



## Collaboration with the military casts suspicion on anthropologists everywhere as potential spies and military operatives.

*Continued From Preceding Page*

George Mason University, recently wrote to *The New York Times*, "Invariably, one of the first questions I was asked was, 'Are you here to spy on us?'" Headlines about anthropologists working in war zones will only compound the problem, Lancaster said.

Given the gravity of these ethical issues, 10 colleagues and I have called on anthropologists to sign a pledge "not to undertake research or other activities in support of counterinsurgency work" and other combat operations in the "war on terror." Far from calling for a retreat to the ivory tower, members of this coalition, the Network of Concerned Anthropologists, are actively involved in and advocate work proposing new directions in foreign and military policy to end such wars and to protect the lives of U.S. troops and peoples around the world. One member (a former U.S. Army soldier) is investigating the dangers of using biotechnology and pharmaceuticals to enhance fighting ability. Another has studied nuclear-weapons policy for decades. My work focuses on how the creation of U.S. military bases can harm native peoples.

While some anthropologists may indeed

be bringing much-needed cultural sensitivity to soldiers and, in some cases, reducing incidents of violence, collaboration in lethal counterinsurgency campaigns is ultimately not only unethical but also strategically wrongheaded: It represents an effort to forestall bringing troops home—on the assumption that if only we could understand the culture of the people in Iraq and Afghanistan, we could fight smarter and be victorious. Such thinking is extending the time that soldiers and civilians are at risk and represents the continuation—not the reversal—of the tragic policies that have left the United States mired in these deadly and deeply unpopular wars. This at a time when a growing consensus here and abroad understands that there can be no military solution, that only diplomatic, political, and economic efforts will end the wars.

And that is precisely where anthropologists and other social scientists could be most helpful. Not on the battlefield, not assisting in combat operations, but in offering their skills in understanding other peoples and the social, political, economic, and historical contexts in which those peoples live in an effort to aid the search for diplomatic solutions.

There may be some hope, however, in the military's approaching anthropology for guidance in the morass that is the "war on terror." One can see it as an encouraging sign for the future that more soldiers and policy makers want to think anthropologically, to see and understand the world from the perspective of others. If only military and government officials had come to anthropologists and other social scientists for insight about Iraqi culture, society, and history before the invasion of Iraq, perhaps we could have avoided this tragic war.

Anthropologists and others should not now throw their skills and support behind failed strategies searching for a military solution that will only guarantee continued warfare and keep troops and civilians in harm's way; they should throw their skills and support behind work to find the political, diplomatic, and economic solutions that are the only way to bring peace to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the world.

*David Vine is an assistant professor of anthropology at American University. Princeton University Press will publish his book, Paradise Stolen: Expulsion and the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia, next fall.*

## Research to Reduce Bloodshed *By Marcus B. Griffin*

**I** STEP CAREFULLY along the broken sidewalk, struggling to keep pace with the soldiers around me. The streets of the neighborhood of Old Baghdad are completely dark and largely deserted. We are on our way to visit with an influential local sheik. At last, we come upon a large house surrounded by razor wire and concrete rubble. We are silently escorted in by an elderly man with a flashlight. The sheik is waiting for us. We are here to learn about his tribe's history and how he operates as a community leader.

When I arrived in Baghdad in August, I became the first Human Terrain System anthropologist to serve in Iraq. HTS is an innovative new program that embeds social scientists with combat brigades in Afghanistan and Iraq, where they serve as cultural advisers. I work closely with my brigade's staff officers to coordinate research efforts that give soldiers an awareness of what is happening around them. The responsibilities that go with that are significant; with every mortar round that explodes nearby, I am reminded that lives, not grades or publication records, are at stake.

My team deals with a variety of projects. Using semi-structured interviews of Iraqi contractors and local governmental officials, we identify key figures in northwest Baghdad who can help rebuild essential services like electricity, trash removal, and the provision of clean water. We also conduct research into how poverty and bonds of social obligation interact in Iraqi society. That information may help staff officers in my brigade, as well as other commanders, to better understand why certain people are willing to assist insurgent forces. Reducing aid and comfort to those intent on destabilizing Iraq will decrease violence and limit the number of

civilian casualties (and loss of life generally). Reducing bloodshed is a primary motive for my participation in HTS.

HTS also acts as a cultural broker to reduce miscommunication and help Iraqis and Americans work more effectively as partners. Most of our data is collected

### Rapport and informed consent go hand in hand in our research.

from interviews and oral-history narratives. I do not speak Arabic, so I am forced to rely on interpreters. But I try to build rapport by demonstrating to my Iraqi interlocutors that I am sincerely trying to learn how to read and write Arabic.

Many of the local Iraqis have taken an amused interest in helping teach me and my colleagues. While at first they were understandably fearful that we were in the business of gathering intelligence (in the sinister sense), we have been able to establish, over time and with great effort, a friendly, trusting relationship with the locals. We ask questions about Iraqi culture and what life is like in the neighborhoods. While that is intelligence of a sort, it is not the kind that gets people hurt.

Rapport and informed consent go hand in hand in our research. We explain what we are trying to learn and ask for permission to record the conversation, either electronically or in a notebook. We do not use a written consent form because interviewees are uncomfortable signing their name to any document, for fear that it may be used against them someday. My workaround is to provide them an opportunity to disengage from the interview. At the conclusion, I am careful to ask the

people I'm interviewing again if they are comfortable with my having a record of what they have said, and I offer to delete the recording or tear out the relevant pages of my notebook and hand them over to be destroyed. No one as yet has ever requested those actions.

Whether you think the United States should have entered Iraq by force (which I don't) and toppled Saddam Hussein, the inescapable fact is that we are here. Now academics have a choice: We can apply our specialized skills in the field to ameliorate the horrors of war, stem the loss of both American and Iraqi lives, and improve living conditions for Iraqis, or we can complain from the comfort and safety of the faculty lounge.

*Marcus B. Griffin is an assistant professor of anthropology and sociology at Christopher Newport University. He is serving with the Second Brigade of the First Infantry Division in Baghdad.*

## The Contribution of Scholars *By Steven M. Miska*

**I** AM JUST FINISHING UP my second tour in Iraq, and I will come back again next year. One aspect of this conflict I have come to appreciate is how greatly the situation varies depending on your location. Different neighborhoods, tribes, and regions are populated by very different Iraqis who have very different customs. I struggle to make sense of it all, not so I can target the enemy better but so I can assist people in resolving their own problems. Anthropologists and other social scientists have a vital role in providing us a more sophisti-

cated understanding of the social forces at work.

Consider my recent deployment in the influential Baghdad district of Kadhimiyah, a Shia stronghold. For the last two months, our team of embedded anthropologists has focused on sensitizing our soldiers to the poverty level of the local population, the problems involved in equitably distributing scarce fuel, and understanding tribal mores. For example, one of our anthropologists traced the lineage of a local sheik whose authority is being challenged by a cousin. If violence

does break out between these two tribal factions, our forces will not misconstrue the fighting as insurgent activity.

What observers at home sometimes forget is that the American presence in Iraq is not simply a military operation, but a complex blend of counterinsurgency and stabilizing activities. The military concentrates much of its resources and organizational energy on providing Iraqis with essential services and building economic and political structures like neighborhood advisory councils that deliver hope. If we cannot protect the popu-



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# American Anthropological Association's Executive Board Statement on the Human Terrain System Project

October 31, 2007

### Preamble

Since early October, there has been extensive news media coverage of the U.S. military's Human Terrain System (hereafter, HTS) project and of that project's use of anthropologists. Later this fall, the American Anthropological Association's Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with U.S. National Security and Intelligence Communities will issue its final report. In advance of that report, the Executive Board affirms that it is important that judgments about relationships between anthropology, on the one hand, and military and state intelligence operations, on the other, be grounded in a careful and thorough investigation of their particulars.

The Commission's work did not include systematic study of the HTS project. The Executive Board of the Association has, however, concluded that the HTS project raises sufficiently troubling and urgent ethical issues to warrant a statement from the Executive Board at this time. Our statement is based on information in the public record, as well as on information and comments provided to the Executive Board by the Ad Hoc Commission and its members.

### The AAA Executive Board's Assessment of the HTS Project

The U.S. military's HTS project places anthropologists, as contractors with the U.S. military, in settings of war, for the purpose of collecting cultural and social data for use by the U.S. military. The ethical concerns raised by these activities include the following:

1. As military contractors working in settings of war, HTS anthropologists work in situations where it will not always be possible for them to distinguish themselves from military personnel and identify themselves as anthropologists. This places a significant constraint on their ability to fulfill their ethical responsibility as anthropologists to disclose who they are and what they are doing.
2. HTS anthropologists are charged with responsibility for negotiating relations among a number of groups, including both local populations and the U.S. military units that employ them and in which they are embedded. Consequently, HTS anthropologists may have responsibilities to their U.S. military units in war zones that conflict with their obligations to the persons they study or consult, specifically the obligation, stipulated in the AAA Code of Ethics, to do no harm to those they study (section III, A, 1).
3. HTS anthropologists work in a war zone under conditions that make it difficult for those they communicate with to give "informed consent" without coercion, or for this consent to be taken at face value or freely refused. As a result, "voluntary informed consent" (as stipulated by the AAA Code of Ethics, section III, A, 4) is compromised.
4. As members of HTS teams, anthropologists provide information and counsel to U.S. military field commanders. This poses a risk that information provided by HTS anthropologists could be used to make decisions about identifying and selecting specific populations as targets of U.S. military operations either in the short or long term. Any such use of fieldwork-derived information would violate the stipulations in the AAA Code of Ethics that those studied not be harmed (section III A, 1).

### **CONTACT:**

Alan Goodman  
AAA President  
413-559-5372  
agoodman@hampshire.edu

Monica Heller  
AAA Executive Board and  
Ad Hoc Commission  
416-978-1987  
mheller@oise.utoronto.ca

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2200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 600  
Arlington, VA 22201-3357  
Tel 703-528-1902  
Fax 703-528-3546  
www.aaanet.org

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In addition to these four points about the activities of anthropologists working in the HTS project itself, the Executive Board has this additional concern:

5. Because HTS identifies anthropology and anthropologists with U.S. military operations, this identification—given the existing range of globally dispersed understandings of U.S. militarism—may create serious difficulties for, including grave risks to the personal safety of, many non-HTS anthropologists and the people they study.

#### Conclusion

In light of these points, the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association concludes (i) that the HTS program creates conditions which are likely to place anthropologists in positions in which their work will be in violation of the AAA Code of Ethics and (ii) that its use of anthropologists poses a danger to both other anthropologists and persons other anthropologists study. Thus the Executive Board expresses its disapproval of the HTS program.

In the context of a war that is widely recognized as a denial of human rights and based on faulty intelligence and undemocratic principles, the Executive Board sees the HTS project as a problematic application of anthropological expertise, most specifically on ethical grounds. We have grave concerns about the involvement of anthropological knowledge and skill in the HTS project. The Executive Board views the HTS project as an unacceptable application of anthropological expertise.

The Executive Board affirms that anthropology can and in fact is obliged to help improve U.S. government policies through the widest possible circulation of anthropological understanding in the public sphere, so as to contribute to a transparent and informed development and implementation of U.S. policy by robustly democratic processes of fact-finding, debate, dialogue, and deliberation. It is in this way, the Executive Board affirms, that anthropology can legitimately and effectively help guide U.S. policy to serve the humane causes of global peace and social justice.

*Founded in 1902, the American Anthropological Association is the world's largest professional organization of anthropologists and others interested in anthropology, with an average annual membership of more than 10,000. The Arlington, Va.-based association represents all specialties within anthropology — cultural anthropology, biological (or physical) anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and applied anthropology.*

*Research & Books*

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From the issue dated November 30, 2007

## Anthropologists in a War Zone: Scholars Debate Their Role

By DAVID GLENN

Lawrence, Kan.

In 2002, Britt Damon was an Army reservist assigned to guard detainees at the Guantánamo Bay Naval Station. At the time, he had eight years of experience as a military police officer, and he was slowly piling up credits toward a bachelor's degree in criminology.

Guantánamo changed Mr. Damon's plans. While most of his fellow guards treated the detainees in a way that he describes as "professional but cold," Mr. Damon, a pensive, slightly built man, often fell into conversation with them. "One of the Afghans would sit down and recite the poetry he had written," he recalls. "We both knew that I couldn't understand its verbal meaning, but you could understand the emotion and the context."

Mr. Damon wanted to comprehend the cultural forces that had helped lead him and his prisoner to this remote place in the Caribbean. Before he left Cuba, he decided to switch his major to anthropology.

Four years later, Mr. Damon was working as a bar bouncer and taking courses at the University of Kansas when he saw an online notice: The military wanted reservists with social-science backgrounds to join a new program known as the Human Terrain System. The program would give brigade commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan detailed information about local customs, kinship structures, and social conflicts. In the military's jargon, the idea is to assist with "cultural preparation of the battlefield." As Mr. Damon sees it, that means providing military leaders with information to help them make better decisions, and, especially, to help them avoid needless violence.

Early this year, Mr. Damon landed in southeast Afghanistan as a member of one of the first experimental Human Terrain Teams. He also landed in the middle of a debate that has roiled his adopted field of anthropology.

Critics of the Human Terrain System say that armed anthropologists in military uniforms cannot possibly be getting voluntary informed consent — a principle at the core of the discipline's code of practice — from their research subjects. They also worry that the program will directly or indirectly help the military select particular neighborhoods or people for attack.

David H. Price, an associate professor of anthropology at Saint Martin's University who is one of the program's most visible critics, says he fears that the new program might someday help the Iraqi or Afghan government conduct immoral scorched-earth counterinsurgency campaigns. (In 1970 several American anthropologists were accused of assisting the government of Thailand with such campaigns.)

Some critics go further, arguing that the U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan is illegitimate and that the Human Terrain Teams are helping prepare the countries for neocolonial rule, in an echo of the imperial-flavored anthropology of the early 20th century.

At this week's annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, in Washington, a special committee is expected to release a set of ethical guidelines for scholars who work with military and intelligence agencies. The association's executive board has already released a statement formally disapproving of anthropologists' participation in the Human Terrain System, and the association has — at least temporarily — stopped accepting recruitment advertisements for the program.

But despite the intense scrutiny, many elements of the human-terrain effort remain little-understood. How do brigade leaders actually make use of the teams' analyses? How will the data be used over the long term? And what exactly is the social-science component of the program? If the Human Terrain Teams are establishing rapport with local populations and learning about social conflicts, doesn't that simply replicate the traditional work of the army's civil-affairs and intelligence teams?

At a workshop this month at Kansas' Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, three members of Mr. Damon's team joined three social scientists to discuss the human-terrain program's future. Their meeting suggested that the program is still rapidly evolving, and it may be years before the public has a full picture of how the military is attempting to put social-science knowledge to use.

### **Anthropology on the QT**

"Our goal was to look at the culture of the military and at the culture of the Afghans, at how they see themselves," says Mr. Damon, who now works at Fort Leavenworth, 35 miles from the Kansas campus, as a civilian contractor recruiting and training members of the Human Terrain Teams. His employer is BAE Systems, an aerospace company that holds a major contract to support the Human Terrain System. He is also still taking courses at Kansas and expects to complete his bachelor's degree in May.

Mr. Damon and his colleagues have a lot of work ahead of them: By July the Army plans to deploy 22 nine-person teams in Iraq and another four teams in Afghanistan. Only six teams are on the ground today. Each team will have a leader with extensive military experience, two social scientists with at least master's degrees (one anthropologist and one regional specialist), and six lower-level data analysts (some of whom are Iraqi or Afghan citizens hired in part for their language skills).

Of those nine people, the idea is to have a roughly equal split between military personnel and civilian contractors. Almost all of the social scientists recruited so far have been civilians.

Some of the program's social scientists have chosen to keep a low profile. Most notably, the lead anthropologist on Mr. Damon's team has been identified publicly only as "Tracy" — and she did not attend the Kansas workshop.

Others, however, have publicly promoted their work. Marcus B. Griffin, an anthropologist at Christopher Newport University who is serving in Iraq, maintains a blog with near-daily updates on his activities. He has also written an essay for this week's issue of *The Chronicle Review*.

Liam D. Murphy, an associate professor of anthropology at California State University at Sacramento, has not served on a Human Terrain Team, but he has traveled to Fort Leavenworth three times to train program participants in ethnographic techniques. He says he can understand young scholars' reluctance to publicize their participation because he believes the anthropology association's disapproval will stigmatize people coming up for tenure.

Mr. Murphy says many of the ethical concerns about the program are real and serious, but he believes it is a mistake for scholars to hold the program at arm's length. "As I've learned more about what the Human Terrain System is intended to do, I've become persuaded that it's worth exploring," he says. He adds that he is prepared to act "as a whistle-blower" if he ever detects serious problems.

### **Dissidents in the Ranks**

When his team first arrived in Afghanistan, Mr. Damon says, they spent several weeks on a base near Khost, working alongside local civilian employees who drive trucks, wash laundry, and perform manual labor. "I would just get up in the morning and embed with one of these workers," he says. "I would grab a scythe and go down and cut wheat with them, or work in the apple orchard, or sit in the back of their truck, and just talk with them. This is how we built these relationships."

Among other things, Mr. Damon recalls, he and his colleagues discovered seething resentment about the security measures that the workers faced when they entered and left the base each day. The workers would sometimes receive gifts of chocolate from Americans during the day, only to see them confiscated when they left the base.

"If we don't start looking at how we treat people at the center of these concentric circles of relationships," Mr. Damon says, "how are we going to expect people to trust us as we move farther away from our bases?"

In a variety of ways, Mr. Damon and his teammates clearly view themselves as dissidents within the culture of the military. During the Kansas conference, Maj. Robert Fulton Holbert, an Army reservist who served with Mr. Damon in Afghanistan, said it took three months for their Human Terrain Team to gain the trust of the brigade where they served. The human-terrain concept, Major Holbert said, "is something that the Army should have embraced 15 years ago." It is still much too common, he said, for the Army to move into an area "like a blunderbuss" with no concern for local sensitivities.

Felix Moos, a 78-year-old professor of anthropology at Kansas who has trained several human-terrain participants, passionately supports the program. He has roughly a dozen different ways of saying "A better-educated military will kill fewer people, not more." In conversation, however, Mr. Moos lapses every five minutes or so into severe criticism of the military. He believes the U.S. poppy-eradication program in Afghanistan is idiotic; he says it is insane that the Army hasn't invested more resources in building officers' language skills; he deplores the fact that the human-terrain program is run through private contractors.

Some observers say the human-terrain program is not as distinct from mainstream military culture as its proponents like to suggest. In an essay in the November 26 issue of *The Weekly Standard*, the journalist Ann Marlowe argued that the news media have given the human-terrain program undue credit for what is actually an Armywide shift toward better counterinsurgency tactics. Throughout Afghanistan, she wrote, Army units are interacting more effectively with the local population, and they haven't needed fancy anthropological knowledge in order to do so.

A converse point was made earlier this year by one of the program's left-wing critics. Roberto J. González, an associate professor of anthropology at San Jose State University, acknowledged in an essay in *Anthropology Today* that the Human Terrain System's soft methods "are apparently anathema to many in the Pentagon." But despite those cultural conflicts within the Department of Defense, Mr. González argued, the human-terrain teams should not deceive themselves that their work is actually progressive. Instead, he wrote, they are scholarly imperialists "seeking particular forms of cultural knowledge that might facilitate indirect rule over foreign lands."

### **Ethnography or Banality?**

Mr. Damon and his colleagues insist, however, that their work in Afghanistan has helped to save lives. Major Holbert cites an official estimate that the 82nd Airborne Division, in which his team was embedded in southeast Afghanistan, reduced its "kinetic operations" — that is, operations that require direct military force — by 60 percent after the Human Terrain Team arrived.

Nothing in the team's work, Mr. Damon says, had to do with selecting targets for military action. If the brigade leader requested a line of research that appeared to deal with targeting, he says, the team would refuse to take it, telling the commander to send the request instead to his intelligence division. "What we would do," Mr. Damon says, "is offer advice about the potential second- and third-order effects of a proposed operation in a village."

During the Kansas conference, Major Holbert offered an example. "There was a particular village that was going to be searched," he said. "And the platoon leaders were planning to go in there at about 3 or 4 in the morning. On a *Friday* morning. ... And Britt and I pointed out that that really wasn't a good idea. Searching these homes on a Friday morning before morning prayer. If this village was hovering between red and blue" — that is, between supporting the Taliban and supporting the Kabul government — "this would definitely push it over onto the red side."

The Human Terrain Team persuaded the brigade instead to approach the town's leader in daylight and to explain why the search was necessary. "Humility and respect go a long way," Major Holbert said.

Many of the interventions described by Mr. Damon and his colleagues — don't confiscate chocolate, don't raid homes before dawn on a Friday — seem common-sensical and obvious. Indeed, one frequent criticism of the program, from both conservatives like Ms. Marlowe and leftists like Mr. González, is that its insights are generally banal. What about the program requires someone with a deep knowledge of ethnographic techniques?

In the dull, brick building where the Human Terrain System is headquartered at Fort Leavenworth, across the street from the fort's famous prison barracks, James K. Greer, the program's deputy manager, offers an answer to that question. The Human Terrain Teams, he says, are slowly compiling detailed ethnographic histories of the areas where they operate. In a cumulative, hard-to-quantify way, he says, those ethnographies will eventually help brigade leaders make better decisions.

The Baghdad neighborhood of Sadr City, Mr. Greer says, "looks absolutely rectangular if you look at it on a map. But if you were to draw a picture of the tribal relationships within Sadr City, it looks very different. You start to see different fault lines. ... What we're trying to understand is, Where are the different tribes in Sadr City and how do they interact with the formal government and all the other formal things that we're trying to do — investments in electricity and water and sewage and schools and all the rest of that?"

At the Kansas conference, an official with the Center for Army Lessons Learned offered a different analysis: Some of the Human Terrain Teams' advice about local customs might seem banal, he said, but a culturally insensitive brigade commander is more likely to heed the advice of a credentialed social scientist than that of a 19-year-old civil-affairs soldier who might make the same point.

### Getting to 'Yes'

The element of the Human Terrain System that is most worrisome to academic anthropologists — even those who are generally open to advising the military — is the question of informed consent. No formal institutional review board supervises the social-scientific research conducted by the civilian anthropologists in the program. The program's leaders have said that because the work consists of "interview procedures or observation of public behavior," it falls outside the federal statute on human-subjects protection. But several critics have disputed that assertion, and the matter is reportedly being reviewed by the Pentagon's lawyers.

David M. Hann, coordinator of the human-subjects committee at Kansas, writes in an e-mail message to *The Chronicle* that he believes the program should be reviewed by an independent federal board, perhaps at the National Institutes of Health.

"Allowing the Department of Defense to decide for itself whether its own research plans need review," Mr. Hann writes, "would be a built-in conflict of interest, much like if departments within a university or hospital were allowed to decide the same question themselves, rather than submit their research protocol to their university's IRB to decide that question."

Despite the lack of a review board, Mr. Damon says he obtained written consent from everyone he interviewed, even if it took several conversations to explain the concept of anthropology. "The best way I could get that across," he says, "was to tell them that I'm there to learn about their culture. They're my teacher and I'm their student, and I want to know what they think and how they feel." He says he told his informants that "we are going to be using them in a published study to the military commanders, but that we'll never reveal who we specifically got the information from."

At this week's anthropology conference, much of the debate will concern how the Army uses the data compiled by Human Terrain Teams. That question probably cannot be fully answered for at least another year, as more teams arrive in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the meantime, Kansas' Mr. Moos urges his colleagues to give the program the benefit of the doubt. "To defeat any insurgency," he says, "you have to separate the population from the insurgents. If you win enough of the population, they will help you defeat the insurgency. So the real purpose of all of this is, How do you convince the people to come over to your thinking, or at least to approximate your thinking?" Only social scientists, he says, can give the military the knowledge it needs to complete that task with a minimum of violence.

Many anthropologists, however, are horrified by the thought of manipulating a local culture in the way Mr. Moos proposes, especially when the coercive force of the Army is involved. "Anthropologists on the ground with military operations, whether they're in civilian or military dress, is just over the line," says Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, a professor of anthropology at Rhode Island College and the former chair of the anthropology association's ethics committee. "That's just not what we do. At the very least, call it something else. Call it open-source intelligence. This is not something that we comfortably recognize as anthropology."

For his part, Mr. Damon hopes that he will still be working with the program a decade from now. "I truly feel that this is a necessary part of the military," he says. "If we can understand this sort of information even before a conflict begins, then we've really gotten somewhere."

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