BUILDING BRIDGES OR BURNING HERETICS?

A response to González in this issue

Professor González is yet again on the war-path, accusing others of committing 'ethical transgressions' in what amounts to a proxy discussion of US foreign policy. Apparently Professor González' efforts to polarize the discipline do not leave much time for self-reflection: if he is so concerned with 'building bridges between peoples', as he has written elsewhere (see González 2007), then why is he taking a position of intellectual isolationism towards the military? One could argue that Professor González' attempts to drive a wedge between anthropologists and the US national security community – especially at a moment when anthropologists have a real opportunity for positive influence – represents a grave ethical breach of the highest order. What are the moral hazards of disengagement?

Nobody owns anthropology

Professor González has referred elsewhere to 'the misappropriation of our work' and advocated that anthropologists 'directly confront – and resist – the militarization of the social sciences' (ibid.). This theme of ownership and control is at the heart of recent AAA resolutions co-authored by Professor González. Although he claims that the recent AAA resolutions 'send an unambiguous message to the military and intelligence agencies', actually anthropologists sent an unambiguous message to themselves. The message is that the anthropology community should 'retain some control over the knowledge it produces', in the words of David Price (2006).

This is a troubling view for a number of reasons. First, the notion that there is a single anthropology ('our work') is problematic given the many intellectual trajectories in the discipline, which by no means form a unified theoretical or ethical whole. Second, the idea that knowledge can be 'misappropriated' suggests epistemological censorship. It is in the nature of knowledge to escape the bonds of its creator; to believe otherwise is to persist in a supreme naivety about the nature of knowledge production and distribution. Third, underlying the notion that knowledge can be 'misappropriated' is a belief that the national security community should not use anthropology for any purpose that Professor González personally deems unethical. The view that the military should remain ignorant of anthropology is a truly alarming perspective for professional educators. Is the use of anthropological knowledge by the national security community less ethical than the censorship and control of such knowledge by academic anthropologists who claim to believe in truth and freedom?

FM 3-24, counterinsurgency

Professor González complains that chapter Three is 'not innovative'. Although most military doctrine represents a slow accretion of institutional knowledge, this manual was highly innovative from the US military's perspective. In fact, this is the first time that anthropology has ever been included in over 200 years of US military doctrine (with the possible exception of the 1940 USMC *Small Wars Manual*). *FM 3-24* is considered 'Zen tinged' not just by the media, but also by many members of the military who felt that the manual, and chapter 3 in particular, was 'too innovative' and 'too politically correct'. Clearly, innovation is in the eye of the beholder.

Regarding *FM 3-24*, Professor González asks, 'is it anthropology at all?' The answer should be obvious: this is military doctrine, not an academic treatise. Doctrine does not have footnotes. Professor González complains that *FM 3-24* does not address 'whether military occupation is appropriate'. Field manuals are not meant to address issues of policy, but to guide the conduct of operations. Professor González seems disappointed that *FM 3-24* does not discuss 'empire' or 'imperialism', yet military doctrine is not meant to provoke philosophical foxhole debates. Professor González complains that the manual does not explore 'the legitimacy of insurgents' grievances'. On the contrary, an entire section of chapter 3 entitled 'Interests' describes how soldiers and marines can identify, assess and address grievances of the population, including political participation, physical security etc. Professor González seems annoyed that I fail to characterize 'culture as a product of historical processes'. While long-winded discussions on 'capitalism' and 'colonialism' may hold great interest for scholars, military personnel have other more pressing tasks to attend to. It appears that Professor González has given me a bad grade on my definition of culture, a definition that anthropologists have proved unable to agree upon for 150 years.

Engaging and educating

Professor González appears to believe that direct engagement of anthropologists with the military or the intelligence community is somehow unethical. On the contrary, anthropological knowledge applied to military problems has the power to save lives, both military and civilian, and it has done so in many 20th-century wars. Although Professor González seems to enjoy quoting selectively and out of context from my published work (for example, he incorrectly interprets my 2005 statement that al-Qaeda is grounded in both 'history and theology' as a dismissal of their modernity, a position I have never taken), he fails to address any of the substantive points that I raised: that socio-cultural knowledge reduces violence, creates stability, promotes better governance and improves military decision making.

A handful of anthropologists working with the military and intelligence communities have again made the discipline directly relevant to national security after a very long divorce. The door is now open for other anthropologists to enter the national security arena if they choose to do so. Of course, many anthropologists will never engage with the military because they view Iraq as a 'bad war'. Perhaps one ought to ask, why exactly is it a bad war? Some of the many reasons might include: problematic government policies, flawed intelligence, counterproductive strategies, etc. In each of these cases miscalculations resulted, in part, from a lack of understanding about other societies. Aren't anthropologists then obliged to educate the military and policy-makers to prevent mistakes in the future? Speaking truth to power should mean something more than sniping from the ivory tower – rather, it should mean constructive engagement with the national security community in a spirit of open-minded discourse. ●

Montgomery McFate
United States Institute of Peace
mmcfate@usip.org

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THE SAHARA AND THE 'WAR ON TERROR'

A response to Jeremy Keenan (AT 22[6])

Jeremy Keenan is right to argue[1] that the threat of military activity by radical Islamists in the Sahara – it is best to avoid the word 'terrorists' – has been exaggerated by US and Algerian security forces. However, his theory of a wider US/Algerian conspiracy is not convincing, as it is seriously lacking in evidence and takes insufficient account of the record of militant activity in the area over the last 15 years.

During that time, Algeria has experienced a vicious war. The Tuareg populations of Mali and Niger have undergone sustained upheaval, including an insurrection in the early 1990s. Influences from the Middle East and even Pakistan reverberate throughout the area, as was apparent during a research visit I made to northern Mali and Niger on behalf of the International Crisis Group in 2004, and as I have gleaned from subsequent interviews. Renewed militant attacks in Algeria claimed by an organization called Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb[2] suggest that more violence lies ahead.

Regarding the wider links of Algerian Islamist radicals, it is clear that the Groupe Islamiste Armé and its descendants the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) and Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb have been animated by Algerian veterans of Afghanistan.[3] Algerian radicals have connections to Islamist networks in Europe and elsewhere.[4]

While the Algerian struggle has taken place mostly in the country's densely populated north, it also has connections to the Sahara. According to Malian military intelligence, a Yemeni veteran of the Afghan war, one Imad abd-Iraqi, was killed in September 2002 on the Mali-Algeria border.[5] Local sources in northern Mali told a colleague and myself in mid-2004 that small groups of GSPC exist in the Malian Sahara. During the same trip, I also received evidence that Malian army officers