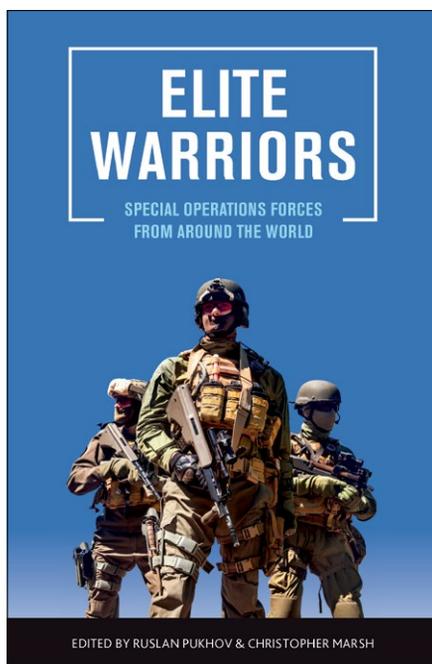


in far-flung “platoon houses” and suffered heavy casualties. Farrell debunks a decades-old argument that pleas from President Hamid Karzai and Provincial Governor Mohammed Daoud had forced the British commanders to move off the original plan. He tells how the British commanders never even read the plan and decided on their own to get into a fight in the hinterlands. Brigadier Edward Butler, the British commander in Helmand at the time, dismissed the original plan as “pretty light on the military Line of Operation . . . drawn up by people who did not properly understand the Brigade’s skill sets and capabilities.” Years later, of course, Butler’s successors fell back on defending central Helmand, just as the original plan had advised. Farrell’s case will surely draw great controversy.

What should we take from this? The United Kingdom was caught in the same dilemma that the United States has faced again and again in Iraq and Afghanistan. For the outsider, intervening in an insurgency or a civil war is a learning experience. The imperative to work with the people demands knowledge of society, culture, politics, and history, in all their complexity. Yet learning takes time. Outsiders face an unavoidable dilemma of making decisions with incomplete knowledge or making no decisions at all. Every decision stands a reasonable chance of being a misstep. Friction is inevitable. What Farrell reminds us is that at any decision point we should listen to the knowledge that does exist and not dismiss it because it complicates what we want to do.

With its broad scope and detail, *Unwinnable* is akin to an official history in the finest of British historical tradition. In fact, whenever the official history does come out, it will find itself in stiff competition with Farrell’s work. JFQ

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Elite Warriors: Special Operations Forces from Around the World

Edited by Ruslan Pukhov and Christopher Marsh
East View Press, 2017
\$79.95 263 pp.
ISBN: 978-1879944992

Reviewed by Bruce McClintock

Special operations forces (SOF) have existed in some form and played roles in warfare since the advent of conventional military operations. For example, in biblical times, King David had a special forces platoon. World War II brought growth, greater recognition, and prestige for special forces like the British Commandos, Special Air Service, and the American Office of Strategic Services. The last two decades have witnessed explosive growth in various forms of unconventional or SOF.

In *Elite Warriors*, Ruslan Pukhov and Christopher Marsh aim to provide accessible, high-quality comparative research on the elite SOF of 14 countries. They achieve some of their lofty objectives and add value to the important field of literature on special operations. Marsh,

editor of the *Special Operations Journal* and professor at the U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies, opens the book by discussing the modern (post–World War II) proliferation of SOF and claims that many countries “seek to gain the status and capabilities” that come from possessing such specialized units. He then briefly describes the intent of the book—to fill the gap between “a vast body of literature that focuses on single cases of heroism, or at best, histories of single units” during a select period.

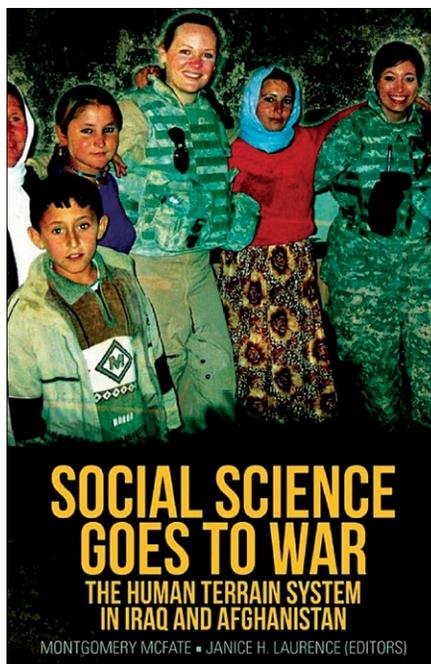
To help fill the gap, *Elite Warriors* provides descriptive chapters on the SOF forces of 14 countries in the following order: Russia, Ukraine, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Turkey, China, Singapore, Columbia, and Algeria. The book claims a format commonly used by the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST), the Russian think tank co-founded and directed by Pukhov. CAST regularly employs a team of highly capable research analysts to provide summaries on a variety of topics—usually focused on Russia’s defense industry and national arms procurement program. *Elite Warriors* claims that each of the chapters provides a “brief historical background to that country’s special operations forces, then quickly moves to the present time, offering the reader a very comprehensive overview of the many units that exist, the missions which they are designed to address, and examples of some of the missions they have conducted.” Marsh states, “Encyclopedic in nature, it is filled with a wealth of information on the special operations forces of the countries included.”

Most chapters do include some form of historical discussion, a detailed organizational listing for known units, and some information on equipment used, as well as training and education. However, the diversity of contributors creates inconsistency in the format as well as the style of the different chapters. If read cover-to-cover, the inconsistency in the chapter organization is readily apparent, as is the level of detail available for various countries. The chapter on Iran, for example, provides good detail on the weapons used by Iranian SOF and provides basic

information on recent operations in Syria with substantive footnotes of the sources for the information. Other chapters include substantially less detail, often citing the lack of available information. The chapters are generally short with the shortest being only eight pages and containing no information on equipment or training.

The strength of *Elite Warriors* is the variety of authors and their use of native-language sources, often from mass media and generally current, as well as other authoritative material. The generous use of footnotes makes the book a worthwhile resource for those who want a guide to other useful material. The book, however, fails to explain its rationale for the relevance or importance of the 14 selected countries. Readers will find value in the China and Iran chapters but wonder where they might find information on key allies including Japan, South Korea, Denmark, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the inconsistent format and level of detail may frustrate some readers. Readers looking for more specifics on U.S. forces should examine Linda Robinson's *Masters of Chaos* (PublicAffairs, 2009) and the more recent historical evaluation by Mark Moyers titled *Oppose Any Foe* (Ingram, 2017). Nevertheless, the material in *Elite Warriors* is valuable and the book is an ideal primer for someone without a background in special operations who wants to learn the basics about foreign military elites and have a guide to other useful sources. JFQ

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Social Science Goes to War: The Human Terrain System in Iraq and Afghanistan

Edited by Montgomery McFate and
Janice H. Laurence
Oxford University Press, 2015
\$39.95 320 pp.
ISBN: 978-0190216726

Reviewed by Brian R. Price

The gap between academia and the military has existed at least since the early 1960s, when Project Camelot crystallized political opposition to the American military/security apparatus by activist academicians. As a result, the military/security community established its own think tanks, designed to replicate social and hard science capabilities, reducing the political noise and fallout inherent in the engagement with a potentially hostile academic community. On the other side of the divide, many academics reacted with anger to social scientists engaged in military activity, political beliefs fusing with concerns of academic freedom and fanned with the flames of opposition to the Vietnam War in what they saw as colonialism and rampant militarization of American society.

This gap has, arguably, reduced the military's effectiveness in operations like Iraq and Afghanistan because think tanks and professional military education have not replicated the academic depth of understanding in local cultural dynamics. Critics like author and co-editor Montgomery McFate, herself an accomplished anthropologist, attorney, and longtime professor at the Naval War College, argue this is because military culture is task-oriented, reductionist, and problem-solving by nature as opposed to the more open-ended, expansive, and puzzle-solving individual nature of academic inquiry that is necessary to produce depth of qualitative knowledge of social complexity. This becomes a problem when the military is tasked, as it has been many times since 1989, with operations other than war where understanding the complexities of the local culture can mean the difference between success and failure, reduced casualties, and escalation.

In the polarized literature surrounding the U.S. Army's controversial Human Terrain System (HTS), few publications are likely to have the impact that this volume promises on the debate surrounding the inclusion of social science expertise within the American military/security establishment. McFate introduces a concept of *the military-academic divide*, noting how the HTS was often successful in bridging the sociocultural gap between not only the Afghan/Iraqi societies and expeditionary military units but also the social scientists' own academic world and that of the military. This out-of-the-box perspective, McFate and co-editor Janice Laurence conclude, proved valuable in widening the perspective of military teams in an effort to represent the local population in the military decisionmaking process.

McFate was the anthropologist who, together with Colonel Steve Fondacaro, USA, led HTS in its formative period. McFate and Laurence gathered first-person data by social scientists who worked in Iraq and Afghanistan. They offer the best summary to date of the program's establishment and mission in "Mind the Gap." McFate's contribution