Non-Western Threats and the Social Sciences

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By Anna Simons

Anna Simons is a Professor of Defense Analysis at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), joining the faculty in 1998. She is on the Board of Editors of *Orbis* journal and is the author of *Networks of Dissolution: Somalia Undone* and *The Company They Keep: Life Inside the U.S. Army Special Forces*, as well as co-author of *The Sovereignty Solution: A Common Sense Approach to Global Security*. She holds a Ph.D. in social anthropology from Harvard University.

Abstract: As the Department of Defense strives to take the social sciences more seriously in the face of threats emanating from the non-West, it confronts several challenges. Among them, we Westerners cannot model non-Western minds. Nor can we devise a methodology that will accurately capture contingency. We may already be doing our "scientific" best with "pattern of life" targeting. Consequently, DoD should invest more heavily in individuals who already have an affinity for, and interest in, the non-West and who show promise as future commanders and talented analysts rather than spend large sums on trying to devise more comprehensive models, methodologies, and metrics.

Still stumped by Islamists more than a decade after 9/11, the Department of Defense continues to try to make better use of the social sciences. But the ways in which it does so pose several dangers.[1] For instance, thinking that "the social sciences can provide a rigorous framework" to explain "a broad spectrum of complex social threats facing the United States in the twenty-first

[1] For the purposes of this essay, non-Westerners are people(s) who emphasize the group or collective over the individual. The contrast I am drawing is between us and tribal societies—peoples for whom social relations are morally fraught and not just transactional (as they often are for Westerners). Chinese and many other Asians might well be included under this loose definition of non-Western, but lumping everyone non-Western together defies my main point: it is all the differences, and *not* similarities, among people that matter.

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century including radicalization, cyber radicalization, instability, and insurgency" or that such a framework can "guide research, analysis, and operations" reflects classic American optimism.[2] But, unfortunately, a "comprehensive analytical framework" is not possible.[3] Attempting to build such a framework ignores the entire history of anthropology—a discipline that has recently begun to disintegrate because professionals across an array of sub-fields cannot countenance one another's perspectives, let alone their methodological approaches. Worse, it distracts from investing in what is needed most: individuals who understand the non-West. There are two reasons for my assertion.

Conceptual Problems

First, it will always be possible to find social scientists who will sign up for the idea that a comprehensive analytical framework can be devised, and validated. They will support this idea for the same reason many highly qualified Ph.D.s often agree with one another and form distinct "'schools of thought." Most academics, like humans in general, enjoy the comfort of crowds. They also thrive on rivalries, which is what turns schools of thought into *competing* schools, which would be fine if the schools remained impartial. But, instead, they turn partisan; those most talented at articulating the "group's view" overstate both their *and* their opponents' positions in order to win over others. Or, as Hegel and Marx might have put it: thesis guarantees antithesis. Eventually, an upstart third school will propose a synthesis. But, the truth is that accuracy does not always lie somewhere in the middle. Consensuses can be wrong and split-the-difference aggregated compromises can mislead.

Meanwhile, social scientists' ability *to* split the difference (for instance, to go from primordialism to instrumentalism to constructivism) should expose the degree to which the social sciences are nothing like the more dependable of the hard sciences, which can accurately describe and *predict* irrefutable realities—otherwise, planes would not fly and machines would not run. Tellingly, too, physicists did not split their differences in order to split atoms. Instead, J. Robert Oppenheimer's scientists came up with *different ways* to achieve fission.

Bottom line: the conceit that *a* framework can be devised to cover the West, the non-West, and all the differences within and between, reflects little more than a particular Western point of view, not universal in any way. What such a notion already misses is the possibility that it is different ways of thinking that make non-Westerners non-Western.

Although the prevailing groupthink among anthropologists and others has long been that humans are humans the world over, and that we are more alike than unalike in our perceptions, logics, and emotions, ample evidence suggests this is not the case. However, because this evidence does not square with the way social scientists are *supposed* to think, the academy has developed a vested interest in

[2] Hriar Cabayan et al., "Operational Relevance of Behavioral & Social Science to DoD Missions," *SMA Report* (DoD), March 2013, p. 4

[3] LTG Michael Flynn, *SMA Report,* "Preface," p. 2.

rejecting the possibility that profound differences exist. By profound differences, I refer to differences in priorities, values, and drives.

To be clear, just because profound differences exist does not mean people cannot understand many things about one another across cultures. This would be akin to saying men and women cannot understand one another. They can—but they still differ significantly in perspectives, priorities, values, concerns, and expectations. Take, for instance, sex, the one act that encourages both parties to try to be in sync. Men and women can think they know what each other feel when it comes to literal (hetero)sexual relations, but they can never actually know. In some relationships this inability to *really* know turns out to be all to the good; in others it is disastrous.

Cross-cultural differences amount to similar kinds of differences between some (but not all) societies, regarding some (but certainly not all) things. Consider, for instance, how tribal peoples have purposely, consciously, and/or willfully prevented anthropologists from gaining access to (or understanding about) their most sacred religious practices and beliefs. American Indian history is replete with examples. Essentially, if I, as member of Tribe X, want you to understand something, I will do my best to explain and try to help you understand. However, particularly when it comes to totems, taboos, and rituals in general, forget it; these will remain impenetrable, and thus impossible for you to accurately interpret without assistance.

As humans, we are all amateur anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. As dedicated observers of other people, this makes us much more "natural" at the "-ologies" than we are at economics or political science. But consequently, it is also extremely difficult for us to change each other's minds about the nature of subject matter we have all been studying since birth: namely, our fellow human beings.

Ask anyone who has taught anthropology for any length of time. Formal education can only go so far in rooting out misconceptions and misperceptions. Some students come to class ready to have their assumptions challenged (and will buy into whatever are the latest trends). Others end up willing to re-think some things. However, a percentage of students simply refuse to shift their point of view at all. Meanwhile, anything taught is pre-digested—by those doing the teaching. This means that what students receive is, at best, second-hand, while if it happens to concern people or a part of the world students have never visited, it is all just theoretical.

None of this is ideal. In the same way that no one can be turned into a decent speaker of another language without interacting with fluent speakers of that language, getting people to understand non-Westerners requires spending time *with* non-Westerners. Some direct experience is vital. Or, stated candidly: you cannot get inside another way of thinking once or twice removed.

This is something the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps know in their bones. Otherwise, they would not need to put everyone through basic training —recruits could simply be shown several months' worth of PowerPoint®

presentations instead. It is also why those who urge that the Department of Defense broadens Service members' experiences with time spent studying abroad deserve support.[4]

Only two methods exist for transmitting an appreciation for how different the non-West is: first, via deep first-hand exposure, and second, by ensuring that members of the military learn more history—which is how experience is gained second-hand. Both provide context. Both also expand and shift people's base of knowledge, which is the only way to alter their perspectives. As for building expertise, that can only be done by *iteratively* encountering non-Westerners and studying the non-West.

In an ideal world, the Armed Services would carefully select and invest in those individuals best suited for this kind of exposure, individuals who show promise as future commanders and/or talented analysts. Undoubtedly, this kind of talent management would be expensive and difficult. Nevertheless, one might think that if—as is being suggested—operators in the future will need to be the "masters of the human domain," then the ability to excel (and not just cope) cross-culturally would already be considered as critical a trait to assess as is leadership. But it is not. Of course, even if it were acknowledged to be a critical capability, the military would then need to overcome another of its biases, which is to treat *traits* as *skills*. For its own institutional reasons—and in keeping with the conviction that leaders can be made (and are not just born)—the U.S. Military typically views traits as nothing more than skills that it can train. But certainly, in the case of cross-cultural affinity, this constitutes a major error.

Cross-cultural affinity represents the first major problem for the United States Military as it strives to take the social sciences more seriously. To begin with, not everyone has it. Nor is cross-cultural affinity transferable—either from person to person, or from location to location. For instance, everyone loves to cite T.E. Lawrence as *the* paragon of cross-cultural ability. But, while Lawrence may well have been able to out-Bedouin the Bedouin, it is clear that he would not have been as comfortable, or as successful, had he been assigned to operate in any location other than Arabia; even he admitted he would have done miserably with town-dwelling versus desert-dwelling Arabs—never mind with Japanese, Chinese or some other set of people.

In addition, Lawrence was a Bedouinist well before World War I and the Arab Revolt kicked off. Consequently, his example—like that of Joseph Stilwell, Douglas MacArthur, and numerous others—should further argue for carefully crafting a selection process, investing in a select number of individuals, and ensuring that they become familiar with the non-West *prior to* the onset of hostilities.[5] As for how much social science training such individuals would need, the answer is very little if selection were undertaken correctly.

Indeed, the military is on the verge of making operating in the human domain far more complicated than it needs to be. For instance, no one gleans more information faster in unfamiliar, chaotic settings than journalists. During the pre-

[4] Though then the time spent abroad needs to be in the non-West, not Western Europe.

[5] Arguably, if the right individuals were in the right places, hostilities might even be avoided.

Internet heyday of objective newspapering, journalists only needed to carry a notepad, a pen, and six questions into the field with them. The six questions were: who, what, where, when, why, and how? Reporters did not need a social science slide rule, a manual, or a set of algorithms.

So, why do those leading the military think they need such expensive, sophisticated tools today?

A cynical answer would be that the defense-intelligence-industrial complex is pushing them in this direction because it stands to profit. More reasonable answers could well include the military's need to disseminate standardized or standardizable tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) or its equally understandable need for inputs it can sequence. Then, too, we Americans clearly like to *engineer* solutions. There is also our affinity for technology, with techniques being the closest thing to technology that social scientists have to offer. Of course, it could also be that some people truly believe it is possible to devise a social science equivalent of a C-130 or an M-4—a reliable, modifiable system/platform that should prove useful in all sorts of environments for decades to come.

However, while it may be possible to field strip (as in disassemble) another culture into its constituent pieces and parts (which is something the best anthropologists proved able to do decades ago), figuring out how to get the enemy to undo himself is hardly the same. This requires individuals with a *fingerspitzengefuhl,* or instinct, for both the enemy *and* for us.[6] No model or framework can help individuals figure out how to develop this. Nor will a model help anyone gauge how well their subordinates are doing. For starters, any model, framework, or set of metrics would have to flex too much to accommodate the fact that every situation is unique in critically subtle ways. Indeed, the entire sweep of military history should serve as a cautionary reminder that it is the *differences* between them and us, then and now, and here and there that always matter.[7]

Unfortunately, the re-usability of certain techniques *can* prove alluringly misleading. Take the combined effects of signals intelligence (SIGINT), drones, and special operators, a combination that has been credited with undoing networks in multiple locales: Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia. As General Stanley McChrystal makes clear in *My Share of the Task*, and as Admiral William H. McRaven's push for a Global SOF Network implies, the organization both men headed—Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)—has developed and continues to refine a targeting methodology it believes it can and should apply globally.

Yet, just because TTPs can be *applied* successfully in a variety of settings does not mean that they add up to overall success. *Has* the application of this methodology achieved *permanent* game-changing effects on the enemy's *in*ability to adapt in any one of these locales? *Have* we dampened the enemy's ardor anywhere?

[6] Anna Simons, "Got Vision? What It Is and Why We Need It," Strategic Studies Institute, July 2010.

[7] Considerable debate exists on whether history belongs to the social sciences or to the humanities, with those who believe it belongs to the humanities pointing to its narrative (as in, this-is-a-unique-story) approach.

The answers to both these and related questions, no matter how discomfiting, should cause defense analysts to rethink what constitutes success, especially when metrics that can be made to suggest we are succeeding belie definitive results.[8]

Using an internally consistent logic to prove an operational concept is always problematic. Consider, for instance, the Son Tay raid to rescue POWs in Vietnam. It is still taught as a supremely successful operation even though no prisoners were rescued because none were there when the raid occurred. Or, if we return to Special Operations Forces' activities in Iraq and Afghanistan, clearly SOF has mastered its environment in the sense that numerous bad actors and entire networks have been (and still are being) removed from the battlefield. Targeting individuals and networks halfway around the world from the United States is an unquestionably impressive feat. Yet, to judge the effects of a methodology on having successfully applied it still tells us nothing about whether the results we tout are the results we *should have sought*. Or, to be truly impolitic, absent an overarching strategy, operational and tactical successes—as in, "we plan, we execute the plan, *ergo* we succeed"—will always be tautologically satisfying. Beneath the churn, however, lurks a bubble in the making.[9]

Meanwhile, were a social science approach to be used to rethink military *methods* overall—and not just ways in which uniformed personnel should tackle the human domain—the trifurcation into tactical, operational, and strategic levels of analysis would likely disappear. As the terms "strategic corporal" and "tactical general" suggest, clear distinctions between these three levels no longer exist if they ever did. From a human terrain perspective, a far more logical method for dividing and nesting responsibilities would instead re-focus on local, regional, and supra-regional (or global) spans of control. Imagine: if the military sliced reality more realistically, it could shift everyone from an overly linear "crawl, walk, run" approach to having to consider the effects of actions short- *through* long-term. Not only would this "liberate" commanders at all levels to adjust and readjust their "ways and means" *situationally*, but, a reallocation of labor would help mitigate micro-management and other current scourges, and also could assist with mission command—but all of these are issues beyond the scope of this article.

Here the question is to what extent twenty-first century "ways and means" should include models, methodologies, and metrics—the 3Ms.

Input Problems

Without question, today's modeling capabilities offer one distinct advantage over those of the recent past: they can capture change over time, and even point to the significance of timing and the convergence of events. They, thus, ensure that more dynamism is infused into the ways models depict reality. But what they still

[8] In some regards the War on Terror resembles the War on Drugs. DoD may consider Plan Colombia to be a success, but at what cost to Mexico?

[9] To return to the "comprehensive analytical framework" goal: just because numerous cross-checks will be built into constructing the framework—thereby making *devising* the framework seem valid—that will not mean the framework is what DoD should be investing in.

cannot do, any more than social scientists can, is take into account (or account for) the force of personalities, never mind interactions *among* personalities.

Human chemistry, thus, becomes the second major problem. Social scientists have always been better at mapping the *physics* of human relations than the dynamics among individuals. This, after all, is how we get social structure. Also, social scientists can help with "who is where *vis a vis* whom, and what," both in real time and over time. But what social scientists are not good at explaining is why people might do what they do *when* they do it—either in advance or retrospectively. Even with the benefit of hindsight, singular explanations are faulty for being singular, while the more compelling an explanation is, the less honest it is likely to be about what it does not reveal.[10]

For instance, say you are trying to make sense of the politics afoot in Somalia's latest version of a central government. At a minimum, you would need to understand:

1) intra- and inter-clan dynamics—historically, locally, sub-nationally (e.g., at the district level), and nationally.

In order to understand those dynamics, you would also need to understand:

2) local socio-ecologies countrywide—e.g., the distribution of resources; relations between sub-populations and their modes of livelihood and sources of income; the cumulative effects of differential development, etc.

3) regional politics—to include cross-border relations with Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti and, moving outward from there: Egypt, Eritrea, the Gulf states

4) supra-local level politics—ties with the former colonial powers Italy, France, and Britain; and the Cold War powers: the United States, USSR, East Germany, West Germany, etc.

You would have to examine how all of these intersected with each other, and then were transected (or bisected) by both timing (*when* events occurred) and personalities (of formal leaders, informal leaders, traditional leaders, spoilers, and so on).

Just ask Somalis. None of this can be adequately captured in a neat retrospective narrative that all actors (or witnesses) would consider accurate. So, how then do you choose what to include, exclude, turn into variables, or quantify when it comes to trying to model Somalis' decision-making, thought processes, or likely future actions? Clearly, that would depend on whose accounts you rely on—

[10] There is no more vivid proof of this than the first blush of books about the Iraq war by George Packer, Tom Ricks, and others. Who these journalists could and could not interview colors their narrative, which nonetheless is presented as if it is seamless eyewitness history.

while you cannot reasonably determine whose accounts to rely on without sufficient prior knowledge and an ability to read Somalis. In other words, you will not have a reliable sense of what to draw a bead on without already knowing what you are looking at – in which case, it is not you who needs a model, method, or set of metrics, but those to whom you want to convey what you know.

Certainly, many things *can* be known and documented: dates, names, sequences. However, influences and reasons for why people behave as they do are difficult to capture, and, even if captured, are impossible to accurately weight. Individuals cannot always articulate to themselves why they do what they do, and especially not when we, as humans, are all subject to self-deception.

Take decision trees. For a time (and maybe still) some anthropologists thought these could illuminate how people make decisions. But whenever I sat in on discussions about decision trees, I was reminded of a visit to the opthamologist, and his questions about which lens was better: 1 or 2? After going through a series of different 1s and 2s in an artificial, dimly lit environment, I invariably reached the point where I could no longer tell—which may have been the opthamologist's aim.

Decision trees are even worse because they require people to rationalize *ex post facto*, as you (the anthropologist) walk them through a set of "why did you choose A and not B?" questions that they never posed to themselves.

Arguably, whenever people have to decide something—as in weigh options —that is a sure sign they do not already know what to do. *If* they do not know what to do, then (by definition) they have entered the realm of the unknown, where getting from A to B requires plunging ahead or a leap of faith (no matter how small the step taken may actually feel). Essentially, choice boils down to a gut call. Ironically, this remains true no matter how much advice people solicit. And, even should they cede control to a methodology *that,* too, is a choice.

Thus, although data in the aggregate may point to the wisdom of crowds and Big Data may promise "big" social science, that still will not get us inside the heads of the Saddam Husseins, Hamid Karzais, or Bashar al-Assads of the world—individuals whose thinking has presumably been studied in depth by intelligence agencies. Meanwhile, what about the thinking of jihadists no one has heard of?

In other words, in addition to there being no way to devise a methodology that will ever accurately capture contingency, let alone inarticulable intuition, there is the problem of opaque non-Western worlds, which brings us to the third major problem.

Mapping social structure and trying to understand the principles that guide behavior in tribal societies can certainly yield a lot of information, especially since gathering an abundance of information is necessary to map the social structure in the first place. In fact, this is one reason earlier generations of anthropologists were drawn to kinship charts.

However, relying on genealogy creates a Goldilocks challenge. Too heavy a focus on kinship will result in inadvertent misdirection, since what no kinship chart can reveal is the content of people's relations, let alone the chemistry among them. What do I mean by chemistry?—who people like, who they dislike, and how much of either emotion they can afford to reveal. Emotion and chemistry matter not only because they are the stuff from which competition, tension, rivalry, enmity,

suspicion, mistrust, and distrust builds, but because some personalities inspire more of this than others.

Also, no matter how important genealogy might seem—and regardless of whether individuals trace descent up their father's line, mother's line, or both lines—cross-cutting ties likewise matter. These can include ties to in-laws, or to anyone outside of a blood relation: neighbors, school mates, work colleagues, members of a religious brotherhood, and so on. Overall, even when genealogy acts as the fixed axis that indelibly "fixes" identities, it hardly prevents individuals from falling into other inter-personal orbits; individuals can still develop relationships that will throw a monkey wrench into others' ability to always predict their behavior.

Shrewd leaders in all societies know how to make strategic use of just such social information, and ambitious social actors will play on (and with) both the fixed and the flexible elements embedded in what they know about others' associations. They also usually use such information with a degree of suppleness no outsiders can track. Not even all insiders can—otherwise, rivals would never be able to one-up one another.

Consequently, what this means is that *they* will always have more complete information about themselves than we will have, which means we will always be: 1) at a disadvantage, and 2) playing catch-up. Our advantages come from being able to gain more information about other factions, external actors, and those whom locals don't have access to—which should enable us to put together a more complete overarching picture. But the weeds will always belong to them. Thus, my argument in "Got Vision?": instead of us ineffectively trying to reproduce what they know, we should identify those who already have that knowledge (e.g., *their* Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen) and tap into them.

I say this, too, because the most difficult challenge the non-West poses for social scientists is that we Westerners cannot model non-Western minds. Nor is it clear that non-Westerners raised in the West or educated according to Western methods can do much better.[11]

This is not a topic anyone in academe wants to touch with a ten-foot pole. As alluded to at the outset, most anthropologists continue to insist that there is a psychic unity of mankind: our cultural differences are really pretty fungible. Never mind that many people—and, indeed, many *peoples*—are willing to die on behalf of cultural differences, or that no one has been able to say definitively which portions of human behavior are hard- rather than soft-wired. But just consider: the very idea that we think in terms of hard- and soft-wiring is itself Western-centric.

In addition to the fact that "wiring" is eminently Western, computers and networks are, as well. Indeed, no such things as non-Western computers or non-Western software exist. There are non-Western-*manufactured* computers, just as there is code written by non-Westerners. But, conceptually, there is no non-Western

[11] Think of Edward Said who, in his autobiography, and only in passing, admits that he did not understand the draw of tribes or blood ties for Middle Easterners.

personal computer any more than there is any other class of artificially-powered machinery invented outside the West.[12]

Does this matter? I do not know, but suspect it must since it suggests a gap that, even if only initially accidental and geographic, appears to have become cumulative over time.[13] Still more germane to the 3Ms: there is no such thing as non-Western social network analysis. This does matter. Here is how.

Take the Italian mob—not exactly a non-Western organization. In their heyday, members of the Mafia probably did not think of themselves in social network analysis terms. If asked to depict themselves graphically, their image probably would not have looked anything like the FBI's line and block charts, while the descriptive they likely would have used for themselves would have been family—not network. Granted, in the interim, images popularized by Hollywood have become so internalized that members of today's Mafia may see themselves exactly as the authorities do. But this is surely not the case for tribal peoples.

People in tribal societies do not think of themselves in terms of networks and no one draws kinship charts.[14] They do not need to. At the same time, the most politically astute (and connected) individuals carry what we would consider to be Rolodexes® full of information around with them in their heads. Do we know how they would depict this information graphically if we asked them to? No. Do we know whether they could depict it graphically at all? No, again.

Many potential analogies spring to mind for how non-Westerners make use of their connections. One I used several decades ago for Somalis was tending traplines. Yet, our most enduring images for how people relate to each other remain tree-based.[15] The classic genealogical approach begins with a trunk, representing people's root-stock. Sub-groups branch off from it, and further sub-divide. More recently, trees have been tipped on their sides and now resemble dog pedigree charts (as seen in Ancestry.com television commercials, for example). Tellingly, the anthropological version still remains vertical: the founder of a group sits at the top of the chart—all his progeny, their progeny, and the splits among them flow from him.

Yet, regardless of which set of images we prefer, none describes intra-tribal social relations from a tribal perspective, while even if members did think of themselves as individuals in trees, they would be looking at the tree—and one another—from a twig's or branch's point of view, and not as we do, in the round.

[12] An abacus may compute, but not without a human manipulating the beads.

[13] It says quite a bit about the political correctness of the "–ologies" that no one discusses such matters these days, since the cause clearly has nothing to do with social science's old shibboleth of race. People from all races and genetic backgrounds are as Western today as any WASP—*and* are over-represented in the IT realm.

[14] Of course, police probably do—but no one else in an adversarial relationship with one another does.

[15] Trees are all wrong for lots of reasons: they are static structures whose branches may wave in the wind, but otherwise never change position. Yet, as the German anthropologist Gunther Schlee painstakingly demonstrated decades ago, entire lineages will shift identities (or, to stick with the tree metaphor, will successfully remove themselves from one tree and graft themselves onto another).

As for what kind of chart we might design that would mark an improvement on these, I have joked in classes about Google Social Structure, something that would enable analysts to zoom in and out from micro to macro and back again, much as is done with Google Earth®. The problem with anything like Google Social Structure, however, is that no matter how analytically convenient zooming in and out might be, it would still offer only a distorted view of people's lived reality, which in turn would distort our view of how others navigate their reality. Among the reasons: no one zooms in and out of his/her own life from micro to macro with everything remaining "to scale."

Or, to put the problem in classically anthropological terms, the real issue with any graphic analysis is that it schematizes our version of others' reality *from* an outside-in (or etic), not inside-out (or emic) perspective. Social network analyses might *look like* they tell us who values whom, given the frequency (or infrequency and secrecy) of contacts, as represented by the size of nodes, the density of links, or what have you. But the only thing networks really map is a set of transaction-based connections—the visible/audible/physical residue of people's interactions. Among people(s) who have mutual dependencies and moral interdependencies, however, associations are never just transactional. All relations are laden with meaning, to include neglected relations, since even neglect means something.

In many if not most non-Western societies, the heaviest moral commitments are typically unspoken. How then can we, as outsiders, accurately assess what is really prompting people to act? Are people doing each other favors out of moral compulsion, convenience, co-incidence, or some combination? And, how can we tell? And then, what happens when one set of commitments or loyalties is cross-cut by other allegiances? Maybe commitments are life-long but only occasionally activated. Or, maybe individuals temporarily choose to be "unavailable" to others. As the standard catch-line "I against my brother, my brothers and I against our cousins, our cousins and us against the world" implies, contexts always shift. When they do, so can alliances and enmities.

In tribal settings everything can depend. Thus, even if we learned everything there is to know about others' personal histories *and* their prior interactions, we still would never know enough. At best, this level of detail might reveal who *might* throw in with or line up against whom, and what *could* motivate them. But since people often decide what to do depending on who else is aligned, how, predicting is not just a contingent affair; contingence itself is situational.

Situationalism is *the* lubricant in tribal settings—and is determined by *who* of note acts *when*, while who is *of* note depends on the situation.[16] This brings us back to the significance of personalities and timing, *the* two critical variables, factors and vectors (it is hard to know what to call them), which will remain beyond the 3Ms' reach—akin to "acts of God."

[16] Situationalism is not only important in tribal settings. Its valences just happen to be different under acephalous vs. hierarchical conditions.

Ironically, yet another reason DoD should set aside the idea of a comprehensive analytical anything when it comes to human behavior is that organizations like JSOC may have already perfected the only viable method for targeting individuals and degrading networks, by relying on "patterns of life." What recent successful targeting demonstrates is that if you track someone in real time with enough dedicated assets, there is only so far he can travel or only so long he can disappear before, eventually, you will pick him up again. Of course, the downside to using "patterns of life" to nail people is that once potential targets know you are studying them, they adapt and evolve. Of course, too, Afghanistan, Iraq, the FATA, and other locations where U.S. Forces have tracked bad actors via their "patterns of life" have been places where the United States has possessed drone (and air and signal) dominance. Perhaps this will continue to hold for all tribal zones. But it certainly will not hold for all adversaries in the future.

Arguably then—and without even realizing it—DoD may have already reached the limits of what it can do well in the realm of social science: namely, real-time "pattern of life" analysis, as opposed to trying to get inside non-Westerners' heads by etically mapping their societies.

Alternatives to the 3Ms

As for how else DoD might take advantage of the social sciences, the short answer is that the Department of Defense should stop trying to create a comprehensive analytical framework. Instead, it should take the hefty sums of money going to the Pentagon's social science industrial complex and invest them in individuals who have an affinity for non-Westerners *and* their situationalism. Frontload selection. Rely on flesh-and-blood ethnographic sensors. Then, let those who have developed an appreciation for the non-West decide which of the 3Ms to use as *their* communication aids.

It could well be that the best way to make the non-West make sense to members of the U.S. Military writ large *is* to do so graphically, through charts, models, and graphs. But those with experience in, and an affinity for, the non-West need to be the judges of which of these tools to use.[17] Technocrats should no more be the arbiters of this than policymakers who have spent no time on their own in the non-West should be allowed to craft strategy aimed at the non-West.[18]

[17] Should such individuals have to have an affinity for non-Westerners? Yes. Do such individuals have to approve of everything non-Westerners do? Absolutely not. But they do have to be cultural (not moral) relativists, able to make sense of the non-West for those for whom this does not come easily or naturally.

[18] Herbert Goldhamer wrote "Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle had already observed that youths do extremely well in mathematics but that young men of practical wisdom are difficult to find. Mathematics deals with universals and abstractions that do not require the prolonged context of a large variety of particulars that only a lengthy experience can give." (*The Adviser* [Elsevier, 1978], p. 69). Worth noting is that the policy realm is full of such young men (and women) these days, steeped in quantitative methods and theories learned in grad school, *not* from time spent navigating the non-West.

Otherwise, the 3M seduction will only further indenture soldiers and marines to databases, rather than the reverse.

Databases represent a very useful tool for storing and accessing information. But populating them has now become a virtual end in itself. Worse, by turning humans into bits and bytes, databases make information about people seem eminently manipulable, and people themselves increasingly reducible to a set (or sequence) of transactional relations. This may play to Western sensibilities. But no humans are this reducible. And non-Westerners certainly are not.

Combat veterans, military historians, and others already know the extent to which intangible qualities like morale, esprit, and the "will to win" matter in conflict. Presumably, military leaders similarly recognize that no academic discipline or set of disciplines can explain group chemistry or why some social bonds are stronger than others.[19] At the same time, what should be apparent to all participants and observers after a decade-plus of fixating on networks in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and elsewhere is that taking out nodes and snipping links is hardly sufficient. What is needed, instead, is a solvent—though to dissolve people's social bonds requires something altogether different than anything tried thus far.

Perhaps the inadequacy of social "science" tools will become clearer as the fascination with networks gives way to new constructs, which it is bound to do; progress promises nothing less. In the meantime, it would not surprise me if the interim silver bullet does not turn out to be something like connectomes. Sebastian Seung describes connectomes this way: "a connectome is the totality of connections between the neurons in a nervous system."[20] As he goes on to note, "Unlike your genome, which is fixed from the moment of conception, your connectome changes throughout life... there is good evidence that all four R's—reweighting, reconnection, rewiring, and regeneration—are affected by your experiences."[21] Essentially, connectomes make each of us our own dialectic.

Even better, like a tangle of cooked spaghetti, connectomes touch one another in multiple ways. They thus do a much better job of graphically depicting our relations than the spirograph or splatter screen version of networked interactions do.

Yet, no matter how attractive the connectome metaphor might seem to be, it too presents a problem since not even those who study connectomes can explain how spurts of neurotransmitters turn themselves into thoughts, ideas, or images. Consequently, while connectomes are surely suggestive, they fall short; something vital still remains missing—which, in turn, suggests that metaphors might amount to a fourth M.

[19] Experientially, everyone in uniform should recognize this, too. What accounts for some units possessing more esprit de corps or better morale than others? Why do some gel better than others? There is no formula. If only there were, all units would always excel—across the board.

[20] Sebastian Seung, *Connectome* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), p. xiii.

[21] Seung, *Connectome*, p. xv.

Metaphors certainly *seem* useful, especially since, like analogies, they provide a vivid alternative to anything too quantitative. However, metaphors (like analogies) fail to throw differences into high relief. Or to paraphrase the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, while metaphors, analogies, models, methodologies, and metrics may all be good to think, we are too prone to let them channel—not challenge—*how* we think.[22]

As for suitable alternatives, my proposal would be: open-ended questions that force members of the military to have to think in terms of positioning rather than just transactions. Ironically, this way of thinking should already be familiar to those in uniform given the degree to which they routinely alter their behavior and even speech depending on the rank of those they interact with.

For example, by posing questions like: Who is where, *vis a vis* whom, and what? Who colludes with whom? How stable are their arrangements? And who has an interest in keeping them stable (or not)? it should be possible to probe relevant dynamics, especially since such questions can be scaled up or down, projected backward or forward, and used to compare between Time Now with Times Before. Of course, arguably the greatest advantage to a handful of questions is that they are easy to remember, eminently portable, and situationally ecumenical—much like the "who, what, when, where, why, and how?" questions that journalists historically used to unparalleled effect.

Finally, although it may seem silly to point out that particulars should not be generalized, combine this with the fact that all politics is never only local—since all sorts of outside influences have an impact, yet all conflict *is* locally fought (in the sense that it is waged *somewhere,* and usually in multiple somewheres)—and it should be obvious why DoD should forget ginning up some overly expensive and ultimately useless "comprehensive analytical framework." Instead, the Services would do far better to put money where only lip service is paid right now. Manage talent. Determine who in uniform today has what it takes to discern how non-Western non-Westerners actually are (or are not), and invest deeply in those individuals.

[22] Often models, charts, and graphs highlight differences rather than similarities. Either way, any graphic approach will do one or the other, but cannot focus viewers simultaneously on both.