



The Use of Local and Oral Histories in Counterinsurgency & Phase Zero Operations

Brian R. Price, Ph.D.

Hawai'i Pacific University

Diplomatic & Military Studies Program

Previously: Senior Social Scientist, Human Terrain System

Contents

1. Human Terrain: A Brief Recent History
2. Human Terrain & Social Science: Challenges
3. Local History as a Framework
4. Oral History as a Depth Tool
5. Combining Local & Oral Histories with other Assessment Devices (PMESII, ASCOPE, etc.)
6. Conclusions

COIN & Human Terrain

- “The guerrilla moves through the population as the fish through the sea.”
Mao Tse Tung
- “The key terrain is the human terrain.”
Gen. Petraeus
- “Future Operations are likely to be conducted in close proximity to, or within population centers. This will create a confused operational environment that is densely populated, possibly with dissatisfied or disadvantaged people, some of whom may be armed and organized.”
UK JDN 3-14, 213

Human Terrain System Mission



“The U.S. Army Human Terrain System functions as the primary and enduring social science-based human domain research, analysis, and training capability, focused on enabling leaders to remain adaptive when shaping current and future complex strategic and operational environments which support Unified Action Partners world-wide.”



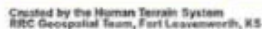
Photo: <http://pulitzercenter.org/slideshows/handing-out-candy-and-kicking-down-doors>

UNCLASSIFIED

Human Terrain & Social Science



- **Founded 2005/7:** U.S. Army program
- **Human Terrain Teams (HTTs):** 5-9 cross functional group – Social Scientist (1-2), Research manager (1-2), Human Terrain Analysts (field collectors), and Team Lead support U.S. & Coalition brigades & RCTs + CONUS Research Reachback Center
- Most HTS Social Scientists anthropologists, but also included sociologists, economists, JD's, psychologists
- Social Network & Link Analysis, Geo-spacial analysis, qualitative reporting (depth interviews; participant observation); quantitative studies (polls, etc.)



Team Info Retrieved From Sharepoint; Subject To Change At Any Time; RC Regions from NATO; Team Locations Not Exact

Social Science Challenges

- How to determine which of the many variables are playing the largest roles in the local context?
 - Ethnicity, sectarianism, civil disputes, blood feuds, business tensions, gender, etc.
- Semi-or non-permissive research environment, access to population, random sampling, lack of control variables, avoiding coercion, safety of respondents
- Historical methodologies strive to represent the understanding from the perspective of key actors

Two “New” Methodologies

- **LOCAL HISTORY:** Places social variables into context by seeking to understand the experience of the local people. Builds trust, conveys interest in who people are (their identities), their beliefs and hopes
- **ORAL HISTORY:** A useful tool for building an enduring record, particularly in oral cultures, and simultaneously deepening personal bonds with important leaders and learning more about their core motivations.

Case Study #1 – Conflict in Kapisa

- TF LaFayette (NATO/FR)
- U.S. PRT Kapisa
- Human Terrain Team AF-14



UNCLASSIFIED

Using Local Histories



- LOCAL PROBLEM
 - What are the root causes of instability within the Province?
 - Semi- and Non-Permissive operating environment.
- SOLUTION
 - Ask the local people to put it into context for you.
 - Since understanding is founded in experience, asking about their history sheds considerable light on the current circumstances.

Photo Credit & Note: PRT Kapisa missions 2011-12. Photos Brian R. Price

Using Local Histories

- Interviews focus on the experience of the village during the last 20-30 years
- Avoids “leading” responses to questions
 - Lets the interviewee say what was / is important
 - Indirect questioning is less confrontational; interviewees are generally more open even as the history approaches recent events
- Initiates a discussion about socio-cultural factors framed in a way understandable to the local population, through their own experience
 - Interviews generate ‘themes’ which can map to lines of operation, PMESII, ASCOPE, DSF, etc.
- Creates trust and deepens the sense of connection
- Reduces the need for exhaustive questioning

Knowledge Gained

- Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) and the Jamiat-i-Islam factions had been in conflict since the Soviet era
- Blood feuds between the factions were common; some extend back long before 1979
- Result was a social network map of the ALPHIG – supporting villages in the province

Oral histories to create depth



Photo credit: Brian R. Price

- Gains rapid insight into the character of local leaders AND can simultaneously build trust
- Oral histories of local ANA officers and ALP commanders yielded valuable connections and forthright communication about longstanding local friction
- Enduring connections lasted beyond the deployment & created a permanent record of life in Afghanistan during and following the Soviet era

Case #2: "Andar Awakening"

- SITUATION: In Pashtun dominant Ghazni province, villagers in a local cluster threw off Taliban rule and captured a number of their operatives
- TASK: Why did this happen? Can it be replicated?



Research in Ghazni (local history focus)



Photo Credit & Note: Pashtun man in Ghazni; NOT the man who made the quote, but one we encountered the same day. Photo Brian R. Price

“When the Russians were here, the whole village fought them. There were several groups of mujahidin. The mujahidin then disbanded, but these are the men and families we trust now—we marry each other’s women, do business with each other—but we don’t trust the other mujahidin groups as much as our own...now, some of them, like [omitted]...are part of the HIG....”

Knowledge Gained

Old Mujahidin Soviet-era alliances in the Anbar village cluster maintained enough social cohesion to oppose Taliban aggression (when provoked), although they were not pro-GIROA, and similar networks existed throughout the area, with the potential to resist

Source note:

This was reported in the press several months after our internal report was released

UNCLASSIFIED

Weaving it all together

1. **Preparation:** Read about the national/regional/local history; prep interpreters
2. Gather (record, where possible) local & oral histories
3. Transcribe interviews (protect sources as appropriate), create a historical record and deposit in an appropriate archive
4. Distill commentary for themes and, if available, map to related social science research
5. Recommend potential actionable issues that relate to lines of operation (**or propose retooling lines of operation**)
6. Fit themes to the preferred analytical tool (PMESII, ASCOPE, DSF, Cultural Risk Plan, etc.)
7. **OR if appropriate** develop confirmatory research tools (focus groups, polls, etc.) to increase reliability
1. Maintain and deepen local contacts to build trust

Reprise: Culture AND History

- COIN & modern ops increasingly involve local populations
- Understanding the local environment is key to operational success
- Local people experience life as history; history resonates & creates identity; culture is the lens through which history is interpreted
- The operational need is to understand BOTH history and culture
- Understanding local culture is deepened and may be achieved rapidly by exploring local and oral histories

Questions?

Papers:

- "The Use of Local & Oral Histories in Counterinsurgency & Phase Zero Operations."
- "The Resonance of History: The Importance of Soviet-Era Mujahidin Networks in Eastern Afghanistan."
- "History on the Battlefield: Oral History Methodology in Counterinsurgency"
- "Taking to Just a Few: Using Key Informants, Oral Histories, and Layered Approaches in Conflict Ethnography."



Brian R. Price, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Hawai'i Pacific University
Diplomatic & Military Studies Program
bprice@hpu.edu
<http://www.linkedin.com/in/drbrianrprice/>

A Final thought: *Trust requires shared risk*