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*At Cross Currents, But Decidedly Not At Odds: Military-Industry and the Social Sciences*

Dr Rohan Gunaratna and Secretary Jay Cohen spoke together in one of the last presentations of the Asia-Pacific Security Summit 2008. This was entitled “Tomorrow is Inbound Now: Predictions and Trends.” Dr Gunaratna and Secretary Cohen were offered a broad canvass and both took full advantage of the opportunity to make their views known. We are fortunate to have public resources of such experience and passion, traits that were very much on display.

Dr Gunaratna spoke about what the United States can do to combat threats that he sees as emanating from the “global south.” By this term he means less developed countries. His emphasis was on capacity-building. He related a moving anecdote about police in Karachi in Pakistan desperate for a constable training manual. Dr Gunaratna’s point was that efforts towards this sort of “soft power”, the spread of knowledge and increased facility for communications, will pay greater dividends than a focus simply on “hard power” alternatives. He saw the United States as masterful at “killing terrorists” but less so at “countering ideology.” But this is not enough, per Dr Gunaratna: “If you focus on protection you cannot protect yourself.” He concluded by stating, “I’ve been frank... America is the only country where I can speak so openly.”

Secretary Cohen spoke of a more Manichean dialectic. He expressed the view that the forces of enlightenment battle the forces of oppression every five hundred years. “Terrorists don’t build, only destroy.... I want them to know we have the technology to win.” He presented fantastic developments in technology focused on this end. Of particular interest to me, a former resident of New Orleans, was an inflatable device that can be dropped by helicopter on to a body of water and floated towards a break in a levee. Once released it begins to fill with water, creating a solid object which flows towards the break and seals greater than ninety percent of it. The possibilities for this, and other technologies presented, are invaluable to a broadly defined sense of homeland security.

There was a great deal of common ground in what Dr Gunaratna and Secretary Cohen discussed. There was, in fact, far more agreement than disagreement. But while they spoke of similar things they were talking about significantly different approaches and what seems to be the next challenge (appropriate for a panel about predictions and trends) is how to integrate better the two approaches. At the risk of gross simplification, I will term Dr Gunaratna’s approach the social science approach, and Secretary Cohen’s approach the military-industrial approach. How can the social sciences and military-industry work better for improved homeland security?

As an example of a parallel conversation it is instructive to consider what is occurring with the Army’s Human Terrain program (intended to bring a social science perspective to the Army) and the debate that has stirred up. George Packer wrote a very thoughtful piece in the December 18, 2006 New Yorker entitled “Knowing The Enemy.” He writes about an anthropologist and Pentagon consultant named Montgomery McFate who received her doctorate at Yale and wrote her dissertation on the several years she spent living among supporters of the

Irish Republican Army and then among British counterinsurgents. McFate went on to pioneer the Human Terrain program. Packer writes, "If the battle field in the global counterinsurgency is intimately local, then the American government needs what McFate calls a 'granular' knowledge of the social terrains on which it is competing." Packer quotes David Kilcullen as calling counterinsurgency 'armed social science.' He goes on to write, "[A] marine told McFate that his unit...used the wrong approach to communication... 'We should have been visiting their coffee shops.'" An excellent, further discussion can be heard on National Public Radio (October 10, 2007: <http://wamu.org/programs/dr/07/10/10.php>)

But it is most decidedly not all sweetness and light. There is a reluctance to integrate the social scientists into actual operations, and there is reluctance from the academy to endorse social scientists who work with the Army. From the Packer piece, "Academic anthropologists hate me for working with the D.O.D.' McFate said." In "Phoenix Reborn? The Rise of the Human Terrain System", Anthropology Today, Volume 23, Number 6, December 2007, Roberto Gonzalez quotes a British colonial administrator, CK Meek, in Nigeria saying that the government felt anthropology should be "the handmaiden to administration." Gonzalez's argument against this is that the scientific rigor of methods is lost when an objective is fixed. Gonzales points to a related case, the story of George Condominas, a French scholar who wrote an authoritative study of Central Highland ethnicities in Vietnam entitled "We Have Eaten the Forest." This was used by the Americans in Vietnam, unbeknownst to Condominas, and he commented negatively on it in 1973 at the American Anthropological Institution.

My point is that there exists a formidable capacity for the use of technology within the superstructure of homeland security, but there exists a less than perfect integration of the social sciences within that superstructure. The reasons for this stem from both military-industry and

the practitioners of the social sciences. Looking forward, however, the task is to reconcile better the two currents. How is this to be done? The first step, of course, is to understand the situation. I believe that Dr Gunaratna and Secretary Cohen were successful in doing that in their presentation. The next step is to consider that models available. During WWII anthropologists like Ruth Benedict were both employed and heeded by the government. The time has come again for such cooperation. I believe that, ultimately, the panelists have shown the way towards a bright future, illuminated by a productive past.