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Charlottesville, VA 22903

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Mr. Jake Wiens  
Project on Government Oversight (POGO)  
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Subject: **US Army Human Terrain System Malfeasance**

Dear Mr. Wiens,

The Human Terrain System (HTS) is a new Army program recruiting civilian academics and specialists to advise US Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan on local culture. The original article describing the program can be found at [this website](http://usacac.leavenworth.army.mil/CAC/milreview/English/sep06/kipp.pdf) <<http://usacac.leavenworth.army.mil/CAC/milreview/English/sep06/kipp.pdf>>. Although the article describes five “proof of concept” teams deploying to Iraq in the Fall of 2006 as a pilot program, these teams were significantly delayed by false starts within the program. When I was recruited to the program in March 2007, and began work in April 2007, I was the first social scientist recruited for those Iraq teams. (At the time there was a single team in Afghanistan that had an anthropologist that specializes in the Caribbean.) In June—before any but the one Afghan team had deployed—the program received additional funding to expand to 28 teams (23 in Iraq and 5 in Afghanistan) as a Joint Urgent Operational Needs (JUON) request. These first five teams finally deployed in August, and in the Fall 2008 the program received another funding boost. Below, I highlight a number of concerns with the program that I raised to program management and my superiors at British Aerospace Systems (BAE). As an academic partaking in my first experience in government, I naively thought that my suggestions for correcting these problems would be welcomed. Instead I was alternately ignored and threatened, until being ultimately dismissed; what’s more, because I was dismissed under the pretenses of posing a security risk, I lost not only my job but my career, as no government body or company supporting a government body is willing to take the risk that the security pretense may not be credible. **It is important that one critical point, explained in the middle of this document, be highlighted upfront: The focal point of the current breakdown of the HTS program is a conflict of interests created by program management’s competing incentive structures—they cannot fulfill their oversight responsibilities over BAE’s numerous failures to fulfill their contractual responsibilities without arming critics seeking the cancellation of the entire program.**

### **My Background**

I came to government work as a result of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. As an immigrant, my father had a deep sense of national service which he passed on to me, and I felt compelled to do my part. With a Bachelor’s Degree in Comparative Religion, I believed that the best way for me to contribute was to

return to school, gain an advanced understanding of Islam and apply that knowledge to helping the government face this challenging new environment. The fact that I had a natural ability and affinity toward languages would only assist me in these efforts. Six years later, I have earned a Master's Degree in Middle Eastern Studies from Columbia University, and am in my final semester of coursework for a PhD in Islamic Studies at the University of Virginia. My work specializes in Shia Islam, religious violence and extremism, and inter-religious dialog. I speak Farsi, Russian, Ukrainian and French, and am currently studying Arabic and Dari. I have pursued the last six years of graduate work with the singular goal of working in support of government efforts in the Muslim world. Although I have written this document in the first person, I actually composed it with my fiancée, Mr. Matthew Tompkins. Matt is a former Army Captain and a former Team Leader of one of the five initial HTS Teams. He is currently a graduate student in Political Science/International Affairs, and completed two tours to Iraq before returning there as an HTS Team Leader. After leaving the Army in 2005, he volunteered to be recalled from the Individual Ready Reserve specifically to participate in the HTS Program. What follows is a composite of both of our concerns and observations.

### **Concerns with HTS**

The following paragraphs explore a number of concerns with the implementation and management of the HTS program—concerns that I raised to program management during my tenure as an employee and again since my dismissal, and to the Army's Inspector General and the Armed Services Committees and Government Oversight Committees of the U.S. House of Representatives in September 2007. Multiple Inspector General reports have come to conclusions that contradict documented evidence I provided them, while my attempts to address the issue to my Representative, Mr. Virgil Goode, and the relevant Committees have been studiously ignored. The descriptions below are only a brief introduction to each of these issues, but I describe and explore many of these issues in detail in the attached memoranda to Congress and journalists that have taken interest in the story at various points. Upon request, I can also provide documents and emails that corroborate the situations I describe.

#### *Recruiting and Retention*

Many of the failings of HTS begin with a counter-productive recruiting effort.

- *Academic Experts.* Corporate recruiters forego efforts that would recruit the desired academic specialists (attending academic conferences, advertising in academic journals, visiting or contacting relevant departments) and instead utilize traditional intelligence recruiting mechanisms (such as the [www.intelligencecareers.com](http://www.intelligencecareers.com) website) and general job sites such as [www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com). As a result of this bumbled recruiting effort, only two of the initial six social scientists were specialists in the region—myself and a Sociologist specializing in the Arab world *that I recruited*. The other four social scientists (all anthropologists by training) specialized in the Caribbean, Native Americans, the Philippines and Latin America.
- *Cultural Advisors.* The true failing here isn't just the missed opportunities of qualified academics who are never approached—it is the illusion of a “recruiting effort” that occurs instead. I was offered a position after a 10 minute phone conversation with the Program Manager. At no point was I interviewed, tested for the languages I claimed to speak on my resume or assessed for my capacity to deploy to a hostile environment. Most of the other civilians hired for those first five teams described a similar experience. The risks inherent in this failure to vet personnel is clearest in the case of some of the “Cultural Advisors” hired to augment the social scientists that lacked regional knowledge. Among them was a woman who claimed to speak Arabic but had no capacity beyond initial greetings and an Arab-American whose English was poor enough to prevent him from contributing in any substantive manner.
- *Prior-Service Civilians.* These failed recruiting efforts extend to non-specialists hired to join the teams: retired military personnel hired to fill slots as Team Leaders, Research Managers or Analysts and serve as “translators” between the civilians with no prior military exposure and the units being supported. Many of these personnel seemed to be hired on the basis of no qualification beyond a personal connection to one of the contractors supporting the program.

The best example of this is a prior Special Forces Sergeant First Class hired to be a Team Leader, “Mr. Jones”. Throughout training and deployment preparation, Mr. Jones showed himself to be completely unqualified for the program: demonstrating an inability or unwillingness to distinguish between Sunni, Shia, Arabs, Kurds or Iraqis (all “those people” to him), often expressing a desire to “just kill ‘em all,” and demonstrating a complete inability to build a rapport with units supported in training—the key responsibility of a Team Leader.

- *Retention Policies.* After encountering the results of these failed recruiting efforts, Program Management repeatedly failed to initiate any corrective action or dismiss personnel. The Team Leader identified in the preceding bullet was removed only after two teams *in their entirety* refused to deploy under him. He was RETURNED to the program as soon as these personnel who had seen him in action had left the country, and is rumored to be on the deployment roster on yet another team. The woman identified in the “cultural advisor” bullet was pulled from Iraq only after *five months* of her (military) team leader reporting not only her inability to contribute, but her open refusal to acknowledge his authority, support information requests from the supported unit or coordinate her work with anyone on the team. (Matt was the team leader in question, and he can provide extensive documentation that makes the description I just gave seem a gross understatement.) Program management's persistent resistance to addressing these obvious bad hires stems from an intense aversion to any negative perceptions of the program, an aversion connected to a conflict of interests described below.

Despite these failings, HTS was also able to recruit a number of talented, qualified individuals—both military and civilian. Many of these individuals, though, have been or are being driven from the program out of frustration with the failings described in this memorandum.

### *Training*

Faulty recruiting efforts were exacerbated by a training program that ranged from nonexistent to poorly conceived. Echota Technologies Corporation, the company initially subcontracted to provide training for the program, hired a training team composed almost entirely of previous Special Forces personnel with no academic background and no specialization in the regions in question. The quality of these trainers is perhaps best illustrated by one who, upon my arrival, expressed frustrated disbelief at what an expert in Islam might possibly have to contribute to the mission. During the tenure of this subcontractor, I was the only civilian academic yet recruited to the program, receiving the training with the military personnel that had been recruited to date. The military personnel voiced unanimous frustration at the stunningly irrelevant training we were receiving, but were unwilling to jump the chain-of-command to report this frustration to Program Management. The prime contractor on the project, British Aerospace Systems (BAE), was both my employer and the company that had hired the subcontractor. After repeatedly voicing these concerns to my superiors in the company to no avail, I voiced them to the Program Manager (PM) directly. (He was remotely located in Northern Virginia while training took place in Kansas, and thus exercised little immediate supervision or management.) Upon hearing my description of the situation, he brought his own concerns to BAE, expressing an inclination to dismiss the subcontractor, remove BAE from the training portion of the contract and hire a separate company qualified to execute this type of training. In response, BAE took no action towards the subcontractor, but attempted to prohibit me from further direct contact with the Program Manager and threatened to terminate me; my employment with HTS continued at this point only when the Program Manager learned of this development, flew to Kansas and intervened after the military personnel in training unanimously corroborated my description of the situation. My employment on the project continued, and BAE was directed by the PM to bring in the more qualified contractor for the training. From this episode forward, though, my every interaction with BAE personnel was met with animosity and threats until or unless I involved Program Management.

However, by this time (mid-May), the program still had deployed no one to Iraq, still had only one social scientist or regional specialist training for deployment (me), and was about to receive the JUON authorizing the fielding of an additional 22 teams. The deployment date was fixed for August, and a hiring blitz brought in two new waves of personnel in May and July (many of whom were described

above). At this point, rather than executing the training described in program literature, or the training prescribed by the company hired specifically to fix the failed training effort thus far, the incoming personnel received only whatever little training could be packed in before deployment. In the case of many of the personnel hired in July, this was as little as 2-3 days of introduction to Arab culture and social science research methodology. **The focus was always much more on the (marginally) timely deployment of five manned teams rather than the technical quality of those teams manning or training.**

#### *Contacting Practices and a Failure of Oversight*

Many of the failings described above touch on questionable contracting practices or failure of companies to effectively execute their contracted responsibilities. I have no direct knowledge of the contracting practices involved, but what follows is a description of them as they have been described to me by personnel in a position to know (whom I am in the process of trying to convince to talk to POGO directly, even if anonymously). BAE has an omnibus contract with TRADOC (the Army Command that owns HTS) that gives BAE right of refusal on any new TRADOC contracts. Unless BAE acknowledges that they cannot fill a given contract, or TRADOC personnel demonstrate that they are failing to do so, BAE is the sole recipient of the contract in question. They have it in their purview to hire subcontractors as necessary, but still collect a profit from the activities of the subcontractors. The profit incentive structure here is set up in a way that encourages BAE to attempt any task themselves before acknowledging that it needs to be delegated to a subcontractor (with whom they would then have to share some piece of profits). Further, when circumstances (or management) force the involvement of a subcontractor, it is in BAE's interest to take the cheapest bid offered, again for obvious profit reasons. BAE makes a given amount for completing the contract; without effective oversight, it is in their interest that they or their subcontractors provide the least expensive recruiting and training services possible, regardless of their quality. As a result of this, specialized companies that would likely have executed more successful recruiting or training efforts were bypassed in favor of BAE executing the task itself or hiring cheaper, less-qualified alternatives. In the most egregious example, the BAE Training Manager appears to have taken the proposed training plan of the well-qualified company eventually forced on BAE by the PM and passed their training plan bid to the competitor BAE hired. The lower cost competitor made their bid based on the information in the competitor's bid, replacing the leading experts on Iraqi History, Arab Culture, Islam and Social Science Methodology with lower-cost alternatives who specialized in Nazis and Latin America.

The failure of oversight is a situation that Matt and I observed ourselves. HTS has a broad range of critics opposed to the very idea of the program (as opposed to individuals like Matt and I, who are supportive of the idea and critical only of the execution). Personnel from the Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, and Intelligence branches of the military believe that HTS is trespassing on a mission area that they argue falls under their respective branches, and that the program should either be folded under the control of their branches or the funding should be going to them instead. Anthropologists claim that participation in the program is a breach of their professional ethics, and that the program's very existence invites such ethical breaches from members of their field. Uniformed personnel who remain resistant to accepting the new mission set of civil stability and support operations are resistant to a program that tells them that understanding the civilian population is far more important than fighting the enemy. In short, HTS has a wide range of critics eager to attack the program at any opportunity. Given this fact, and the fact that the program is still an "experimental" effort, it is in the interests of Program Management to minimize the visibility of any failings of the program. It is Program Management personnel, however, who are responsible for forcing BAE and its preferred subcontractors to effectively fill the terms of the contract. Any effort to do so would necessarily involve identifying tasks (such as recruiting, manning and training) that BAE has failed to effectively execute. **Program Management personnel are caught in a Catch-22 where they cannot hold BAE accountable for their failure to deliver on the terms of the contract without their evaluations of BAE being turned on the program by HTS's vocal chorus of critics.**

## My Termination of Employment

I brought every criticism and concern identified in the “Recruiting and Retention” and “Training” sections of this memorandum to the attention of my superiors at BAE and Program Management personnel at HTS. Admittedly, I did so somewhat naively, believing that all the personnel and organizations involved were there “for the mission” just as much as I was, and that they needed to only be made aware of the problems to immediately take action to fix them. I described above the episode where I was disabused of this notion, where BAE attempted to terminate me only to be overruled by the PM. From that point on, BAE made a consistent pattern of threatening and bullying me at every turn, attempting to silence my efforts to improve the execution of the program and hold them accountable for their performance. Events are described in detail in the attached documents, but this is a brief timeline of the key events leading to my termination:

- June 9 2007.* During a two-week training exercise in Texas, I get into a debate over America's Iran policy with a Lieutenant on the program. The Lieutenant was already disgruntled over his own desire to leave the program and had expresses significant bitterness at the fact that I had the freedom to do so at will. Given this, the conversation quickly becomes heated and emotional. At one point the LT expresses a desire to just “bomb the whole Middle East,” to which I respond that that would be the point where I “draw the line, hop the border and switch sides.”
- June 11 2007.* The LT reports my comment to my team leadership personnel, expressing that he believes I pose a security threat because of the comment. The Team Leader, a Lieutenant Colonel and my immediate supervisor, recognizes my comment as my joining in on an existing string of marginally inappropriate banter my military teammates had been engaging in about “who I really work for”—banter largely driven by my linguistic abilities. He admonishes me, advises me of the foolhardiness of the comment, and tells me that the situation is resolved.
- June 15 2007.* At the conclusion of the two week exercise, evaluators from TRADOC and personnel from the unit we supported (the Fourth Infantry Division), single Matt, myself and one of our teammates (an Arab-American Lieutenant) out of the 20 HTS personnel participating for the quality and consistency of our contributions.
- June-July 2007.* Apparently dissatisfied with the LTC's handling of his complaint, the disgruntled LT repeats his security concern about me to security personnel at Fort Leavenworth, who initiate an investigation. I continue training to deploy as this investigation proceeds. I repeatedly volunteer (and voice a preference) to defer my deployment until the investigation is complete and my name is definitely cleared.
- August 2 2007.* Matt and I submit a memorandum for record to program management describing our gross concerns over the qualifications of the civilian slotted to be our team leader (the civilian Team Leader above that expressed a desire to “kill 'em all”). After we formally put these concerns in writing, program management removes the team leader.
- August 7 2007.* I receive word that I have been terminated from the program for security concerns, over my potential allegiance to a foreign government. **The investigation into this allegation is still ongoing at the time.**
- August 7 2007.* Two hours after notification of my termination, I am contacted by the Military Intelligence and FBI personnel conducting my investigation, who want to schedule an interview with me in conjunction with that investigation. They express surprise at the fact that I have just been terminated, given that they have not completed their investigation, stating that “this might still be nothing.”
- August 2007.* Upon my termination from employment, my background check for a security clearance is dropped mid-way. **The investigation into the accusation against me is also dropped without being completed, since my termination has made it a moot point.**
- September-December 2007.* I pursue multiple avenues in an attempt to clear my name, including the Fort Leavenworth Inspector General, the TRADOC Inspector General, the U.S. Army Inspector General, the House Committee on Government Oversight, the House Armed Service Committee, my local representative, and the media. **I do so with the full support of the Program Manager, who claims that my termination was the work of TRADOC and BAE**

**personnel working against him without his knowledge while he was out of the country. He repeatedly expresses a desire to “fix what was done to me” and, with weekly updates to me, continues to “work the problem from the inside”.**

*December 5 2007.* A recounting of my situation is described in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, as are a number of my criticisms of the program. Two days after the publication of the article, the PM receives authorization to rehire me contingent on my agreeing to cease all media contact.

*December 2007.* I agree to cease media contact and return to HTS (in the interests of the PM's commitment to clear the notation in my security file upon my rehiring), and the PM directs BAE to rehire me. Over the following weeks, Human Resources personnel repeatedly tell me verbally that I will be offered a contract only if I agree to terms acknowledging that I am a “high-maintenance employee” and “not a team player,” and that I can therefore be terminated at any time that BAE personnel determine these qualities are returning. I refuse to accept any such conditions unless the terms—and my corresponding protections—are spelled out in writing. BAE HR personnel report to HTS that I have declined the offer. Simultaneous to this, my written contract offer is sent to me with none of the verbal conditions. I accept the offer as written, but BAE personnel claim to HTS management that the offer is no longer valid since I already rejected it. Repeated references are made by BAE employees during this process to an “investigation” of them resulting from the Chronicle article. **At no point during this negotiation—even during BAEs most vitriolic attacks on me—was security ever expressed as a concern in my rehire, which would have included resuming the process of obtaining a security clearance for me.**

*January 2008.* Out of frustration at his own inability to affect my situation and rehire me onto the program, the PM authorizes Matt's return from Iraq and his release from both the program and active duty so that we can “heal and deal with this together”. By late January, all contact between us and HTS management is cut off by what appears to be a TRADOC order.

There is no doubt in my mind that I was terminated for consistently identifying areas where BAE was failing to deliver on it's contract with the Army or HTS was failing to deliver on the mission support it was claiming to provide. **If I was terminated for the security threat that I allegedly posed, my termination would have occurred at one of two times: immediately after the initial complaint without even bothering to initiate an investigation, or upon the conclusion of the investigation with a finding against me.** I gave the timeline above to explicitly illustrate that neither was the case. Instead, program management repeatedly implored me to remain after I expressed an inclination to remain state-side until the completion of the investigation, promising me an unclassified support position at Ft Leavenworth alongside Iraqi citizens supporting HTS should the investigation drag past our scheduled deployment date. The only specific event that immediately preceded my termination was the formal memorandum Matt and I submitted expressing our extensive concerns over the suitability of our team leader.

In order to maintain the pretense of terminating me for a security concern, BAE had to place a notation in my government security file stating that I was terminated as the result of an allegation of foreign allegiance that led to the initiation of an FBI investigation. This single act has ensured that I have been completely shut-out of a career in government and government service. With my language skills alone—let alone my academic expertise—I have had multiple companies express interest in hiring me immediately to support one government project or another, only to have them lose interest once I give them my Social Security Number to initiate my background check.

I am not reporting these concerns now out of any desire for retribution. I do so for the only reasons that I've pursued this from the beginning: (1) I believe in the mission of the Human Terrain System and that TRADOC management's acquiescence to BAE's corporate malfeasance is stymieing that mission while squandering government resources and (2) in a continuing attempt to clear my name so that I can have the opportunity to make the contributions to which I aspire. I turn to the Project on Government Oversight now as a last resort: TRADOC, HTS and BAE can each only protect

themselves by protecting each other, presenting a united front against me. Despite my extensive documentation to support my description of events, I have been studiously ignored by the political and government authorities that might offer me redress, having apparently failed some critical litmus test since the entire pretense for my dismissal stems from my hesitance to blindly support the wholesale destruction of another nation. I suspect even the most potentially sympathetic and level-headed of Congressional Representatives must be frightened by the notion of sound-bytes or headlines about supporting an alleged Iran sympathizer. I believe our government is better than the actions I've witnessed and the treatment I've received, and I write this in the hopes that you will assist me in holding the government to that highest of standards.

With respect,

Zenia Helbig

**Attachments:**

1. Original statements to Congressman Goode, the House Armed Services Committee, and the House Government Oversight Committee, dated September 13, 2007.
2. Original supplemental statements to Congressman Goode, the House Armed Services Committee, and the House Government Oversight Committee, dated September 24, 2007.
3. Copy of JPAS incident report, posted by BAE Systems upon my termination, dated August 7, 2007, including DSS amendment, dated March 24, 2008.
4. Copy of email correspondence between HTS Management and TRADOC personnel regarding my termination, dated August 7, 2007. This email chain, which demonstrates TRADOC's role in my termination, was ignored by TRADOC IG because it was not obtained through a FOIA request, which was withheld; forwarded to me by Karen Clark on October 12, 2007.
5. Statement from former HTS Team Leader CPT Matthew Tompkins, prepared for DSS, corroborating events surrounding my termination, dated October 27, 2007.
6. Copy of one of HTS Program Manager COL (Ret) Steve Fondacaro's many "pep-talk" emails to Matt and myself regarding my situation, dated November 9, 2007. This email was sent to my primary PhD advisor at UVA, after I declined COL Fondacaro's request to come meet with my UVA faculty regarding my situation.
7. Statement from HTS Chief of Staff Karen Clark, prepared for DSS, corroborating events surrounding my termination, dated November 14, 2007.
8. Copy of email from HTS Deputy Program Manager COL (Ret) James Greer, supporting Karen Clark's DSS statement, dated November 21, 2007.
9. Assessment of HTS delivered at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, dated November 29, 2007.
10. Copy of article from The Chronicle of Higher Education, dated December 5, 2007.
11. Copy of my contract to rejoin HTS, dated December 20, 2007, signed December 27, 2007.
12. Copy of correspondence from my lawyer to BAE Systems regarding the validity of the above contract and my treatment by BAE Systems' representatives, dated January 4, 2008.
13. Ft Leavenworth IG investigation results, dated February 8, 2008.
14. TRADOC IG investigation results, dated March 6, 2008.

**Carbon Copy:**

Chairman Henry Waxman, House Government Oversight Committee  
 Chairman Ike Skelton, House Armed Services Committee  
 Chairman Joseph Lieberman, Senate Government Affairs Committee  
 Chairman Carl Levin, Senate Armed Services Committee  
 Congressman Virgil Goode, VA 5<sup>th</sup> District (Local representative)  
 Senator James Webb, D-VA  
 Senator John Warner, R-VA