

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**INCORPORATION OF INDIGENOUS FORCES
IN MAJOR THEATER WAR: ADVANTAGES,
RISKS AND CONSIDERATIONS**

by

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ABSTRACT

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Indigenous assets will continue to be incorporated into major theater campaigns, particularly with the recent threat from failed or failing states. The value of such incorporation has been evidenced over time. While the benefit of the local asset depends upon the specific use and locale, the intelligence provided is value added to the US military. The benefit of local surrogates was recently highlighted in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Indigenous fighters on the battlefield lessen the number of US and coalition fatalities which may correspondingly reduce the concerns of a "casualty phobic" US populace.

In addition to training, surrogates require appropriate vetting in order to corroborate their information. US military handlers must be aware local assets may use the opportunity to pursue personal agendas or retaliation. Local forces are best characterized by their environments and those from resource-rich failed states may present a unique set of challenges for the US military handler.

The opportunity for the US military to train and cooperate with the indigenous fighter should be viewed as an initial step to foster the values and skills which will be required during the establishment of that nation's new government.

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INCORPORATION OF INDIGENOUS FORCES IN MAJOR THEATER WAR: ADVANTAGES, RISKS AND CONSIDERATIONS

INCORPORATION OF THE INDIGENOUS ASSET ON THE BATTLEFIELD

The planning of nearly all military campaigns has included, at least in part, the consideration of the participation of friendly indigenous forces or assets. From the North African Campaign (Operation Torch) to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the number and specific tactical responsibilities of the indigenous assets in theater have varied but generally have continued to increase. Just as the responsibilities of the indigenous force have continued to change over time, so have the responsibilities incumbent upon the U.S. military establishment in determining the appropriate integration and handling of this local asset, based upon respective inherent factors.

Indigenous assets will continue to be incorporated into the battlefield. The value of incorporating the indigenous asset is multi-faceted, both during and after combat operations. It will continue to be incumbent upon the U.S. strategist to identify unique ways in which to incorporate these individuals or units to maximize their effectiveness on the battlefield. Training, vetting and battlefield engagement of the indigenous force begins a series of steps culminating in conflict termination and subsequently conflict resolution or restoring freedom and self governance in the conflict nation. The U.S. military's initial contact with indigenous assets can be critical to not only the efficiency and expediency of conflict termination, but also to enforcing the security environment during the conflict resolution phase of the operation. While the U.S. military may enter a country with a phased strategy, the indigenous asset is fighting for the survival of his country and the success of both conflict termination and the conflict resolution are legacies which indigenous personnel will have to address in the future.

The validity of intra-theater assistance to a nation in defending its sovereign rights versus unilateral U.S. military action in a country was clearly stated in the 1969 Nixon Doctrine.¹ The approach of the Nixon Doctrine, that of a reduction in "costs" ...introduced a "new direction in American policy" as it...focused upon "the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense." In other words, this policy sought "to assist another nation defend its freedom...but not fight the war for them."² Even though this policy statement was presented during the turbulent period of the Vietnam Conflict, adherence to its principles has continued to define America's pursuit to further democracy and defend those most victimized by its absence. While the Nixon Doctrine laid the framework, it did not, however, provide specifics regarding the use of indigenous forces nor did it address their

numerous respective internal factors which differentiate them and, subsequently have a significant impact upon their handling, on and off the battlefield.

It is timely to consider the incorporation of friendly indigenous forces or assets into theater warfare as it is practiced today as an offset to increased demands of both manpower and resources and the costs of developing technologies. Undoubtedly, the indigenous fighter's contribution to the applied battlefield strategy can include invaluable information on the terrain, geo-political dynamics and additional, although less technically and professionally capable, manpower. In using indigenous forces, the U.S. military is tasked with the employment of appropriate vetting techniques which must be adopted to corroborate the information and evaluate capabilities that might be provided by potentially previously unknown local assets. The superior U.S. fighting force is also obligated to provide training in military hardware and tactical techniques as required. Language barriers must be overcome in order to meet these essential pre-battlefield requirements. The willingness of the indigenous population to assist the U.S. military is based in part upon the "enemy of my enemy is my friend" concept, thus, their commitment and performance on the battlefield is directly related to that relationship and must be carefully considered.

A 1998 Rand Corporation Research Brief ³ noted a discrepancy between the 1993 Department of Defense Bottom-Up-Review which identified a "building block" of joint forces as the configuration required to win one major theater war (MTW) and the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review's (QDR's) strategy which judged the success of any MTW in its opening or "halt phase" - as an indicator when specific forces should be inserted into the campaign.⁴ Three years subsequent to the 1998 research, the value of inserting indigenous assets as "enablers" and "counteroffensive forces", during a campaign was clearly demonstrated in OEF. In fact, OEF proved that the inclusion of indigenous forces in theater can play a pivotal role in determining the rapid and successful outcome of the campaign.

While the Rand research focuses primarily upon a proposed restructuring or modification of the MTW strategy in the face of budget cuts by presenting a model which advocates functional force deployments vice major contributions from each service, the research fails to expand upon the possibility of increased use of indigenous forces (when possible) to compensate for budget reallocations to support technological advances. For example, in OEF, decisive air support (surveillance and attack elements), critical to the success of the campaign, was based in part, upon information - the determination of various centers of gravity, location of Taliban forces, Taliban capabilities, terrain anomalies, etc. - provided by indigenous forces. This on-the-ground knowledge and perspective can provide key insights into not only the

enemy's asymmetrical techniques, but also assist in prioritizing joint actions based upon overall strategic objectives.

While overall strategic objectives may remain virtually constant, the factors which create the need for the U.S. military to intervene may originate in different ways. For example, Afghanistan is not Iraq and Kosovo was different from Vietnam. In his 2002 article, Jeffrey Record identified America's greatest threat as those political ideologies originating from failed states in the aftermath of the Cold War.⁵ This new threat or challenge for the U.S. military is accompanied by a whole new set of variables inherent in the definition of a failed or failing state. The problems which lead to the creation of the weak or failed state may include a lack of national identity, rampant lawlessness and devastating economic conditions. The U.S. military soldier must maneuver through these factors in order to incorporate the indigenous asset from a weak or failed state in the most efficient manner possible.

According to Record, while willing to fight, the level of combat experience and sophistication of local forces pales miserably alongside their American partners. In addition, one potential liability for U.S. forces is the desire of the indigenous fighter to follow his own agenda by providing information to settle personal arguments or take revenge rather than adhere to the military objectives as set out.⁶ The same exploitable vulnerabilities, therefore, of the failed state's indigenous fighter which make him both attractive and accessible to U.S. forces can often be a disguised Achilles heel.

With due regard to the obvious concerns associated with the incorporation of surrogate individuals or units, these assets may be critical to the success of the campaign. The inclusion of indigenous assets can foster popular support for U.S. forces operations on foreign soil. There was obvious local indigenous support in Afghanistan for OEF in the aftermath of 9/11. Anti-Taliban Northern Alliance forces fighting alongside U.S. troops cooperated to achieve mutually beneficial goals. Anti-Taliban forces were not immune to casualties and/or fatalities and this contribution most likely lowered the number of injured or killed U.S. servicemen. In fact, Record acknowledges that indigenous fighters did in fact reduced the number of U.S. casualties.⁷ In a sense, indigenous assets provide a valuable shield during all phases of the campaign. The international media highlighted the contributions of indigenous forces in both OEF and, most notably through embedded media in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

Record provides a virtual equation for future warfare if weak and failed states are the next threat for the U.S. and if U.S. leadership is "casualty phobic", then:

ADVANCED MILITARY TECHNOLOGY (MORE FORCE/LESS RISK)
PLUS
COMBINATION AIR POWER
PLUS
SPECIAL SUPPORTING GROUND FORCES W/REGULAR FORCES IN RESERVE
PLUS
INDIGENOUS SURROGATES
EQUALS
"THE NEW U.S. MODEL FOR WAGING FUTURE WAR" ⁸

Although this new model incorporates indigenous forces which may reduce the so called casualty phobia of the leadership of the United States and its Allies, the model does not address uncertainty, specifically the lack of dependence of known abilities, reactions, and commonality of tactical experience which the indigenous fighter brings to the table. The argument can be made, and it would be valid, that the coordination or synchronization of battlefield tactics between United States and Allied or coalition forces is also unpracticed. It can be deduced, however, that through interactions which promote and solidify the allied relationship which include combined training exercises and programs like the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, to name a few, the United States has a far better understanding and resultant comfort level of the abilities and capabilities of their coalition partners than that of the surrogate partner.

Being "casualty phobic" is not peculiar to U.S. leadership and can be expected of the leadership and the respective populace of any coalition member. Technological advances have and will continue to consume a large portion of a country's national budget. Many of these advances may be designed to maximize the effectiveness of air power to reduce the need for massive ground support elements. In spite of these advances, battlefield casualties are a reality. As these advances are applied on the battlefield, the proper "fit" for the indigenous fighter may become more difficult to achieve. As technology advances, it must guarantee it is both adaptable and flexible to permit use by less sophisticated participants. These components of technical advances will continue to be essential to the coordination of close and long-range tactics on the battlefield, especially the integration of indigenous assets into this equation.⁹

As stated before, there is a definite role for the indigenous forces and the value of this role in both close combat and in support of long-range precision strikes should be carefully evaluated. If Record's thesis is accepted, in close combat, willing and able bodies can provide a casualty barrier, but, this is not the sole prerequisite for incorporating indigenous forces in a theater strategy. The intelligence provided by these sources may contribute to both ground combat operations as well as the exactness of precision air strikes. Both the Rand study and Record's proposed modification of force structure suggest means of configuring combined resources - technical and human - to minimize time on the battlefield while maximizing results.

As is necessary, and for every phase of the campaign, these local assets must be assessed, vetted and tested. This process can be time-consuming and is often hindered by language and cultural differences. Nevertheless, a process must be followed, especially when indigenous forces are relied upon to provide information which could (a) potentially endanger U.S. lives and/or (b) expend costly materiel and other resources.

The willingness and even acceptability of indigenous forces to cooperate with the U.S. and ultimately their successful integration into a major combat operation is contingent upon a number of factors. Many of the factors characteristic of a failed or failing state such as, regional tribal delineations, international isolation and depressing economic conditions can either facilitate or hinder U.S. objectives. In Afghanistan while the goal of anti-Taliban forces to oust an oppressive regime served as a motivating factor for their cooperation with U.S. forces, it was a cooperation that required remuneration over an extended period of time in the form of cold hard cash, uniforms, weapons, etc.

AMERICA'S NEW THREAT: THE FAILED OR FAILING STATE

Since the end of the Cold War, the threat to America's overall security at home and abroad (with the exception of the Oklahoma City bombing), has increasingly been from divergent political ideologies nurtured in failed states.¹⁰ While the argument could be made that it is precisely these weak and failed states that offer the most fertile ground or the greatest pool of indigenous forces or surrogates, the nature of the failed state must also be considered. Just as U.S. involvement is based upon specific events, threats or concerns which attack or could potentially infringe upon our national sovereignty or core values, the characteristics of the indigenous fighter are also based upon an equally specific set of variables. Whether a recent eloquent explanation of the Afghan Model's uniqueness and applicability to future combat theaters¹¹ is accepted, the similarities and differences between Afghanistan and future potential failed state adversaries must neither be overlooked nor over or underestimated throughout

theater operations. Just as U.S. post-conflict scenarios have a proposed progression, the leadership of surrogate forces may also have preferences for their post-conflict nation. Optimally, there would be little divergence between the goals of the United States and those of the failed nation in need. For generations post-conflict, however, the failed state may still not resemble our version of “democracy”, but, the absence of chaos,¹² and relative assurances of the known interests and capabilities of that failed state will go a long way to increase the U.S. sense of security.

A central question is whether there are differences between failed states and, if so, whether these differences affect the manner in which U.S. forces should handle and integrate indigenous forces on the battlefield, and ultimately, if these differences affect the transition to Phase IV Operations. Undoubtedly, there are many similarities shared by all failed states. There is usually oppression, rampant poverty, and marked delineations in the population, whether along ethnic/tribal or regional lines. While Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC) may all qualify as failed states, they are all different. Specifically regarding Afghanistan, professors, scholars and historians have described how the United States Government was fortunately able to exploit long term dissatisfaction of a large segment of the population to deteriorating living conditions and an oppressive regime as critical factors in soliciting indigenous support for OEF.¹³

While sharing obvious parallels, a failed state such as Afghanistan, differs significantly, however, from the DROC. One of the primary differences in this instance is the presence of natural resources - not only what they can buy inside the failed state, but their influence and value to the outside world. As aptly stated by Michael Renner, “Although such conflicts are fought out in locales far from the Western countries that are the prime consumers of such resources, they relate to a number of key global concerns.”¹⁴ Renner notes many sub-Saharan African nations rich in natural resources have poor economies and governments run in part by private foreign military or security firms.¹⁵ The natural wealth of the country not only fuels the conflict and finances these firms, many of which exploit the lack of a solid government (contributing to its nature as a failed state), but also facilitates the introduction of more sophisticated weaponry into the local market and an international dynamic not present in failed states that lack resources.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS OF RESOURCE RICH FAILED STATES

The identification of significant natural resources, readily exploitable in a failed state due to a lack of governmental controls, facilitates another variable: foreign interest and associated

foreign presence. Both Afghanistan and the DROC meet many of Record's characteristics of a failed state that "...have become shelters and breeding grounds for such transnational threats as terrorism, drug-trafficking, refugee generation, environmental degradation, and political and religious extremism..."¹⁶ The abundance of exploitable resources, however, appears to be a key factor which further differentiates these two failed states. The type of resources, their abundance and locations within the country¹⁷ are variables that influence foreign interest in that country when plagued with an internal conflict. Financial benefit will continue to drive foreign activity even when a conflict could foster the development of a failed state which could lead to U.S. intervention.

Unquestionably, the Taliban did exploit whatever they could from Afghanistan, including 'natural resources' from marijuana to precious stones. The financial rewards of this exploitation was used to finance the Taliban regime. The Taliban, however, was more interested in solidifying a terrorist safe haven and base of operations through a forced ideological takeover of the Afghan people than mere exploitation and exportation of 'natural resources'.¹⁸ The Taliban's objective of a protected safe haven and base of operations defined their desire to isolate themselves from the world. This isolation was maintained until the Taliban was ready to introduce the world to their form of self expression. In resource rich failed states, however, regardless of the level of oppression and violence committed against the populace, the potential wealth to be gained far outweighs any need to adopt an isolationist approach. In fact, isolationism is counter-productive to a resource rich state - failed or not. According to David Kern, violence in a resource rich failed state is the "mode of accumulation".¹⁹ This "mode of accumulation" is the process whereby the exploitation of resources gives local leaders power, status, and access to Western wealth, while for the foreign exploiter - whether an international oil company or diamond dealer - profit is the bottom line. It is precisely this outside or foreign involvement in resource rich failed states that adds a unique dimension to any U.S. consideration of utilizing indigenous forces.

The United States has had little if any direct military involvement in resource rich failed states with the greatest conflict and corresponding level of international economic interest. The DROC, Angola, Liberia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone continue to attract oil companies as well as mineral and jewelry exploiters. Foreigners exploiting the resources for personal gain in failed or failing states run the gamut from former mercenaries such as the former South Africa-based Executive Outcomes, employed by the sitting government to maintain local order to organized crime syndicates from either the former Soviet Union, the Ukraine or Lebanon. Therefore, the

exploitation of resources may be motivated by private, corporate or personal reasons but all have the potential to impact security considerations worldwide.

Many of the minerals found and currently being exploited in sub-Saharan Africa, are essential in the fabrication of military materiel (e.g. titanium, chromium and platinum-group metals).²⁰ The abundance of high quality oil is also of strategic importance. The potential application of these types of resources is directly proportional to the type of interested “client”, whether organized crime syndicates or rogue states. While many of these resources have beneficial applications, even their possession by those with already demonstrated ambitions contrary to that of the United States is, at the very least, cause for concern. It is precisely the abundance and often high quality of minerals and other resources in failed states which (a) changes the international footprint, (b) alters the dynamics effecting the indigenous fighters’ receptivity to support changes, and (c) impacts the ability to transition during the post-conflict phase.

The living conditions of those in failed states contribute to their willingness to lead natural resource exploiters to mineral rich areas, mediate and/or barter with local tribes or simply locate water during the dry seasons, thus giving them some form of employment for compensation. This skill provides some small livelihood through the benefit of foreign capital in the country and provides the locals with the ability to provide basic goods for their families. While this is in no way comparable to that access by government or regional leaders, on a lesser scale it can be compared to the difference in the money obtained by the farmer in the Peruvian hills for harvesting the coca plant versus an alternative crop. It is precisely this residual effect of the foreign investor in resource rich failed states which can negatively impact Phase IV post-conflict operations. It is difficult to proceed with a smooth transition to self governance when the main source of financial sustenance for the majority of the population no longer exists. While a Phase IV transition may have a set timetable, invariably it will not be expeditious enough when the day-to-day ability to address their basic needs is uncertain.

Another by-product of the resource rich failed state is the quantity and type of weapons available in theater when U.S. forces arrive. In this instance, the resource rich and non-resource rich failed state may share similarities. While weapons, from old Soviet bayonets, Chinese Stinger missiles and rocket propelled grenades were certainly in abundance in Afghanistan in 2001, similar weapons were available in the DROC, and ran the gamut from primitive to sophisticated. In addition, as previously mentioned, those providing assistance to the foreign resource exploiter, a much sought after occupation, are usually armed and this

employment can facilitate the distribution of weapons to more and younger members of the population throughout a wider area in the conflict nation.

A third dynamic is whether the indigenous fighter's nation ever emerged and existed as a viable independent state even though it may have failed in subsequent years. In this aspect, North Korea is different from Iran just as Liberia is from Haiti. The concepts of national pride and identity can lead the surrogate to take on a different perspective and must be considered. As an example, tribal lineage and appropriate respect is still followed in many African nations, this should be considered when forming indigenous units as it could compromise a potential chain of command. Correspondingly conceptualizing members of an interim administration during the post-conflict phase can also influence success if culture and tribal lineage is considered.

POST-CONFLICT OBSTACLES AND BENEFITS OF INDIGENOUS ASSETS

During the post hostilities phase, the cooperation of the indigenous individual may be further delineated along regional tribal allegiances. For example, pro-Taliban strongholds in Herat in western Afghanistan, retained previously established close ties to Iran. The southern area of Qandahar and the eastern border area of Khowst continue to retain their perilous "Wild West" atmosphere. Similar differences exist in resource rich-failed states such as those between ethnic groups in eastern DROC and those in the interior of the country. In the case of Afghanistan, perhaps this is the result of engaging friendly indigenous forces in one region of the country early in the campaign, while delaying an approach to other potentially friendly forces until later in the war. In addition, after seeing their men killed and wounded on the battlefield and after being wooed and compensated for their support, cooperative OEF Northern Alliance leaders may have expected a larger share in the Afghan Interim Authority governing board in Kabul than they actually received. This may be a contributing factor to the continuing discord and tribal skirmishes between the major warlords in the north of the country today. While this paper will not address nation building, perhaps U.S. leaders-civilian and military-should consider post conflict political integration of those indigenous forces that actively participated in the campaign. "Warlords whose armies acted as proxy U.S. ground forces in the anti-Taliban campaign are now refusing to disarm or accept the writ of the country's fledgling interim government. They are even defying the Americans, say Western diplomats. And as warlordism takes root again, Afghanistan's neighbors are doing what they have always done: pursuing their own vested interests by supporting one faction or another, in turn, undermining Afghan unity".²¹ While this early 2002 statement may not be as true today, it cannot be totally dismissed.

The same available indigenous pool of potential surrogates was not available at the outset of OIF and efforts to distinguish friendly forces-including the designation of secure areas-continues to be a critical factor. There was no organized indigenous anti-Saddam group which could be contacted, equipped and integrated into the campaign. In this sense, Iraq was a more restrictive society than Afghanistan. The U.S. had very little information on the extent of the regional tribalism. The natural wealth of the country was absorbed by the Saddam regime. The absence of any local opposition forces in Iraq put U.S. military forces at a disadvantage during the initial planning phases of this campaign. Once on the ground, however, reluctant Iraqi military forces either surrendered or simply walked away from the battle. Rand's view overtook Record's modified version of the battlefield by taking on an unexpected element which minimized the need for advanced technology, i.e. no overt organized enemy. The continuing battle today, however, is focused upon the continuing asymmetrical manifestations of a yet unidentified opponent. The inclusion of indigenous forces at this stage of the operation - beyond the Rand study - can obviously do little to effect the outcome of the war but may have critical impact on the success of Iraq as a nation. During OIF, casualty sensitivity has been a reality at least in the media for the United States as well as her coalition partners.

In spite of the absence of an organized local opposition at the onset of OIF, former Iraqi Army members are being incorporated into newly organized national security forces. These forces are designed to keep and restore order, as succinctly stated by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, "because it is their country".²² It is crucial for indigenous forces to secure order to allow for the initiation of transition to Phase IV operations. In late 2003, the Secretary of Defense highlighted the unnaturalness of a foreign presence in any country because it can lead to unintended consequences. The unnaturalness of a foreign presence post hostilities in a campaign such as OIF may be a testament to such unintended consequences. The question may then be asked whether pre-conflict military training of indigenous forces should be customarily followed by orientation training on post conflict resolution. While conflict termination may be the end of the fighting for U.S. forces, it is in many cases the beginning of the struggle for one of our core national values- democratic governance. Indigenous forces should be aware of the difference in a post conflict environment in order to be able to adequately support the new principles and government The United States Government hopes they support. This transition from battlefield fighter to security professional could mirror the assistance provided during the initial phases of the campaign. The transformed indigenous security professional could assist in the transition by providing insights to government leaders of potential regions of discontent, dissidents, etc. This incorporation would also lend a measure of legitimacy to the new security

professional as well as a commitment to democracy through a solidified authority base for the new nation, post conflict.

The employment of indigenous assets at this stage of OIF has and will serve to identify atrocities the Saddam regime committed against its own people. Indigenous contributors may very well complete the puzzle leading up to the discovery of the location of the claimed weapons of mass destruction. Such contributors were most certainly instrumental in providing the pieces of information which lead to the discovery of Saddam himself. One often overlooked benefit of indigenous assets is the recovery of U.S. personnel. Acknowledgement of this need was recognized and formalized on 13 October 2000 when the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy approved Department of Defense (DOD) Instruction 2310.6, which "implemented policy, assigned responsibilities and prescribed procedures to develop and execute Non-conventional Assisted Recovery (NAR) procedures for U.S. military personnel, DOD civilian employees, contractors and other designated personnel isolated during military operations or as a direct result of developing or ongoing crisis prior to U.S. military intervention". Under its implementation, this policy specifies "...its dependence on detailed operational intelligence and indigenous assets".²³

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, when able to be accessed, the integration of indigenous friendly troops alongside U.S. forces on the battlefield is undoubtedly an asset. In a weak or failed state scenario, the likelihood the number of potential indigenous assets will be numerous and may serve to relieve a "casualty phobic" leadership, especially during initial phases of a campaign. Characteristically, failed states do not challenge U.S. military might, but rather rely on loosely coordinated and non-conventional tactics carried out by blindly obedient followers in treacherous and confusing terrain. In the new era of asymmetry, however, the rules have changed.

The role of the indigenous asset should not be limited to fighting on the battlefield. During the initial training phase, the indigenous asset is exposed not only to U.S. military professional training, but to examples of many of the core U.S. values. In a sense, this training on the battlefield provides the same opportunity as does training provided through IMET or any other U.S./foreign training program. As such, the initial benefits achieved should be re-enforced by providing the indigenous fighter with conflict resolution training to better incorporate these new skills into the nation's new security apparatus. U.S. forces may be able to depart the foreign field sooner if the transitioned fighter and the new administration are more closely aligned in

their expectations. At the very least, both sides will have a more realistic view of the local situation and what they can do together as the new nation emerges. The integration of indigenous forces into the theater will inevitably continue to take on challenging and expanding dimensions as the threat-and by extension the battlefield-changes for U.S. forces in the future.

WORD COUNT= 4,791

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¹⁴ Renner, Michael, The Anatomy of Resource Wars (Washington, D.C.: WorldWatch Press, 2002), 09.

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