partitioning of space, and the hierarchical ordering of units, all of which are particular practices (Mitchell, 1991: xxi).” The effect of these practices creates the appearance “of an apparatus apart from themselves, whose structure orders, contains, and controls them (Mitchell 1991: xii).” What justifies interrogating practices and the production of seemingly external structures as the conditional component of social life is the fact that “understanding/intelligibility [are] the basic ordering medium of social existence (Schatzki 1996: 14).” In Chapter 6, I argued that the late-modern manifestation of this external structuring effect is the appearance of social relations as “networks,” what I identify as a secular cosmological vision that has enabled an innovative set of power relations to emerge, such as “big data” mining techniques used to analyze data elements in order to calculate emergent properties within a given population—what I call *computational counterinsurgency*. Importantly, it is the practices themselves that disclose the world as having these qualities (such as “emergence,” “uncertainty,” “complexity,” etc.), and actors embedded within human-machine assemblages act upon and develop protocols around the appearances and representations that emerge from such disclosures. In order for

the world and its “event-spaces” to be understood as “networked”, the state in which human and machine assemblages operate and hang-together has to be the basis upon which re-presentation(s) are made. Hence the emphasis I place on the technical and conceptual armatures utilized by the U.S. military.

Throughout the dissertation, but especially in Chapter 6, I contend that the technologies and techniques deployed in Afghanistan between 2006-2012 are really quite novel compared to other U.S. counterinsurgencies. Although people, practices and protocols circulate between wars and spaces over time, the technical and conceptual armature utilized in Afghanistan is unique. While superficial similarities can be drawn, there are more discontinuities than continuities in the counterinsurgency campaigns in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and the differences are too many to overlook.

Consider the material practices of conducting war in Vietnam and Afghanistan, both of which are rural insurgencies. While military researchers in both Vietnam and Afghanistan sought to develop computer techniques to model and predict insurgent activity and movement in time and space, the *means and methods* by which this was done have been entirely different. For example, in the Hamlet Evaluation System in Vietnam, U.S. Army personnel were sent to various “protected” hamlets to conduct weekly or bi-weekly surveys on a given population’s morale and loyalty towards the government in Saigon. In order to do this, the survey takers met with both individual villagers and groups, filled out bubble-sheets on their behalf, evaluated each hamlet through a matrix of 18 indicators to “measure” security and development, and gave each hamlet a grade, A (best) through E (worst). Sometimes, the survey takers just filled in the sheets without meeting anyone at all, jeopardizing any semblance of accuracy in the surveys (Komer 1972). The bubble sheets were then taken back to a base and the data was inserted either by hand or by punch-card into a computer. The computers then produced reams and reams of data sheets, which compared numbers on a daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly basis depending on the analysts’ preference. The sheets were then taken by Army statistical analysts and

translated, as it were, into trends and summaries for commanders, who then developed plans for troop movement, or even intervention, into areas where discontent seemed to be “high,” a possible sign of Vietcong presence.

While there are filiations between the Hamlet Evaluation System and the Nexus 7 program discussed in Chapter 6, we can already see that the entire apparatus is different, more decentralized, and constituted by entirely dissimilar materials and data. First, there is no comprehensive survey mechanism at work in Afghanistan, nor the “face-to-face” time to produce this kind of data.⁶³ There is not even an accurate census of Afghanistan. Nexus 7 analysis is largely based on data produced, collated and mediated through computer systems based on SIGACTs and a multitude of other intelligence sources to distill “indirect metrics” on what people *do* in their actions, what are called “human signals,” and not on what they say to survey takers, an absolutely critical distinction. The apparatus is also positioned differently: whereas the HES surveys were a direct input system based on Command and Control structures – data comes in, its analyzed, action goes out – what is being done in Afghanistan (and somewhat in Iraq) is a dispersed retrieval of selected data produced by decentralized nodes, collated and presented on screens with a host of other information present, and then (ideally) used to send reports back to individual commanders in the field to tweek their maneuvers and positions. In other words, the HES was a tactically-produced mechanism that (re)oriented strategy, whereas Nexus 7 is a strategic collation of information to refine and adjust tactical positions themselves. Or, to put it even more plainly, one is a top-down mechanism (HES), and the other is bottom-up (Nexus 7).

The very small example of comparing the HES program with Nexus 7 is emblematic of the various kinds of complications a research runs into in a comparative analysis. Even though my original intent when I set out on this dissertation was to compare the counterinsurgencies in Vietnam,

⁶³ Human Terrain Teams were intended to work in a similar fashion, but the program has had very limited effects, whereas the Strategic Hamlet Program was central to U.S. strategy formation in Vietnam.

Iraq, and Afghanistan, at some point I had to make my own strategic choice of sorts and decided to focus for the moment on *one* war, not three. There were many reasons for doing this. At the time I started doing heavy research, another study on Vietnam or Iraq seemed inconsequential, and I chose to focus on the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan for the most part because it has remained an understudied war—and, no doubt, this dissertation is an incomplete picture. Iraq has captured the lion's share of critical attention on America's imperial wars over the last decade. And although more attention turned in that direction in 2009, two problems emerged when mainstream emphasis shifted to Afghanistan.

First, there was already a media infrastructure in place in Iraq from the first Gulf War through the 1990s sanctions regime. Iraq is several times the population size of Afghanistan, and Baghdad is (used to be?) a cosmopolitan city. The weakness of the Afghan state, coupled with thirty five years of war that has completely ravaged its cities, makes it impossible to maintain the same kind of media and scholarly infrastructure in Afghanistan as in Iraq, especially for Western media outlets (both mainstream and critical). This lack of infrastructure limited the amount of information and critical books on the war: the rigor of a Patrick Cockburn, Naomi Klein, and Nir Rosen was lacking. Instead, all we got was the shallow politics of Peter Bergen, Michael Hastings, and Ahmed Rashid.

Second, there was a real sense of fatigue among the critical Left when the focus of war shifted to Afghanistan. So much energy went into opposing the Iraq War, and then criticizing the U.S. violent occupation. Not only was there a sense of fatigue, but Afghanistan poses real problems for any critical researcher, in that the Taliban insurgency is a wholly unacceptable insurgent force. In another stark difference with Vietnam, there is no Ho Chi Mihn figure in Afghanistan, nor a left-leaning, let alone secular movement to support in Afghanistan. The research calculus is tricky because both the U.S. occupation *and* the insurgency must be condemned. Unfortunately, this “war fatigue” has had the perverse effect of giving Obama *carte blanche* along several fronts that would have been roundly condemned under the Bush Administration: the dramatic increase of drone strikes in Pakistan and

Afghanistan, the destabilization of Pakistan, the development of a “kill list” and “disposition matrix” for targeting and assassinating “terrorist operatives” (including American citizens) determined by the Executive Branch, the village razings in southern Afghanistan (see Chapter 5), the uptick in civilian deaths in Afghanistan, the war in Libya, and the list goes on. Apparently, attendant silence goes on as well. Nothing like a *Fiasco* or *The New Imperialism* has been written for the Obama Administration (*Dirty Wars* being an exception). But, with these two problems in mind – the lack of media infrastructure, and war fatigue resulting in a dearth of critical analysis – I hoped to fill a critical void on a subject that has been too handily dominated by military scholars and their fellow travelers (Guistozzi, Exum, and Seth Jones).

As I finish this work, it’s clear that “counterinsurgency” has become a toxic word within the Pentagon and White House. Unfortunately, the wrong lessons are being drawn. The turn against counterinsurgency over the past eighteen months is not due to the devastation it has left in its wake—the broken lives, destroyed homes, and empowered warlords in both Iraq and Afghanistan. No, counterinsurgency is treated as economic issue, as a strategy “financially untenable” in the current economic crisis. Occupations are expensive – the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost the United States well over \$1 trillion at this point (Stiglitz and Blimes, 2008). Unfortunately, this has not meant an end to the violence, nor a reappraisal of the cheerleaders of counterinsurgency. Instead, the U.S. military, in insatiable pursuit for “lessons learned” has attempted a “best of both worlds” approach, keeping cultural awareness as a “force multiplier,” but at a distance, through the use of geospatial intelligence and remote sensing technologies, not to mention the investments into big data. This vast accumulation of information, a veritable deluge of information (Drew, 2010), has made analysts an important commodity within the military. And this data accumulation is coupled with a turn to drones as the weapon of choice over the skies of Pakistan and Afghanistan in the unapologetic counterterrorism strategy of the Obama Administration. Transformations are occurring so quickly with

respect to these technologies that it's increasingly difficult to keep up, a symptom of the vertigo I discussed at the beginning. The limits of international war law are being tested, with human rights officials at the United Nations giving multiple reprimands to the United States (and Israel) over the illegality of its drone program.

Personally, I have never been so pessimistic with respect to the prospects of any real structural military or economic change that would lead to an end to arbitrary violence and/or the constitution of a radically democratic society. The stunning defeats of the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States, the workers movements throughout Europe, and the revolutions in the Middle East, with little to show for themselves, has not been reassuring. The pendulum seems to be comfortably swinging the other way, with counterinsurgency techniques and technologies being imported and readily used by domestic police in order to pacify restive populations.

I find myself increasingly in agreeing with the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek (2012) when he says that now may not be a time to act, but to think, since whatever the Left is doing obviously is not working. Of course, this does not mean sitting passively by and watching economic, military, and police violence unfold with one's hands voluntarily held behind one's back. But, there needs to be a radical rethinking of the concepts, strategies, and theories used by the Left over the past thirty years. As they presently stand, theories on the Left for "non-violence" or economic restructuring and redistribution remain empty and bankrupt. I am not sure of any answers. But, I remain open to being surprised.

"The hope that earthly horror will not possess the last word is, to be sure, a non-scientific wish." Max Horkheimer, in *The Dialectical Imagination* (1973: xxvi)

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