Two Sides of the Same COIN: A History of the United States and Counterinsurgency During Operation Iraqi Freedom

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in the History Department and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Date Defended: 10 December 2021

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Date Approved: 10 December 2021

Abstract

Soon after the United States invaded Iraq in the spring of 2003, it became embroiled in an insurgency that left coalition troops with no choice but to revive, and in many cases reinvent, old counterinsurgency methods. Indeed, contrary to narratives that have suggested the existence of a "turn" to counterinsurgency halfway through the war, the United States' adoption of counterinsurgency during Operation Iraqi Freedom was actually a slow, incremental process that started in the summer of 2003. This process started with *ad hoc*, haphazard, grass-roots efforts across the theater of operations. As military leaders increasingly came to recognize the difficulties encountered by troops in Iraq, these efforts progressively expanded, first to the Multi-National Force headquarters in Baghdad, then in military training and education programs states-sides that also stressed the importance of culture in counterinsurgency operations. Counterinsurgency was then enshrined in doctrine with the publication of an interim field manual in 2004. This temporary manual was eventually replaced with a new multi-service publication, better known under its Army denomination FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency*, in December 2006. A relentless promotion effort surrounded the writing of the multi-service *Counterinsurgency* field manual and continued well into the second half of the conflict. Tracing this highly effective promotion campaign helps us understand how the military shaped its relations with the American public and civilian branches of the government through its use of the media. This is, therefore, a story of adaptation under pressure that explains how counterinsurgency rose from discarded concept to become the defining doctrine of the war in Iraq.

occasions carved time out of her incredibly busy lawyer schedule to not only read my work, but also help me brainstorm on ways to improve it. The rest of my family and friends too have been there every step of the way, counting the words until I would finally have a finished dissertation. Theavy, Mélanie, Lindzee, Liz, Dan, Paul, Amanda, Samantha, Guillaume, JB, Lauriane, Alix, Fabienne, Jean-Michel, François, Aline, Parrain, Marraine, Mamie, and of course Dad—thank you for supporting me, making sure I stayed on track, taking me out to lift my spirits, and celebrating every milestone.

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Introduction

On the evening of March 20, 2003, the United States invaded Iraq. After months of

planning, the 1st Marine Division, flanked on the left by the 3rd Infantry Division, and with the

British 1st Armored Division on its right, crossed the southern Iraqi border from Kuwait and

started to make their way north towards the nation's capital, thus marking the beginning of

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The day before, coalition forces' artillery and aircrafts had

started targeting outposts on the border, senior Iraqi leadership, air defense systems, surface-to-

surface missiles, and artillery batteries, to reduce the threat they posed to ground troops.[1] After

breeching through the berm in several locations, coalition convoys inched their way across the

fortified border before continuing towards their respective objectives. For the second time in a

little over a decade, American tanks and Humvees were rolling into the Iraqi desert.

Anticipating Saddam Hussein would use chemical or biological weapons against the

invading forces, troops wore their hazmat gear at all times, adding yet another layer of bulk to

their already heavy equipment and leaving them drenched in sweat as they fought their way

deeper into the country. Still, progress along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers was rapid. Despite

fears to the contrary, no chemical or biological weapons were ever deployed against coalition

troops and after years under the dictator's yoke, the Iraqi armed forces turned out to be in far

worse shape than expected. Iraqi defense forces deployed during the invasion included seventeen

regular army divisions, six Republican Guard divisions, and around 15,000 soldiers dedicated to

the protection of the capital—far fewer than during the First Gulf War twelve years prior.[2] In

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[1] Gregory Fontenot, E.J. Degen, and David Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, vol. 1 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 86–87.
[2] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 1:99.

addition, while some paramilitary units like the *fedayeen* offered fierce resistance to the invading

forces, most regular units ended up melting away without much of a fight.[3] What planners had

anticipated might take months was instead achieved in a matter of weeks. On April 5, troops

entered Baghdad.

By the end of April, the invasion had seemingly unfolded without a hitch. Saddam's

weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) arsenal was nowhere to be found and statues of the

dictator were being torn down. Many believed the war to be over and that troops would soon be

deploying back to the United States. On Thursday, May 1, 2003, less than two months after the

beginning of the invasion, President Bush landed on the *USS Abraham Lincoln* off the coast of

San Diego and pictures of the war-time president wearing a flight suit and posing with sailors

returning from operations in the gulf soon appeared all over the media. Later that day, the

president stood on the deck of the aircraft carrier under a banner reading "Mission

Accomplished," to give a speech in which he declared that major combat operations in Iraq had

ended.[4] As we now know, the president was partially correct: the conventional portion of the war

was indeed over.[5] However, an insurgency was on the rise in Iraq and the United States was

about to get embroiled in an asymmetric conflict that would last eight more years.

Yielding to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's vision, the United States had

decided to go to war with a limited number of troops and to rely on superior technology and

mobility instead of overwhelming force. The secretary's gamble initially appeared to pay off, but

once Saddam was removed from power and the Iraqi armed forces were put to rout, the entire

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[3] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 1:102.
[4] George W. Bush, "President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended," The White House, President George W. Bush, May 1, 2003, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030501-15.html.
[5] Conventional warfare refers to an open confrontation between clearly identified forces, like operations during WWII.

regime collapsed and coalition troops turned out to be too short-staffed to ensure the security of

the population as the country slipped into a state of lawlessness. Looting and violence quickly

ramped up. Iraqis increasingly perceived foreign troops as an army of occupation incapable of

restoring the country's basic infrastructure, in lieu of the liberation forces American troops

envisioned themselves to be. Anti-American sentiment was on the rise.[6] In addition, far from

being a unified nation, the state of Iraq had been cobbled together by the British following the

fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War. The population's makeup was

divided between Arabs and Kurds, Sunnis and Shia, and a mosaic of tribal affiliations, and while

the majority of Iraqis welcomed the end of Saddam's ruthless dictatorship, it also meant that old

sectarian differences were allowed to resurface, prefacing years of conflict to come.[7] In a matter

of weeks, these issues coalesced into an insurgency challenging the coalition's presence in the

country as well as the new government it was trying to stand up.[8]

All of the US military's conventional power, which had just led to a sweeping victory in

the initial portion of the operation, was at best insufficient and at worst an impediment once it

had to confront an insurgency.[9] Despite the United States' long history with counterinsurgency

(COIN) operations, it had repeatedly sworn off involvement in foreign insurgencies, which

meant that it was far from ready once it ended up embroiled in the exact type of conflict it had

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[6] Christopher Cooper, Yochi Dreazen, and Farnaz Fassihi, "U.S. Sends Seasoned Peacekeepers to Baghdad --- Getting Handle on Episodes Of Armed Resistance Is Key To Withdrawal of Soldiers," *Wall Street Journal*, May 5, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/docview/398935863/abstract/7761F5D8A2A04318PQ/120.

[7] In late 2003, even insurgents told reporters they were glad to be free from Saddam and that only a handful among them were supporters of the dictator. Evan Thomas, "Operation Hearts and Minds," *Newsweek*, December 28, 2003, https://www.newsweek.com/operation-hearts-and-minds-132031.

[8] The US military defines insurgency as "the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region." "Insurgency," in *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, October 2009), https://www.jcs.mil/Doctrine/DOD-Terminology-Program/.

[9] The US military's extensive conventional capabilities and advanced technology tend to create a false sense of security in the face of a less developed enemy. The more remote an individual is from the theater of operations and the unfolding conflict, the more the United States' firepower risks skewing their perception when assessing the threat caused by poorly equipped insurgents.

sought to eschew. According to the Army's official history of the war, "in the stabilization and counterinsurgency campaigns that followed [the fall of the Saddam regime], thinly stretched units and overtaxed headquarters often found themselves undertaking unexpected missions for which they were doctrinally, materially, and perhaps intellectually ill-prepared."[10] Instead of being able to put training and doctrine into practice, the military had to devise a way to wage a type of warfare for which it had not prepared, while the conflict unfolded and the situation deteriorated. This is, therefore, a story of adaptation under pressure in which I will explain how counterinsurgency rose from discarded concept to become the defining doctrine of the war in Iraq.

Contrary to narratives that have suggested the existence of a "turn" to counterinsurgency halfway through the conflict, I argue that the United States' adoption of counterinsurgency during Operation Iraqi Freedom was actually a slow, incremental process that started in the summer of 2003. This process started with a bottom-up embrace of counterinsurgency during the early stages of the war, often against resistance from upper echelons of the hierarchy. It then evolved into a wholesale endorsement of the concept following the Army's and Marine Corps' creation, and most importantly promotion, of a new *Counterinsurgency* field manual in 2006.

Counterinsurgency refers to actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency, which encompass "military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions" and consist of "offensive, defensive, and stability operations," and by focusing on the United States military's development of counterinsurgency tactics to try to achieve victory in Iraq, this work explains the bottom-up processes at play in the military's wartime adaptation between 2003

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[10] Joel D. Rayburn and Frank K. Sobchak, eds., *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War: Invasion, Insurgency, Civil War, 2003-2006*, vol. 1 (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College Press, 2019), xxxii.

and 2006.[11] Looking at the Army and Marine Corps—which provided the bulk of the ground

troops in Iraq and co-authored the multi-service field manual—I show that the military's

adoption of counterinsurgency started with *ad hoc*, haphazard efforts in the theater of operations

where commanders improvised solutions to the issues they were encountering in their respective

areas of operation.[12] Then, as more people within the military institution started to recognize the

difficulties encountered by the troops in Iraq, these efforts were followed by changes in

education and training stateside in order to better prepare soldiers and Marines for their

deployment. In particular, the defense community embraced the idea that culture and cultural

training would prove key in gaining the upper hand against insurgents. Thus, over the course of

the war, the Department of Defense wrestled with many competing definitions of culture and

ways to better prepare the troops for the cultural environment that they would face once

deployed and stood up a wide variety of programs to expand troops' cultural awareness.[13]

    The evolution in people's understanding of the nature of the conflict eventually led to the

development of a new counterinsurgency interim field manual that was subsequently replaced by

a multi-service field manual, the creation of which, remarkably, involved a wide range of actors

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[11] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2006), 1.1, 1.19. It is worth noting that scholars have regularly created subdivisions within counterinsurgency—such as enemy-centric counterinsurgency, which they then oppose to so-called population-centric counterinsurgency. However, in fragmenting the concept into ever-narrower categories, not only do they obscure the great degree of continuity that existed throughout the war in Iraq, but also the significant overlap between many of the actors in the early 2000s COIN debate. Therefore, throughout this work, I will consider counterinsurgency in its broadest sense, as encompassing all the means developed and employed by the military to counter the insurgency. In sum, counterinsurgency presupposes the acknowledgment of an insurgency's existence and the implementation of measures to defeat it.

[12] While the 2006 *Counterinsurgency* field manual is often colloquially referred to as a joint publication, it is, technically, a multi-service publication since it only applied to the Army and Marine Corps rather than all the services.

[13] Despite that consensus over the importance of culture, scholars involved in the development of these programs pointed out that the military's understanding of culture "often were at odds with contemporary science," in that it thought of culture as "a static set of traits, behaviors, or social structures that could be clearly described." This view of culture, those experts lamented, "was not particularly useful for preparing military personnel for the fluid, changing cultural patterns they would actually encounter." Kerry B. Fosher and Lauren Mackenzie, eds., *The Rise and Decline of U.S. Military Culture Programs, 2004-20* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2021), 9.

from both within and without the armed forces. I further argue that the relentless promotion effort that surrounded the writing of the multi-service *Counterinsurgency* field manual and continued well into the second half of the conflict helped create a window of opportunity for the Bush administration to conduct its 2007-2008 surge. Tracing this highly effective promotion campaign helps us understand how the military shaped its relations with the American public and civilian branches of the government through its use of the media. Without counterinsurgency's popularity, President Bush's options in Iraq would have likely been limited to withdrawal—a significant departure from the administration's foreign policy line in the Middle East. However, given the public and Congress' familiarity with counterinsurgency—thanks to the military's efforts to promote the concept well beyond military circles—President Bush was able to frame the surge as a change of strategy and not simply an increase of troops, and to claim that this "new" doctrine would yield a different outcome from the 2003-2006 quagmire.

What follows is the story of the United States' preparation for the war and subsequent occupation of Iraq, in which I explain why the situation deteriorated so quickly and how the military adapted once the insurgency was underway.[14] The history of counterinsurgency in Iraq is not a strictly operational one limited to the battlefield.[15] Therefore, rather than focusing narrowly on the armed forces, this story encompasses a wide range of actors who all played a part in the events' unfolding, from the Pentagon's civilian leadership, to Army and Marine Corps commanders, to journalists, to Congress, to academics, to the White House.

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[14] It is worth noting that as the military was adopting counterinsurgency in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan largely remained in the background, and thus it is beyond the present scope of the story.

[15] While the term "military history" has long been used to refer to strictly operational matters, this work embraces its wider definition, which encompasses both traditional operational history and war and society aspects, as well as everything in between.

In the weeks following the coalition forces' initial victory, a series of American blunders caused the situation in Iraq to go awry and eventually left the military with no choice but to fight an insurgency. These mistakes initially occurred because the higher echelons of the Department of Defense (DOD) never appropriately prepared for post-conflict operations, "phase IV" in military parlance. They were subsequently compounded by mismanagement on the part of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), which had been put together and placed in charge of the civilian side of the operation at the very last moment. Chief among those latter mistakes was Ambassador Paul Bremer's decision to fully disband the Iraqi armed forces as part of the de-Baathification program, which left thousands of men, armed and trained, unemployed and virtually without prospects for the future.[16] Many of these men came to see the United States' troops as an occupation force and chose to take up arms against the invader. In addition, the fall of the regime and the state of chaos that followed when the Iraqi police ceased to enforce law and order caused sectarian tensions to resurface between the country's various factions. By the fall of 2003, a full-fledged insurgency was raging throughout the country and it was up to the military to find a solution to the civilian-made problem.

Still, civilians were not the only ones at fault. The military bears its fair share of responsibility in the events that followed. Having essentially refused to train for counterinsurgency since the Vietnam War fiasco, despite the historical prevalence of such operations, the US military, and the Army in particular, failed to prepare its troops for the situation they were now facing. In lieu of institutional guidance, commanders in theater had to rely on their personal knowledge and understanding to develop haphazard measures to counter

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[16] Modeled upon the denazification efforts that followed the Allied victory in WWII, de-Baathification was supposed to remove only the top echelons of the Baath party from the country's bureaucracy, leaving the institutions intact but free from the dictator's party's influence. In practice however, the implementation of the order went far deeper and left a lot of men without prospects and holding a grudge against occupation forces.

the insurgency, which led to a mosaic of experiments whose effectiveness varied widely depending on individual degrees of expertise during the first years of the conflict. Upon his arrival, General George Casey, commander of Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) from 2004 to early 2007, tried to find ways to better implement counterinsurgency in theater, such as creating a "COIN Academy" to train officers for a few days when they rotated in, but on the whole, his efforts fell short of a full-fledged coherent approach. To make matters worse, it took months before the highest echelons of DOD even recognized the existence of an insurgency and much longer for a comprehensive institutional response to be developed. In sum, the adoption of counterinsurgency during OIF initially was a bottom-up process that had to fight its way against the hierarchy's flawed understanding of the nature of the conflict.

In addition to the various measures taken by the military in the Iraqi theater to adapt to the situation at hands, in 2004, the Army published an interim field manual dedicated to counterinsurgency—*Counterinsurgency Operations*.[17] Before then, the Army's last doctrinal publication on counterinsurgency dated back to 1986 under the title *Low Intensity Conflict*. Meanwhile, the Marine Corps was still working off its *Small Wars Manual*, originally published in 1940.[18] By 2005, the Army and the Marine Corps also started to adapt training and education programs states-side. Changes included reforms of the professional military education schools' curricula to better reflect the situation at hand, as well as the creation of centers dedicated to the study of COIN or culture more broadly. These programs built on the understanding that the local population is asymmetric warfare's center of gravity, meaning that its acquiescence is critical to the conduct of operations for either insurgents or counterinsurgents, who are therefore both vying

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[17] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, FMI 3-07.22 (Department of the Army, 2004). Published in October 2004, the interim field manual was set to expire in October 2006.

[18] The manual was initially published in 1935 but it is usually known through the 1940 revised version. Ron Schaffer, "The 1940 Small Wars Manual and the 'Lessons of History,'" *Military Affairs* 36, no. 2 (April 1972): 46.

to gain its support. It was also generally accepted that insurgents have the upper hand in that

contest because of their familiarity with the population. As a consequence, in an attempt to better

compete with the insurgents, cultural awareness became a central tenet of the military's effort to

prepare its troops. Through these changes, the US military was officially recognizing the

centrality of counterinsurgency to the Iraqi conflict, but coalition troops still fell short of a

coherent implementation of COIN principles across the entire war theater.

In late 2005, the Army and the Marine Corps started to work towards a new multi-service

publication. Its goal was to make up for counterinsurgency operations having been neglected in

American military doctrine for several decades.[19] Under the impetus of General David Petraeus,

then commander of the Army Combined Arms Center (CAC), this new counterinsurgency field

manual was written at record speed and published in December 2006. Remarkably, the field

manual's writing involved a wide range of individuals, most affiliated with the military in some

shape or form, but also many who came from the civilian academic world; this array of

contributors makes it rather singular. Anthropologists' involvement, in particular, stemmed from

the fact that, like many of the programs stood up by the military in the year prior, the field

manual stressed the importance of culture and cultural understanding.

Usually known under its Army denomination, FM 3-24, the field manual immediately

met an immense popularity. Even though this was to be expected given soldiers and Marines'

dire need for guidance in Iraq, what makes its story striking is the fact that the manual also

became quite popular with the media and the American public more broadly. Thanks to

Petraeus's relentless promotion of COIN since the manual's inception, instead of remaining a

matter for professionals, counterinsurgency found its way into the mainstream to the point that

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[19] Department of the Army, "Preface," in *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2006), vii.

its core precepts were discussed in various newspapers and magazines, and even on late night TV.[20] While supporters of COIN argued it was the best solution to the worsening of the situation in Iraq, their opponents believed that the promises of counterinsurgency were overstated and that the US military should not put its core conventional capabilities at risk by focusing on more elusive, "soft" practices. In the end though, the unparalleled public affairs campaign surrounding FM 3-24 carried significant consequences for the conduct of operations in Iraq, as the narrative crafted by Petraeus proved successful in presenting counterinsurgency as a solution that could allow the United States to turn the tide in the war.

By the time the new field manual was published, support for the war in Iraq had reached an all-time low. In November 2006, the Democratic party obtained a majority of seats in the House and the Senate in the mid-term elections, in no small part in response to the president's handling of the war in Iraq, which more and more electors started to view critically. Following this blow to his leadership, President Bush opted for a hail Mary move and, rather than heeding to the pressure and withdrawing the troops, chose instead to double-down on Iraq. Taking advantage of counterinsurgency's popularity, Bush announced in January 2007 that General Petraeus would take command of MNF-I and preside over what would come to be known as the surge; an additional 30,000 troops sent to the Iraqi theater until 2008 in order to help stabilize the country. This was a landslide victory for counterinsurgency's supporters, who argued that adopting a large-scale counterinsurgency strategy was the only way to turn the tide in Iraq. Since Petraeus had just spearheaded the creation of FM 3-24 at Fort Leavenworth, he was to bring his counterinsurgency expertise to bear and implement an overhaul of the coalition's

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[20] Articles dedicated to counterinsurgency appeared in leading newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, in *Time* magazine, the doctrine was discussed on the *Charlie Rose Show* on several occasions, and even featured on the *Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

strategy, essentially putting the manual to the test. General Petraeus later called it "the most important endeavor—and greatest challenge—of [his] thirty-seven years in uniform."[21] Most commentators agree that the surge did in fact lead to a significant decrease of violence in Iraq, but Petraeus's impact is debated.

Pitting so-called "COINdinistas" against "COINtras," the discussions around counterinsurgency unfolded on a variety of platforms (from specialized military publications to mainstream media) and often veered into outright polemic.[22] Some people have claimed that Petraeus's arrival in Iraq in 2007 led to a turn to counterinsurgency, when in fact, rather than conducting a total overhaul in the conduct of the war, Petraeus's true achievement was in using counterinsurgency to frame every aspect of the discourse during the surge. In this work, I demonstrate that it was this successful promotion campaign that in turn helped the general bring a greater degree of operational coherence to the war theater and bought him additional time with the American people and Congress.

A few years after the surge, under the Obama administration, the United States' focus shifted away from Iraq, a war that the new president had long criticized as a war of choice, back to Afghanistan, which President Obama saw as a war of necessity.[23] By the end of 2011, after eight years of combat and over thirty-six thousand American casualties, US troops finally left Iraq. Despite the improvement brought about by the surge, over time, the Iraqi Prime Minister's

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[21] David Petraeus, "Foreword," in *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War*, by Peter R. Mansoor, The Yale Library of Military History (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).
[22] The labels "COINdinistas" and "COINtras" are references to the Nicaraguan Revolution, which opposed Sandinistas to US-backed Contras. Intended for derisive purposes, the creation of these labels furthered the polarization of the debate. Security studies expert David Ucko critiques it, writing that "counterinsurgency is not a flavor of ice-cream or a sports team, to be liked or disliked, but an ambiguous term with many meanings. It should therefore be eminently possible to appreciate counterinsurgency for its contributions, all while understanding its limitations." David H. Ucko, "The Real Myths of Counterinsurgency," *War on the Rocks* (blog), June 10, 2014, https://warontherocks.com/2014/06/the-real-myths-of-counterinsurgency/.
[23] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention," August 17, 2009, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/node/907.

"authoritarian and sectarian policies and actions" led the country back into civil war.[24] While COIN remained a focus of US military doctrine a while longer, soon, it too disappeared in the background. In a few years, counterinsurgency was once again ripped out of the service schools' curricula under the impetus of a new generation of nostalgic senior officers, to make yet more room for classes on conventional conflicts with near-peer adversaries reminiscent of the Cold War era. By the late 2010s, it would be hard to determine what, if anything, had truly been accomplished in rethinking military doctrine during the previous decade.

For the US military, counterinsurgency has long been a controversial topic, and the Iraq War was no exception. Historically, counterinsurgency has been a central tenet of the American way of war and yet it has hardly ever been acknowledged as such. Instead, the military has placed so-called "conventional" operations, with their clear-cut outcomes usually in the United States' favor, front and center. In the second half of the 20th century, World War II and its subsequent lionization in popular memory as the epitome of the good war have further cemented that position, while the disaster of the Vietnam War dealt a debilitating blow to counterinsurgency warfare. Following its defeat in South East Asia in the early 1970s, the United States adopted the Weinberger doctrine, which stated that the United States would only commit its armed forces to conflicts that were a direct threat to national security and then only do so with full support of the American people and overwhelming force. In other words, the doctrine essentially asserted that proper warfare should involve two armies clashing over a battlefield, as in Pickett's charge at Gettysburg, soldiers attempting to cross the no man's land during the battle of Verdun, or troops storming beaches in the D-Day landings. This belief was so deeply

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[24] Jeanne Godfroy and Liam Collins, "Iraq, 2003–2011: Succeeding to Fail," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 161, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2018.1552354.

ingrained in people's minds that by the time the insurgency erupted in Iraq, hardly anyone within the US national security establishment was prepared to acknowledge it, let alone deal with it. Over the next chapters, I will retrace the military's progressive and disputed adoption of counterinsurgency in its pursuit of victory in Iraq and the debates that surrounded it to show how, in spite of its controversial nature, counterinsurgency managed to evolve from old, discarded doctrine into the US military's creed in a matter of a few years.

To this point, the bulk of the studies dedicated to COIN during the war in Iraq have been either journalistic chronicles or partisan accounts of events, written by people with a vested interest in the debate, including Conrad Crane, Gian Gentile, David Kilcullen, Peter Mansoor, and John Nagl. My work offers a comprehensive approach to COIN during OIF that connects the different institutional efforts at the strategic level, in-theater operational and tactical developments, and counterinsurgency's representation in the media into one narrative. Building upon studies of counterinsurgency by scholars such as Andrew Birtle, David Fitzgerald, Martin Clemis, and David Ucko, I move beyond both triumphal narratives of the creation of a new doctrine and descriptions of a simple institutional re-learning of forgotten lessons, to show that the singularity of the story of counterinsurgency during Operation Iraqi Freedom resides in its adoption from the bottom-up against institutional resistance, the amount of popular support its promotion generated, and its eventual influence on the nation's foreign policy.

This work is chronological and divided in two main parts that reflect two separate phases in the United States' adoption of counterinsurgency during OIF—two sides of the same COIN, if you will. The first part focuses on the United States' conflicted relation to counterinsurgency operations—both as a nation and within the armed forces—which first led to the mismanagement

of post-conflict operations and subsequently caused institutional resistance to the bottom-up adoption of counterinsurgency methods. Then, the second part shows how the creation of FM 3-24 and the promotion effort that surrounded it led to a shift in the discourse on counterinsurgency, to the point that it opened a window of opportunity for President Bush to implement the surge and eventually framed the entire conduct of operations in Iraq.

The first chapter traces the United States' history with counterinsurgency back to the 18th century. It shows that the Iraq War was but the last chapter in a long list of American involvements in irregular warfare, despite repeated attempts to steer clear of such conflicts. The cognitive dissonance between the wars actually fought by the United States and those it remembers helps explain the military's state of unpreparedness in the face of the Iraqi insurgency, as well as the Pentagon leadership's reluctance to even acknowledge the existence of said insurgency.

The second chapter is split in two parts. First, I focus on the planning stage of the Iraq War to trace back the roots of the issues that COIN subsequently sought to address, in order to unpack the role of the United States in its own demise. While the divided nature of Iraq's population made sectarian violence likely in the wake of Saddam's removal from power, it was the United States' failure to appropriately plan for it that sealed the fate of the country. In the second half of the chapter, I show how, even though the invasion played out seamlessly in the initial weeks of the conflict, the insurgency was able to rise. In effect, the lack of focus on post-conflict operations prior to the invasion and the small number of boots on the ground made it nearly impossible for coalition troops to prevent Iraq from spiraling into chaos once violence started to erupt.

In chapter 3, I expose the ways in which US troops in theater initially attempted to counteract the insurgency, from the summer following the invasion to General Casey's tenure as MFN-I commander through the adoption of disparate counterinsurgency measures, and without institutional guidance from the Pentagon. I highlight how troops' understanding of the situation in Iraq conflicted with the views of DOD's leadership, which made it nearly impossible to use counterinsurgency as the coalition's guiding line, since the secretary of defense first denied the existence of an insurgency and later opposed the implementation of counterinsurgency measures. Counterinsurgency's manpower requirements were anathema to the secretary's light footprint approach to the conflict.

In chapter 4, I detail some of the various initiatives taken by the Army and the Marine Corps states-side to address the insurgency in training and education programs before an overarching institutional response was developed. I show that many of these changes revolved around the notion that US troops needed to be more adept at understanding the enemy as well as the local population, which led the military to establish a variety of programs and centers that emphasized cultural training, including the Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL) and the Human Terrain System (HTS).

Moving to the second half of the story in chapter 5, I show the process behind the creation of FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* and the "turn to COIN" narrative that surrounded the publication thanks to Petraeus's promotion efforts. In particular, I highlight the fact that the development of this new doctrine was singular in that it involved many people outside of the military, such as journalists and academics, throughout the entire process—from the initial drafts to the eventual promotion of the doctrine. This blurring of the lines between military and civilian matters further amplified the debate around COIN in the media. The increased participation of

civilian experts in the war effort—in particular anthropologists—caused significant backlash from academic circles and set the stage for debates around counterinsurgency to expand beyond the professional military realm into the mainstream. Counterinsurgency's popularity in turn helped shape the president's decision to double-down on the war.

In the sixth chapter, I leave the domestic front and move back to the Iraqi theater in order to analyze the top-down implementation of the new doctrine under General Petraeus's leadership during what became known as the surge. Specifically, I look at the way Petraeus was able to shift the narrative surrounding the war in Iraq by presenting counterinsurgency as a new solution, despite its continuing presence since the beginning of the conflict, and how this framing was debated at the time. I argue that the decrease of violence during the surge was the culmination of a wide range of counterinsurgency measures developed and adopted up to that point, supported by a shift in the narrative, rather than the sole result of Petraeus's actions.

Finally, in the epilogue, I conduct an assessment of the United States' relationship to counterinsurgency during and following the Iraq War, and discuss the doctrine's potential future within the US military. I expand the conversation to highlight broader significance of these developments for the conduct of future wars, foreign policy, but also for the relationship between the US military and American civilians.

Part I: Counterinsurgency's Come-Back(s)

Chapter 1: The US Military and Two Centuries of Counterinsurgency

The US military's utter lack of preparedness when the insurgency started in Iraq in 2003 might suggest that this was the first time it had confronted such a situation, yet nothing is farther from the truth. Even though the military has labeled asymmetric warfare "unconventional" and relegated it to "military operations other than war" (MOOTW), it is hardly an anomaly. Over the past two centuries, the United States has been party to many conflicts that have alternatively been described as guerilla, insurrection, low-intensity, or irregular.[1] In fact, even though the epithet "conventional" has been impressed on wars that involve two armies confronting each other head-on on the battlefield, these have historically been less prevalent than so-called "irregular conflicts."[2]

Such conflicts occur between forces of uneven strengths and usually see an objectively weaker group develop tactics that circumvent the strengths of a stronger, more established opponent. The US military thus defines insurgency as "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict."[3] Counterinsurgency in turn, according to the Department of the Army, consists of "military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to

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[1] The wide variety of terms associated with insurgency warfare and its counterinsurgency pendant should be understood as historically contingent rather than referring to different concepts altogether, even though the varied terminology did contribute to each generation believing that it was confronted to a new and unique problem (Frank G. Hoffman, "Small Wars Revisited: The United States and Nontraditional Wars," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 6 (December 1, 2005): 916, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390500441040.). I will use the different terms interchangeably throughout this work for stylistic purpose essentially.

[2] Even though I am demonstrating here that irregular conflicts are in fact the norm, I will still use irregular warfare without quotation marks throughout the rest of the work as it is the accepted terminology.

[3] Definitions evolve over time, but for the purpose of this work I chose to rely on those outlined in the 2006 *Counterinsurgency* field manual. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1.1.

defeat insurgency" which requires "offensive, defensive, and stability operations."[4] As these

definitions demonstrate, the range of operations encompassed by insurgency and

counterinsurgency is wide. Insurgents, quite logically, try to avoid confronting their opponent

head-on, since a conventional confrontation of forces would most likely result in their defeat.

Instead, they favor ambushes and explosive devices, and deploy a combination of information

operations and terror attacks meant to turn the population against the established authority, or at

least to dissuade people from supporting it. Meanwhile, the tactics employed by

counterinsurgents go from killing or capturing insurgents to efforts aimed at coopting the support

of the local population, often described as "winning hearts and minds." These operations consist

of providing security to civilians, but also repairing or improving a region's infrastructure,

establishing police forces, or supporting the economy. In sum, counterinsurgency seeks to

address both the roots and expression of the insurgency through any means that might bring

stability to the area. As such, counterinsurgency operations tend to be a much broader-

encompassing form of warfare than conventional operations.

For the United States in particular, irregular conflicts have been essential to the country's

creation, from the Revolutionary War to the Frontier Wars, and remained important for the next

century. The United States has been the counterinsurgent power in just about every conflict since

the Revolutionary War and yet, retracing the history of the United States' involvement in

asymmetric wars, this chapter demonstrates that the US military systematically failed to

institutionalize lessons learned during these numerous confrontations.

There were a few moments when counterinsurgency almost made it into the doctrinal

canon, and different services had varying degrees of success with this type of warfare. But even

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[4] Department of the Army, 1.1, 1.19.

though the Marine Corps has tended to be somewhat more adept at conducting counterinsurgency operations and maintaining these skills than the Army, overarching cultural biases prevented the US military from developing a proficiency in counterinsurgency. After the Vietnam War fiasco especially, the military decided to leave this type of warfare in the past, once and for all. Instead, it chose to focus its attention on conventional wars whose easily identifiable enemies and clear-cut outcomes make far more appealing. This conflicted history with counterinsurgency meant that, in spite of extensive past experience, the military was left woefully unprepared in the face of the 2000s Iraqi insurgency.

Once Upon a Counterinsurgency

Even though popular portrayals of war in movies and documentaries usually treat WWII as the standard, there is in fact nothing "conventional" about this conflict. Rather, it stands as an exception. Its scale, clear-cut outcome, and the amount of support it generated across the US population—at the time and in its memorialization—are in fact quite unconventional. Instead, whether before or after the middle of the 20th century, America's fights have been steeped in irregular warfare.[5] What has varied is the degree of success the United States has met in those ventures and the lessons it has subsequently drawn from them.

The roots of the United States' experience with asymmetric warfare can be found at the country's inception. When the thirteen American colonies rebelled against their British ruler at the end of the 18th century, they had no choice but to fight unconventionally, as they would not have stood a chance against the British imperial might in a head-on confrontation. As George

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[5] For an in-depth analysis of US involvement in counterinsurgency operations see the two-volume study by the Center of Military History: Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860-1941*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2009); Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2006).

Washington himself acknowledged, "it would be presumption to draw out our Young Troops into open ground, against their Superiors both in number and Discipline."[6] Instead, under Washington's leadership, revolutionaries achieved victory by harassing British troops and then retreating into the countryside, making it increasingly difficult for the crown's forces to maintain their hold on cities and to secure transportation lines. Patriots were not able to inflict a decisive defeat upon imperial troops, but they maintained pressure until Britain decided that American colonies were not worth the effort or the cost anymore.[7] These methods are typical of insurgencies, and the fact that they essentially led to the creation of the United States is a testament to their efficacy. This initial experience should have been a lasting lesson for the United States and caused it to think twice before adopting Britain's hubris, yet this was not the case.

While the Revolutionary War was the last time that American troops were the insurgent forces fighting against a foreign invader, it was far from the last time that the United States got involved in asymmetric warfare. In the years following their victory against the redcoats, Americans set out on imperial ventures of their own, expanding the United States' territorial borders continentally at first and then beyond. These efforts to subjugate other nations and gain control over their territories often resulted in asymmetric conflicts. The United States could usually rely on resources far greater than its opponents', especially in terms of material and technology, even when those opponents proved to be better skilled fighters. This time around, the Americans had become the formal counterinsurgent entity seeking to impose its government.

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[6] George Washington, "George Washington Papers, Series 3, Varick Transcripts, 1775-1785, Subseries 3A, Continental Congress, 1775-1783, Letterbook 1: June 24, 1775 - Sept. 22, 1776," George Washington papers, Library of Congress Website, accessed July 24, 2020, https://www.loc.gov/resource/mgw3a.001/?sp=407&st=text.
[7] Michael E. O'Hanlon, "America's History of Counterinsurgency," *Brookings* (blog), June 18, 2009, https://www.brookings.edu/research/americas-history-of-counterinsurgency/.

Throughout the 19th century, white settlers, aided by the newly formed US government, forced their way westward into territories described as empty land ripe for the taking, when in fact, it was anything but. For every bit of territory gained by the settlers, scores of Indians were either displaced or killed. Their fierce resistance to the invasion of their territory elicited an ever-more brutal reaction on the part of the American government, which repeatedly rescinded its word and abrogated treaties previously signed with Indian nations. Indian tribes were more numerous than the American settlers and soldiers invading their territories, and often better warriors. However, in terms of equipment, weapons, and resources more broadly, white colonizers unquestionably had the upper hand. Given this discrepancy and the methods employed by both sides, wars on the Frontier squarely fit the irregular warfare framework.

Incapable of securing western territories through decisive victory on the battlefield, the United States chose to adopt measures of such a violent nature that experts argue that "they were in fact closer to ethnic cleansing missions in the modern vernacular."[8] After decades of skirmishes and ambushes, the US military was finally successful when, instead of focusing narrowly on battles, it was able to leverage its logistical support while simultaneously depriving Indians of theirs by decimating the buffalo.[9] Targeting the livelihood of the enemy as well as civilian populations in addition to fighters became a staple of the US military's operations to subdue enemy nations and gain control over their territory. Some of these violent and coercive measures turned out to be particularly enduring, as the notion of strategic hamlets during the

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[8] O'Hanlon.
[9] Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 69–70. For a detailed account of bisons's disappearance on the plains, beyond its extermination through hunting, see Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750 - 1920*, 11th printing, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Vietnam War can easily be compared to the "strategy of confining and controlling populations through the establishment of reservations" during the wars on the Frontier.[10]

The Indian Wars of the 19th century also marked the beginning of another trend that would last well over a century: the army did not attempt to carry lessons from one Indian War to the next, but instead forced soldiers to start anew with each new war rather than building on past experience.[11] Because officers perceived the actions of the Army on the Frontier as nothing more than skirmishes, they easily dismissed the lessons that had been learned by the commanders who fought them—using mobile cavalry units, relying on local intelligence sources, anticipating ambushes. As a consequence, the few lessons that were passed on were disseminated through field reports and memoirs, but not codified in formal doctrine.[12] Despite many echoes from one unconventional conflict to the next, this pattern of dismissing lessons from irregular warfare persisted in some form all the way to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Even during the Civil War, traditionally remembered for its confrontations along the East Coast and the clash of Robert E. Lee's troops with the Army of the Potomac, Confederates' irregular forces played a significant part in the war effort and thus forced the US Army to develop counterinsurgency measures. Most confederate generals had been formally educated in military academies and therefore favored disciplined armies and conventional fighting—while they acknowledged the threat that irregular troops could pose, their training at West Point would have nonetheless emphasized conventional operations as the proper form of warfare.[13] In addition, because of the scale and the technology employed during the conflict, the Civil War is

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[10] Paul Rich, "Introduction: A Historical Overview of US Counter-Insurgency," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25, no. 1 (2014): 9, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310412331300536.
[11] Kori Schake, "Lessons from the Indian Wars," *Policy Review*, no. 177 (March 2, 2013): 73.
[12] Linn, *The Echo of Battle*, 69–71.
[13] Robert R. Mackey, *Uncivil War Irregular Warfare in the Upper South, 1861-1865*, Campaigns & Commanders (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 9.

usually remembered for ushering in the age of total war.[14] Therefore, both contemporary actors

and people remembering the war in retrospect tend to think of the conflict solely as a

conventional war. Yet, because of white Southerners' overwhelming support for the

Confederacy, insurgencies rose in most of the Southern and border states as US troops advanced.

They were so widespread that at times they tied down up to a third of the US Army.[15] Loosely

organized and not wearing uniforms, these fighters acted outside the bounds of the laws of war

and, if captured, were treated like common criminals, not enemy fighters.[16] It is worth noting that

while their tactics were not codified, many Southern guerillas explicitly drew parallels between

their actions and those of their forefathers, equating their struggle to that of the Patriots against

Great Britain and likewise concentrating their efforts on disrupting communication and supply

lines.[17]

Meanwhile, confronted with this hostile environment, the United States Army once again

relied on violent tactics akin to those it had employed against Indians and in Mexico. These

included "fining, imprisoning, forcibly relocating, or burning the crops or houses of individuals

suspected of aiding the guerillas" and "executing captured guerillas on the spot" as a means to

squash enemy resistance after more benevolent initiatives to coopt the population's support

failed to yield substantive results.[18] Because guerilla warfare intentionally blurred the line

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[14] Austin G. Long, *The Soul of Armies: Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Military Culture in the US and UK*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 37–48.

[15] Daniel E. Sutherland, "Guerrilla Warfare, Democracy, and the Fate of the Confederacy," *The Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 2 (2002): 273–75, https://doi.org/10.2307/3069933; Mark Moyar, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 15; Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860-1941*, 23.

[16] Historian Robert Mackey distinguishes between three categories of irregular fighters waging what he called the "uncivil war": partisans, guerillas, and bushwhackers. See Mackey, *Uncivil War Irregular Warfare in the Upper South, 1861-1865*, 8–14. In this work's framework however, only the latter two fall into the "insurgent" category as partisans were formal extensions of the regular armies.

[17] Sutherland, "Guerrilla Warfare, Democracy, and the Fate of the Confederacy," 268, 273.

[18] Moyar, *A Question of Command*, 17; Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860-1941*, 27.

between soldier and civilian, officers generally perceived it as dishonorable and improper for "civilized" people. US officers' frustration in the face of elusive plain-clothed enemies, added to the efficacy of guerilla tactics, explains their willingness to rely on such severe repression aimed at both guerillas themselves and the population suspected of abating them.[19] Over the course of the war, the pattern of brutal retaliation spun out of control because guerilla practices led to a spiraling of violence that only concluded when the US Army finally exhausted the Confederacy's armed forces and resources, forcing its surrender.[20] The fact that victory was eventually achieved through conventional operations and sealed by formal surrender meant that, even though the Army had been quite successful in its targeting of the Southern insurrections, it did not codify the techniques it had developed, which for the most part faded away in the memories of the war's veterans.[21]

Following the United States' victory, its troops essentially conducted nation-building operations across the South throughout the Reconstruction era. In order to ensure that the advances achieved during the war would endure, the US Army was put in charge of occupying the defeated Southern states and administering their reintegration into the Union, in collaboration with the Freedmen's Bureau. For nearly five years after Lee's surrender at Appomattox, the US

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[19] In 1863, largely in response to the Southern insurgency, the War Department published General Order 100 to formally codify the way the military was to behave towards the enemy's armed forces and civilian populations, which in terms of guerillas essentially sanctioned the violent practices employed by US officers up until that point. GO 100 became the foundation for future international law of war agreements. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860-1941*, 32–36.

[20] Sutherland, "Guerrilla Warfare, Democracy, and the Fate of the Confederacy," 289–90.

[21] Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860-1941*, 47–48. When Ulysses S. Grant became president in 1868, he appointed General William T. Sherman as commanding general of the Army, thus putting him in charge of the Army's professional education system. Drawing on his understanding of the lessons of the Civil War, Sherman put a premium on ensuring that officers would be prepared to fight another total war, which would mobilize large numbers of civilians under the command of a small cadre of professional soldiers. Long, *The Soul of Armies*, 47; Mackey, *Uncivil War Irregular Warfare in the Upper South, 1861-1865*, 22.

Army had over 20,000 troops stationed in the South.[22] Battles were over, but wartime was not.[23] Between March 1867 and July 1868, the South was divided into five military districts in which the Army oversaw law enforcement, the political process, as well as the administration of justice.[24] The methods developed to administer the South under martial law could have been the bedrock of a doctrinal approach for military occupations following an insurgency, however, following President Andrew Johnson's decision to withdraw troops from the South and the failure of the Reconstruction, those lessons failed to be institutionalized too.

New Century, Same Tactics

The United States' reliance on extreme violence against insurgents did not end with the closing of the Frontier. To the contrary, the United States employed similar tactics to those it had developed during the Indian Wars once it sought to expand its territory beyond its continental borders, still, none of these experiences let to a codifying of said tactics into formal doctrine.

At the turn of the century, US armed forces once again confronted an insurgency, this time in the Philippines. Following the end of the Spanish-American War in the summer 1898, during which American naval forces supported Filipino ground troops against Spanish imperialists, the United States reneged on its promise to its allies. Instead of supporting Filipinos' claim to independence when the Spanish surrendered after the siege of Manila, the United States chose to take over ruling the colony and bought the islands from Spain for $20 million. Outraged by this betrayal, the Filipinos who had just achieved victory against the Spanish turned their arms against the Americans. The confrontation started in earnest in February

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[22] Gregory P. Downs, *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of War* (Harvard University Press, 2019), 9.

[23] Downs, *After Appomattox*.

[24] Mark L. Bradley, *The Army and Reconstruction, 1865-1877*, CMH Pub 75 (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2015), 34, http://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo60344.

1899 and, after several months of confrontation, the United States' forces defeated Emilio

Aguinaldo's Army of Liberation and forced him to retreat into the mountains. At that point,

Filipino fighters chose to capitalize on their knowledge of the terrain and the people and resorted

to guerilla warfare. In response to the raids and ambushes conducted by Aguinaldo's forces

against occupying troops, the US Army started to employ counterinsurgency methods.[25] While

soldiers did not import specific techniques from the Indian Wars, the mindset that pervaded

among the Frontier military that "encouraged adaptability, individual initiative, and

aggressiveness" found its way to the Philippines War.[26]

      To counter the guerillas, US troops developed their own raids against enemy

encampments known as "roundups" and worked to destroy the insurgents' logistical base by

burning crops and other supplies.[27] In addition to targeting guerillas and depriving them from

material resources, the military also developed a pacification campaign designed to sever the

insurgents from their popular support. This campaign started by focusing on benevolent civil-

affairs missions, which ranged from issuing ID cards to the construction of schools and roadways

designed to coopt the population's support, but progressively veered towards more violent

methods. As the milder forms of pacification failed to suppress the insurgency, the US military

employed increasingly repressive measures, including "the imposition of fines and communal

punishments, the destruction of private property, the exile of individuals and the relocation of

populations, imprisonment, and, in the case of guerillas and their closest civilian allies,

execution."[28] Since rallying the population to the American side through enticements had failed,

the US military sought to scare the population into compliance. These methods, compounded by

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[25] Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860-1941*, 110–11.
[26] Birtle, 113.
[27] Birtle, 114, 128.
[28] Birtle, 126.

blunders on the part of the insurgents, eventually led to an American victory.[29] Still, it did not

lead to an institutionalization of the tactics in doctrine.

For the rest of the first half of the 20st century, the so-called "Banana Wars" constituted

the main theater for American counterinsurgency operations. Between 1906 and 1933, the United

States became involved in "small wars" in Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua.

Both the Army and the Marine Corps fought in the Philippines War and that in Cuba. However,

by the time operations started in Haiti in 1915, small wars had become the exclusive domain of

the Marine Corps.[30] The Marine Corps has always been a much smaller service than the Army,

both in terms of the number of men and women who serve in it and its budget.[31] Because of such

challenges, it has always been crucial for the Marine Corps to demonstrate its value and

specificity, to prove that it is not just another Army and that its existence is warranted. To that

end, Marines developed their own particular culture and "created a set of narratives for and about

themselves that attained wide legitimacy within their organization and without," and carved

themselves a niche in the realm of military operations that went well beyond amphibious warfare

by emphasizing their versatility.[32]

Lasting between six and nineteen years, the "small wars" of the early 1900s had the

general characteristics of full-fledged colonial occupations, with the Marines essentially acting as

governors. Even though the Banana Wars eventually resulted in the first deliberate effort to

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[29] Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War,1899-1902*, Modern War Studies (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

[30] Keith B. Bickel, *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915-1940* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), xi, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/txu.059173007682956.

[31] In the early 2000s, the Army had nearly three times as many service personnel as the Marine Corps and was operating a budget seven times that of the USMC. "DoD Personnel, Workforce Reports & Publications," accessed September 5, 2019, https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp; Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (comptroller), "National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2003," March 2002, 24, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/Docs/fy2003_greenbook.pdf.

[32] Aaron B. O'Connell, *Underdogs: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2.

develop a defined set of practices for small wars, there was no such doctrine when the wars began, a problem that was, not for the last time, compounded by a lack of clear guidance from Washington. In addition, similarly to the way the Army had approached Indian Wars, the USMC did not really build upon each experience as the different interventions unfolded. Altogether, this meant that Marines were starting anew each time and had to go through a slow and costly re-learning process.[33] For instance, even though small patrols proved to be most effective in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the Marine Corps initially tried to quell the Nicaraguan insurgency by moving in large columns and only adapted once those proved ineffective.[34]

After three decades of fighting in Central America, the USMC finally drew upon its experience to institutionalize lessons in a *Small Wars Manual*, initially published in 1935 but better known through the 1940 revised version.[35] Throughout its fifteen chapters, the manual detailed the characteristics of such "small wars," which it defined as: "operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation."[36] It also suggested that small wars were conducted differently from conventional warfare because they stayed below the threshold of a declaration of war.[37] Falling short of an "actual" war—the various conflicts were instead labeled insurrections or rebellions— small wars thus became the purview of the Marine Corps expeditionary force, while the Army focused its attention on conventional operations. The manual stressed the civil-affairs dimension

[33] Jeannie L. Johnson, *The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture: Lessons Learned and Lost in America's Wars* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 143.
[34] Johnson, 148–49.
[35] Schaffer, "The 1940 Small Wars Manual and the 'Lessons of History,'" 46.
[36] US Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940), 1.
[37] The manual explicitly stated that "the very inception of small wars, as a rule, is an official act of the Chief Executive who personally gives instructions without action of Congress." US Marine Corps, 4, 11.

of small wars, albeit with a marked colonial bias. It argued that "interventions or occupations are usually peaceful and altruistic. Accordingly, the methods of procedure must rigidly conform to this purpose," while simultaneously acknowledging that "when forced to resort to arms to carry out the object of the intervention, the operation must be pursued energetically and expeditiously in order to overcome the resistance as quickly as possible."[38]

As these examples illustrate, throughout both the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, the vast majority of conflicts involving the United States, aside from the main campaigns of the Civil War, were of an irregular nature. And, in addition to developing various forms of civil-affairs programs, US armed forces often relied on extreme levels of brutality to suppress enemy resistance by targeting the population as a whole, rather than focusing on combatants solely. Yet, despite these common characteristics from one conflict to the next, the military did not believe these wars were important enough to develop an enduring set of principles to conduct such operations until the mid-1930s. At that point, however, the beginning of World War II meant that the military's focus shifted back to "conventional" warfare, and amphibious warfare for the Marine Corps specifically, thereby reinforcing the institution's preferential bias towards this type of conflict. As historians recently pointed out, asymmetric conflicts "usually offered less clarity to its soldiers, both in the sense of what was being fought for and how it was being fought."[39] Their murky and unsettling nature makes them "forgotten wars," ignored by the public lore and the tale the armed forces tell about themselves.

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[38] US Marine Corps, 13.

[39] Wayne E. Lee et al., *The Other Face of Battle: America's Forgotten Wars and the Experience of Combat* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2021), 5.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

As in many other respects, when it came to counterinsurgency the Second World War marked a turning point. Over the course of six years, the Allies confronted and eventually defeated the Axis powers, to a large extent by relying on the superiority of the United States' industrial capabilities. The conflict was characterized by the extensive use of technology aimed at destroying the enemy's armed forces, its means of production, and the will of its people, which resulted in hundreds of tanks rolling across the European landscape and just as many planes dropping thousands of bombs on cities in Germany and Japan. Lionized in popular memory and culture, the Second World War, fought by "the greatest generation," soon became the measuring stick by which people define what war looks like; it has remained so to this day.[40] With WWII as the canon, any war that did not resemble it would subsequently be brushed to the side as "irregular" or "low intensity," that is, not worthy of much attention. And yet, such wars were still prevalent throughout the second half of the 20th century.

Following the end of the war, which saw the Old World's powers greatly diminished by years of fighting on their territories and the associated human casualties and material destruction, more and more nations sought to get out from under Europe's thumb and pursued the right to self-determination. Violence rippled across the globe for decades as former colonies fought to liberate themselves from their oppressors through wars of independence. These wars were waged against a Cold War backdrop as the United States and the Soviet Union sought to use them to expand their spheres of influence by supporting the side that would further their interests and

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[40] A testament to the war's enduring allure, in the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration relied on WWII's popularity and repeatedly drew parallels between the upcoming invasion of Iraq and the liberation of Europe from the Nazi in order to bolster public support. See Marjorie Galelli and Michael Stricof, "Haunted by the Lessons of 'the Good War': Post-Cold War Contestation of World War II Narratives," in *Ghosts, Memory and Identity* (Routledge, forthcoming).

world view. As a consequence, many of these so-called low-intensity conflicts became proxy wars fought between two superpowers who waged them as artificially limited wars in order to avoid nuclear Armageddon. These constraints required the US military to re-develop, once again, means to fight unconventionally.

Counterinsurgency operations have, by nature, always been difficult to prosecute, and with the end of formal empires and their associated systems of brutal subjugation of other people, it simultaneously appeared that the era of successful counterinsurgencies was definitively over. The creation and signing of the Geneva Convention following the end of WWII and the associated heightened international scrutiny meant that colonizers were, at least in theory, far more restricted in their use of violence than when they first conquered these foreign territories and, even when relying on some version of those immoral and now illegal tactics, they proved unable to maintain a hold of their colonies.

The Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, or Geneva IV, aimed at protecting civilians from violent retributions and thus limited the means available to the counterinsurgent to separate guerillas from their support base.[41] These changes in the law of war set the stage for a debate on democracies' ability to wage and win small wars, since, under these conditions, the nature of asymmetric warfare systematically favors the small power: all it has to do in order to win the war is not to lose it. In other words, if guerilla forces are able to hold out long enough, unfettered by the regulations imposed on states by the law of war, they

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[41] In 1977, the additional protocol further specified that "it is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse Party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive." Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts (Protocol I), June 8, 1977, 1125 U.N.T.S. It is worth noting however, that the vague language used in the accords still gave a significant degree leeway to signatory parties, in particular in the case of guerila wars, since those blur the lines between combatants and civilians.

will eventually exhaust the will of their superior opponent and thus win the war.[42] Yet

surprisingly, and somewhat absurdly, what some have labeled the classical age of COIN still

ended up becoming the US military's main frame of reference for counterinsurgency doctrine,

despite corresponding to a time when insurgents from Algeria to Malaya achieved

independence.[43]

In fact, seeing European powers lose against insurgent forces around the globe did not

stop the United States from trying to play a role in these wars. Because of its reliance on a

doctrine of containment to wage the Cold War, the United States saw it necessary to curb the

Soviets' expanding influence over newly independent nations who often found communist

ideology appealing and, given the nature of these conflicts, it frequently ended up relying on

counterinsurgency to do so. As it was to be expected, the United States did not fare any better

than its European counterparts and this series of poor decisions eventually led to the United

States' involvement in the Vietnam War. The murky conflict and the loss that ensued became the

United States' main frame of reference for counterinsurgency warfare, which had costly

consequences for the war in Iraq.

Haunted by Vietnam

By the time the war in Iraq started, the United States had been plagued by the "Vietnam

Syndrome" since the 1970s—an aversion to unconventional overseas military ventures inherited

from the country's first military failure. Asymmetric conflicts were to be avoided at all cost. This

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[42] Historian Greg Daddis notes that in the post-1945 era of decolonization, great powers realized that wars of annihilation were no longer acceptable, yet protracted wars of attrition are "better suited the military weak but politically strong." Gregory A Daddis, *Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 172.

[43] The classical age of counterinsurgency corresponds to the late 1950s-early 1960s. See David Kilcullen, "Counterinsurgency: The State of a Controversial Art," in *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* (Routledge, 2012), 132.

stance embraced by the US military for three decades and its reluctance to train for this type of warfare left it woefully ill-prepared to face the deteriorating situation in Iraq. Even as Iraq was rapidly sinking into an endless insurgency, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld kept refusing to use that terminology for fear that it would conjure up the ghost of the Vietnam War.[44] In June 2003, he would answer a reporter's question during a DOD news meeting stating that "the reason I don't use the phrase 'guerilla war' is because there isn't one," adding that "I know it's nice to . . . have a bumper sticker, but it's the wrong bumper sticker."[45] Still, despite the secretary's reluctance, the similarities between the two wars led many journalists, government officials, and military officers to look back at Vietnam in search of insights. Therefore, in order to understand those perspectives and how they shaped the counterinsurgency debate in the 2000s, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the Vietnam War itself.

Three Decades of Conflict

After the Japanese defeat in August 1945, communist leader Ho Chi Minh declared the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and hoped to establish it as a sovereign nation, but with World War II over, the French were now intent on reclaiming their former empire and associated status as a global power. Meanwhile, as the French government struggled to reassert its hold over its old colonies in Indochina, which had been under Japanese control during the war, the United States started to fear that communism would spread out of China and eventually take over the entire region. Therefore, in the spring of 1950, the United States

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[44] George Packer, "The Lesson of Tal Afar," *The New Yorker*, April 3, 2006, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/04/10/the-lesson-of-tal-afar.
[45] Donald H. Rumsfeld and Richard Myers, "DoD News Briefing - Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers," U.S. Department of Defense Archive, June 30, 2003, https://archive.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=2767.

announced its decision to support the French effort.[46] For several years, the US was effectively

bankrolling France's war. Yet, in spite of this assistance, France proved incapable of turning the

tide; French troops were no match for the nationalist and communist guerrillas who knew the

terrain and had the support of the population. Despite the French attempts to gain the local

population's support by ensuring its security, their efforts were hampered by the fact that they

regularly destroyed villages in their effort to kill or capture elusive guerillas, which

understandably turned the population against them. Also, when asked to produce propaganda to

bolster support for the colonial government, officers pointed out that their lack of knowledge of

the local language and customs made the task nearly impossible. On the other hand, the Viet

Minh insurgents were able to turn every failed French operation into propaganda material.[47] In

addition, despite their best efforts, French forces proved incapable to compete with the tactics

employed by the insurgents. It was much more difficult and costly for the French to maintain

control over towns, cities, and roadways than it was for the guerillas to attack them, leaving the

French forces stuck in a defensive posture and the insurgents with the initiative.[48] After nearly a

decade of fighting, a decisive battle finally took place in spring 1954, when the French forces

were defeated at Dien Bien Phu, forcing the French government to reconsider its posture in the

region. Before long, France was relinquishing control of Indochina.

At that point, in accordance to its Cold War policy of containment intended to prevent the

expansion of the communist bloc, the American government decided to intervene. After the 1954

Geneva Accords ended the French Indochina War and established two separate governments in

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[46] In addition to containing communism in Asia, the United States also believed its intervention was necessary in order to rebuilt France's status as a global power, which the US would need to counter the expansion of the Soviet Bloc in Europe.

[47] Ivan Cadeau, *La guerre d'Indochine: de l'Indochine française aux adieux à Saigon, 1940-1956*, Texto (Paris: Editions Tallandier, 2019), 224.

[48] Cadeau, 233.

Vietnam—North Vietnam under the control of the communist leader Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi, and

a pro-western regime in South Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon—the United States

threw its wholehearted support behind Diem. From economic and material aid at first, American

help rapidly evolved into military involvement; the US initially sent a limited number of

advisors, but soon entire battalions were arriving in the country. By the mid-1960s, the United

States had over 184,300 troops in South East Asia (with an additional 200,000 already scheduled

to join them) who were fighting both North Vietnamese regular forces and South Vietnamese

guerillas known as the "Vietcong" under Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV).[49]

This was known as the "Americanization" phase of the war, which took place under President

Johnson's leadership.

Even though the United States was a superpower with superior technology and greater

manpower, because of the enemy's skilled use of guerilla tactics, the war rapidly devolved into a

quagmire that bogged down US troops for years. The Army's approach to the Vietnam War is

primarily remembered for its "search and destroy" tactics and infamous body-count metric under

General Westmoreland. Yet, historian Greg Daddis has since demonstrated that this

interpretation of the war was oversimplified.[50] Vying for control over the South Vietnamese

territory and population, the US military also sought to develop a doctrine to address the issues

raised by the enemy's use of guerilla tactics. To that end, it penned counterguerrilla field

manuals to a large extent based on the principles developed by the French during or directly

following their own conflicts in Indochina and Algeria—even though those both ended with

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[49] James Stuart Olson and Randy Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam, 1945-2010*, Sixth Edition (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 134.
[50] Daddis, *Westmoreland's War*.

French defeats.[51] One such manual, published in 1967, pointed out that "since the essence of the counterguerrilla campaign is to win back the support of the people for the established government, the importance of civil affairs is paramount."[52] The manual also detailed other counterguerrilla activities that US troops should conduct in order to strengthen the host government. In addition to military actions that encompassed "tactical operations directly against guerilla forces," intelligence operations, and psychological operations, those included political actions, economic actions, and civic actions.[53] As this field manual demonstrates, the armed forces were preoccupied by issues that went far beyond conventional operations and body count. Still, despite MACV's best efforts, it was only ever reacting to a pace set by a highly flexible enemy for whom military strategy was subordinate to a broad political strategy designed to achieve national independence.[54]

CORDS, which stands for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, was one of the main counterinsurgency efforts developed during the Vietnam War. This program, created in 1967 at President Johnson's behest and run by Robert Komer, was meant to integrate the civilian and military sides of US operations in South Vietnam and to improve relations with their Vietnamese counterparts. Up until that point, civilian agencies and the military answered to separate chains of command, with each side at best ignoring what the other

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[51] In the second half of the 1950s, French officers endeavored to draw lessons from the nation's recent and traumatizing defeat in Indochina in order to apply them to the unfolding conflict in Algeria. In an effort to adapt to what they perceived as a new form of warfare that permanently altered the way wars would be fought moving forward, their reflections focused on ways to counter what they labeled *guerre révolutionnaire* or sometimes *guerre subversive*. François Dieu, "Guerre Révolutionnaire," *Res Militaris* 6, no. 2 (2016): 25; Michael P.M. Finch, "A Total War of the Mind: The French Theory of La Guerre Révolutionnaire, 1954–1958," *War in History* 25, no. 3 (July 1, 2018): 410–34, https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344516661214. The works of David Galula *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, and Roger Trinquier, *A French View of Counterinsurgency*, were particularly influential for the development of American views on counterinsurgency.

[52] Department of the Army, *Counterguerrilla Operations*, FM 31-16 (Washington, DC, 1967), 7.

[53] Department of the Army, 11.

[54] Daddis, *Westmoreland's War*, 174–75.

was doing and at worst hindering it. Trying to remedy those enduring issues, Johnson established

National Security Action Memorandum 362, instructing that "U.S. civil/military responsibility

for support of Pacification (Revolutionary Development) in Viet Nam will be integrated under a

single manager concept to provided added thrust forward in this critical field."[55] In essence, this

directive created a single chain of command for pacification operations in Vietnam,

subordinating civil operations to MACV. This simultaneously provided civilian operations with

significantly more resources which, added to the increased coordination, made CORDS far more

effective than previously disparate programs. The importance of integrated civilian and military

operations was reflected in the counterguerrilla manual published that same year which stated

that "all internal defense operations plans must be based on an integrated civil-military approach

designed to progressively reassert host government control and gain the trust, confidence, and

active cooperation of the people."[56] Still, the military's efforts to develop and adopt

counterinsurgency measures proved incapable to turn the war's tide and yield an American

victory.

The year after CORDS's creation, North Vietnam launched a large-scale conventional

operation, known as the "Tet Offensive" after the holiday on which it began.[57] The lunar year

had traditionally been a time of truce, but at the end of January 1968, North Vietnamese and

guerilla forces launched a series of coordinated attacks across South Vietnam. The targets were

mostly urban, populated areas with a heavy US presence. This widely televised attack led to

footage of fighting on the streets of Saigon and even inside the American embassy being

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[55] "NSAM 362 Responsibility for U.S. Role in Pacification (Revolutionary Development)," May 9, 1967, National Security Action Memorandums, NSF, Box 9, LBJ Presidential Library, https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/nsf-nsam362.
[56] Department of the Army, *Counterguerrilla Operations*, 8.
[57] For a detailed study of the dual struggle to control South Vietnam following the Tet Offensive see Martin G. Clemis, *The Control War: The Struggle for South Vietnam, 1968-1975* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018).

broadcasted around the globe. These images discredited the positive reports the US government had been giving its people and eventually sank American support for the war, but on the ground the Tet Offensive concluded with a punishing communist defeat, temporarily forcing North Vietnam to dial down its operations and thus giving more space to CORDS' pacification operations.[58] These yielded positive results and CORDS is widely remembered as "one of the most valuable and successful elements of COIN" during the Vietnam War.[59] Yet, despite some local successes, even well-conducted counterinsurgency operations never translated into decisive improvements at the strategic level as the United States' and South Vietnam's governments never offered a convincing alternative to the North Vietnamese political project.[60]

In addition to the Army, the American presence in Vietnam included Marine units who often found themselves on the forefront of ground combat. In fact, a brigade of Marines constituted the first ground troops deployed to Vietnam in March 1965, when President Johnson decided to escalate the American presence in the country beyond advisers.[61] As the war evolved into a seemingly never-ending quagmire, the USMC developed its own operational doctrine to counterbalance the Army's use of search-and-destroy. In particular, the Marine Corps tried to create a system that would bolster the relationship between American forces and local South Vietnamese forces by squarely placing the emphasis on nation-building—albeit on a very small scale. This was possible because, according to historian Adrian Lewis, the Marine Corps "demonstrated a greater willingness to adapt and adjust its tactics and operations to the circumstances of Vietnam than did the Army."[62]

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[58] Clemis, 201.

[59] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 2.12. As we will see in subsequent chapters, even though CORDS tends to be perceived as a success, some of the programs it implemented proved quite controversial.

[60] Daddis, *Westmoreland's War*, 180.

[61] Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 115.

[62] Adrian R. Lewis, *The American Culture of War: The History of U.S. Military Force from World War II to Operation Enduring Freedom*, 3 edition (Routledge, 2018), 259.

Just as during the Banana Wars, the Marines on the ground had very little understanding

of the Corps' past experiences with counterinsurgency warfare and therefore imagined

themselves engaged in what they saw as a new experiment, when in fact the service had a long

history with such practices.[63] The main way in which the Marine Corps practiced

counterinsurgency in Vietnam was through the development and use of Combined Actions

Platoons (CAP) between 1965 and 1971. Those were teams of about 15 Marines and a Navy

corpsman led by an NCO who received a couple weeks of in-country training on Vietnamese

language and customs in order to work conjointly with local Vietnamese to enable villagers to

defend themselves from the guerillas. Best known for living among the people and gaining their

trust, and therefore gaining valuable intelligence, CAP units also conducted aggressive patrolling

and ambushes to interdict their village to the guerillas, but those stayed limited to the villages'

immediate surroundings. Even though the villages did not, in the end, fend off the 1975

communist offensive, and despite the small-scale of the program, CAP eventually came to be

heralded as one of the most successful counterinsurgency programs ever developed by the

United States.[64]

The longer the Vietnam War lasted, the less support it received from the American

people. The draft required to sustain it grew increasingly unpopular and waves of anti-war

protests washed over the home front. By 1973, the last American troops finally left the country.

The same year, President Nixon put an end to the draft and the American military became an All-

Volunteer Force (AVF). Two years later, Saigon fell in the hands of North Vietnam. The

Vietnam War had thus become the first significant military failure of the United States and, as

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[63] Johnson, *The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture*, 152.
[64] In 2006, the fifth chapter of the *Counterinsurgency* field manual listed "combined action" as an effective way to achieve success in a COIN effort by "providing a persistent counterinsurgency presence among the populace." Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 5.24.

such, has cast a shadow over every military intervention abroad since the 1970s, especially those that would take an asymmetric dimension.[65] Since then, "Not another Vietnam" has become a rallying cry among both hawks and doves. The former use it to argue against nation-building operations which they perceive as antithetical to the military's mission, while for the latter it is a statement that the United States should not set out on military ventures abroad.

The US military itself embraced the creed, rejected the Vietnam experience, and decided that it would stay away from anything related to counterinsurgency in the future. The last troops had barely left Vietnamese rice patties and jungles when the military, as on many occasions before, discarded counterinsurgency as a doctrine, barely stopping short of burning the manuals. The 1976 version of the Army's *Operations* field manual did not include any mention of counterinsurgency and instead focused exclusively on conventional warfare in the European theater.[66] It is worth noting that while both services distanced themselves from counterinsurgency and related nation-building operations at the end of the Vietnam War, the Army's efforts to move as far away from COIN as possible were more pronounced than those of the Marine Corps. Despite the USMC's primary focus on combat—illustrated by the motto "every Marine a rifleman"—Marine Corps culture's insistence on the service's adaptability meant that, while such efforts were not presented as central to the corps' mission, Marines still prided themselves in their capability to conduct so-called "operations other than war."[67] In the 1990s, following the end of the Cold War, the United States' military got involved in several

[65] Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity*, Reprint edition (New York: Penguin Books, 2016).

[66] Donald P. Wright and Timothy R. Reese, *On Point II: Transition to the New Campaign, The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003 - January 2005*, vol. 2 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 61.

[67] For an example of how the USMC embraced peacekeeping operations in the latter part of the 20th century see Mary Elizabeth Walters, "'Tree Hugging Work': The Shifting Attitudes and Practices of the U.S. Marine Corps Towards Peace Operations in the 1990s," *Marine Corps History* 5, no. 2 (Winter 2019): 54–70.

conflicts labeled "stability operations" in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo and developed

corresponding doctrine and training. While these experiences would prove useful for some of the

personnel later deployed to Iraq, familiarity with such operations was uneven across the armed

forces and only addressed part of the demands of counterinsurgency operations.

Lessons Learned… Or Lost[68]

Since the end of the Vietnam War, people have drawn conflicting lessons from the

conflict, leading to disputes that eventually fueled the debate over the use of counterinsurgency

during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Following its failure to secure a stable pro-American regime in

South Vietnam in the 1970s despite superior technology, equipment, and manpower, the United

States adopted a new foreign policy, which became known as the "Weinberger doctrine," after

Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. In 1985, Weinberger presented six conditions that

needed to be satisfied before engaging US troops in any operation: the United States should only

enter conflicts that are of vital national interest; once the choice is made to enter in a conflict the

US should commit overwhelming resources to achieve its objective; the political and military

objectives need to be clearly defined; resources should be adjusted as conditions change; the

government should only commit military forces with the support of the American people;

military commitment has to be a last resort. This new foreign policy unwittingly abetted the

military's choice not to train for asymmetric warfare as it could point to the doctrine to justify its

decision; after all, why prepare for a type of war that the executive promised never to engage in

again?[69]

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[68] While the notion of "lessons learned" is widely used across the military, that of "lessons lost" is developed in Johnson, *The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture*.

[69] Richerd K. Betts, "Are Civil-Military Relations Still a Problem?," in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 19.

In addition to changes to foreign policy, which generally focused on when and whether to engage into a conflict overseas, the Vietnam War also raised issues regarding the proper way to conduct military operations and the role of counterinsurgency more specifically. Understanding the tenets of this debate is essential since it was revived in nearly identical terms when US troops started to face the Iraqi insurgency and weighed heavily on the conversations surrounding COIN throughout the Iraq War. As historian Brian Linn correctly observes, "the wars the United States has actually fought are important less for what happened than for what military intellectuals believed they had learned from them after the shooting stopped."[70]

Shortly after the end of American operations in Vietnam, two main schools of thought emerged within the military to explain the United States' failure. On the one hand, some officers claimed that General Westmoreland—the ranking US commander in Vietnam during the Americanization phase of the war— spent too much time focusing on guerilla forces in the South, when focusing on the North Vietnamese conventional forces would have led to victory. On the other hand, a handful of officers argued that Westmoreland lost the war because he did not put enough emphasis on counterinsurgency operations. The doctrine devised under Westmoreland's leadership, they claim, placed too much emphasis on firepower in order to destroy the enemy's armed forces. His approach revolved around "search-and-destroy" missions, which consisted of sending out patrols to look for and kill the enemy. Westmoreland sought to keep track of progress through an infamous body count, as he believed that eliminating enough enemy combatants would eventually translate into victory once the toll became too heavy to bear. Those who believed that Westmoreland did not spend enough time on counterinsurgency operations also claimed that his successor actually got it right when he developed a global

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[70] Linn, *The Echo of Battle*, 9.

counterinsurgency approach to the war. Unfortunately, they contended, by the time General

Creighton Abrams took over as commander of MACV in 1968, the American people had lost its

will to fight. Over time, scholars have charted a more balanced argument, which shows that the

pre-Tet Offensive war faced by Westmoreland was different in nature from that confronting

Abrams afterwards, thus largely explaining the discrepancies between the two generals'

approaches.[71]

Yet, decades later, the dichotomy between the "too much" and "not enough"

counterinsurgency factions came to serve as the main frame of reference for the 2000s COIN

debate almost from the start. On the whole, military circles' views aligned with Harry Summers,

a retired infantry colonel who served in both Korean and Vietnam wars and later wrote about

military theory, who believed that the Vietnam War was lost because too much time was spent

trying to win the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people, while neglecting conventional

operations against the enemy's main armed forces.[72]

In his foundational work, *On Strategy*, written at the Army War College in the early

1980s, Summers claimed that under President Kennedy's impetus, "counterinsurgency became

not so much the Army's doctrine as the Army's dogma, and . . . stultified military strategic

thinking for the next decade."[73] The focus on counterinsurgency, according to Summers, proved

central in the eventual American failure to win the Vietnam War because "counterinsurgency

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[71] Dale Andrade and James H. Willbanks, "CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future," *Military Review*, April 2006, 11. For a work that seeks to rehabilitate General Westmoreland see Daddis, *Westmoreland's War*.
[72] Conrad C. Crane, "Avoiding Vietnam: The U.S. Army's Response to Defeat in Southeast Asia" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, September 2002), v, https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11228.
[73] Peter R. Mansoor, "US Army Culture, 1973-2017," in *The Culture of Military Organizations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 305; Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, Reissue edition (New York: Presidio Press, 1995), 73.

took on a life of its own."[74] As announced by the book's title, Summers attributed the American failure in Vietnam to "a lack of strategic thinking" that allowed counterinsurgency to take too significant a role in the conduct of the war, to the detriment of conventional operations.[75] Taught at the Army War College and the Command and General Staff College as well as the National, Naval and Air War Colleges and the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Summers' view was embraced by many who, when the topic was eventually raised during the Iraq War, believed that a focus on counterinsurgency in practice, but even more so in training, would become at best an impediment and at worse a threat to the armed forces' overall readiness.[76] Yet, according to historian and retired officer Peter Mansoor, Summers' "approach to Vietnam as a conventional conflict ignored its hybrid nature and allowed officers brought up in its shadow to focus on high-end combat operations at the expense of a more holistic approach to warfare."[77] In other words, Summers's work helped to, once again, reinforce the US military' inclination towards conventional operations.

Those who thought that there had not been enough focus on counterinsurgency operations during Vietnam met a new success in the early 2000s. Andrew Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam,* published a decade after the end of the Vietnam War, argued that the US Army was ill prepared for the kind of war it had to fight in Vietnam. Krepinevich believed that "the Army's conduct of the war was a failure, primarily because it never realized that insurgency warfare required basic changes in Army methods to meet the exigencies of this 'new' conflict environment."[78] Once counterinsurgency started to make its way back towards center stage

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[74] Summers, *On Strategy*, 77.
[75] Summers, 182.
[76] Crane, "Avoiding Vietnam," 6–7, 9.
[77] Mansoor, "US Army Culture, 1973-2017," 306.
[78] Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 259.

following the rise of the Iraqi insurgency, Krepinevich's work appeared repeatedly in the press, where it was essentially hailed as gospel, thanks, in part, to the retired lieutenant-colonel's lobbying of the government in favor of an "oil-spot" strategy.[79] In 2005, Krepinevich published an essay in *Foreign Affairs* in which he argued that "instead of a timetable for withdrawal, the United States needs a real strategy built around the principles of counterinsurgency warfare."[80] According to Krepinevich, "rather than focusing on killing insurgents, [US and Iraqi forces] should concentrate on providing security and opportunity to the Iraqi people, thereby denying insurgents the popular support they need."[81] Once an area is pacified, stability will progressively radiate and spread around it, which will eventually allow for the whole region to be pacified.

Krepinevich's thesis on the Vietnam War was echoed by writers like Lewis Sorely, who served in Vietnam and has since written several works that place the blame for the United States losing the war squarely on Westmoreland, while arguing that Abrams's efforts could have yielded victory if domestic support had not been wavering by the time he took command.[82] Sorley's *A Better War* became widely read at the higher echelons of the military during the 2004-2005 time period, a sudden success that was not without issues.[83] As journalist Lawrence Kaplan

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[79] See Andrew F. Krepinevich, "How to Win in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* (Council on Foreign Relations, 2005); Tom Donnelly and Gary Schmitt, "The Right Fight Now: Counterinsurgency, Not Caution, Is the Answer in Iraq," *The Washington Post*, October 26, 2003, http://search.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2267416952/abstract/2AD11348204735PQ/1; Lawrence F. Kaplan, "Clear and Fold: Forgetting the Lessons of Vietnam," *The New Republic*, December 19, 2005, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.www2.lib.ku.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&t=&sort=YMD_date%3AA&page=1&fld-base-0=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-0=counterinsurgency%20AND%20Leavenworth&fld-nav-1=YMD_date&val-nav-1=2003%20-%202012&docref=news/1392530787533E80.
[80] Krepinevich, "How to Win in Iraq," 88.
[81] Krepinevich, 88–89.
[82] See both Lewis Sorley, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam*, Reprint edition (Boston: Mariner Books, 2012) and Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (Harvest, 2007).
[83] John Nagl, interview by Don Wright, October 20, 2010, 9, Operational Leadership Experiences Interview Collection, Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library, http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4013coll13/id/3043/rec/4; David Ignatius, "A Better Strategy For Iraq," *The Washington Post*, November 4, 2005.

pointed out at the time, "one can take this as evidence that the generals correctly grasp the nature

of the war in Iraq . . . Or one might ask what the discovery of a standard text on Vietnam,

without which no college course on the subject would be complete, says about the strategic

literacy of leaders who get surprised by problems and then go read a book to resurrect a dubious

answer from the past."[84] Further demonstrating the impact of his theories on the military and the

new *Counterinsurgency* field manual, in 2006 Sorley went on to be interviewed by Charlie Rose

on a segment dedicated to the new field manual, along with Conrad Crane and Lieutenant

Colonel John Nagl, who were directly involved in its writing.[85]

Beyond the importance, or lack thereof, imparted to counterinsurgency operations by

Westmoreland and Abrams, another aspect of the Vietnam War debate proved particularly

enduring: the idea that the Army failed to adapt to the requirements of asymmetric warfare and

therefore failed as a learning institution. This argument was popularized by social scientist and

Army officer John Nagl in his best-selling monograph, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, in

which he claimed that, unlike the British in Malaya, the organizational culture of the US Army

prevented it from developing and implementing a successful counterinsurgency doctrine in

Vietnam.[86] Unlike the British, "the United States Army viewed its task as the absolute defeat of

an enemy on the field of battle, supported by all of the resources of the nation," and did not

change course in Vietnam.[87] Instead, Nagl argued, it simply "proceeded with its historical role of

destroying the enemy army—even if it had a hard time finding it."[88] Even though Nagl's work

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[84] Kaplan, "Clear and Fold: Forgetting the Lessons of Vietnam."
[85] "Counterinsurgency Lesson," *The Charlie Rose Show* (PBS, March 31, 2006),
https://charlierose.com/videos/21262. Conrad Crane was the lead author of the 2006 *Counterinsurgency* field
manual.
[86] John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*,
Paperback (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xxii.
[87] Nagl, 50.
[88] Nagl, 115.

did not have much success when he first turned his dissertation into a book, the rise of the Iraqi

insurgency propelled it on the best-seller's list and led to the publication of a paperback edition.

Its popularity grew to the point that one journalist later labeled it "the bible of today's COIN

movement."[89] Yet, taking Nagl's counterpoint in "Eating Soup with a Spoon," historian and

former officer Greg Daddis argued that "as an organization, the U.S. Army did learn and adapt in

Vietnam; however, that learning was not sufficient in itself for securing victory."[90] Adding that

"charges that the Army failed as a 'learning organization' often underrate the mosaic nature of

Vietnam while overvaluing the influence of a constraining organizational culture."[91] As these

two examples from the 2000s demonstrate, the debate on counterinsurgency in Vietnam and the

US military's ability to learn from past lessons was far from settled when Operation Iraqi

Freedom started to unfold and it significantly tainted the contemporary COIN debate.[92]

The enduring nature of this debate was compounded by the military's own interpretation

of the lessons of the Vietnam War, namely that it represented the kind of operation to avoid at all

cost. As a consequence, following the end of the war the military did not seek to build upon the

knowledge it had gained from the operations it had just conducted and this attitude persisted until

Operation Iraqi Freedom forced the military to deal with yet another large-scale insurgency. The

preface of FM 3-24 later concurred that the manual was made all the more necessary by the fact

that "counterinsurgency operations generally have been neglected in broader American doctrine

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[89] Tim Shorrock, "Making COIN: The Modern History of an Unstoppable Bad Idea," *The Baffler*, no. 33 (2016): 128.

[90] Gregory A. Daddis, "Eating Soup with a Spoon: The U.S. Army as a 'Learning Organization' in the Vietnam War," *The Journal of Military History* 77, no. 1 (January 2013): 231.

[91] Daddis, 231.

[92] In her 2018 monograph, political scientist Jeannie Johnson too stressed the importance of understanding what she calls the military's "strategic culture" in order to understand why certain lessons are learned and adopted in the long-term when others, just as sound, fade away, arguing that "if the best counterinsurgency lessons learned pose too great a challenge to cherished aspects of national- and service-level cultures, they will be resisted in implementation and may disappear altogether." Johnson, *The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture*, 1.

and national security policies since the end of the Vietnam War over 30 years ago."[93] Describing

the US Army's relationship to COIN in the wake of the Vietnam War, historian David Fitzgerald

coined the phrase "learning to forget," illustrating the fact that lessons learned from that conflict

were virtually nonexistent.[94] However, Fitzgerald argues that this posture changed over time: at

the end of the Vietnam War, the Army equated its experience in counterinsurgency with the

war's bad outcome, yet when the insurgency started to rise in Iraq, lessons from Vietnam were

reframed and reinterpreted, this time in favor of counterinsurgency practices. Historian and

Army officer H.R. McMaster, who played an integral part in Operation Iraqi Freedom, concurred

that "America's memory of the divisive military intervention in Vietnam is easily manipulated

because it is foggy and imprecise, more symbolic than historical."[95] As we will see, during the

war in Iraq, it was in large measure the pliability of the lessons from the Vietnam War that first

led to a blatant disregard for the rise of an insurgency and eventually contributed to undue

optimism concerning the potential of counterinsurgency.

The United States and its military services have a long history of confronting

insurgencies, and yet, because of their cultural preferences, in over two centuries, they have

never truly embraced asymmetric warfare as one of their core missions despite the overwhelming

preponderance of such conflicts. Interest for counterinsurgency has ebbed and flowed according

the type of war the United States was involved in and the degree of success it achieved, without

ever becoming a staple of the American way of war. Instead, the United States remained

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[93] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, vii.
[94] David Fitzgerald, *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq*, Stanford Security Studies (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).
[95] H.R. McMaster, "The Human Element: When Gadgetry Becomes Strategy," *World Affairs* 171, no. 3 (Winter 2009): 34.

stubbornly focused on so-called "conventional" warfare. Because of this cognitive dissonance between the wars actually fought by the US military and the ones it remembers, it repeatedly failed to learn and institutionalize lessons from the past. Therefore, each generation had to re-develop an approach to counterinsurgency warfare until, in the 1970s, the Vietnam War fiasco cemented the view that asymmetric conflicts should be avoided altogether. This consensus left troops woefully unprepared when, at the turn of the 21st century, the US military once more faced an enemy using irregular tactics. At that point, military leaders once again developed a doctrine to defeat insurgents, partly based on past experiences but also somewhat reinventing the wheel. The following chapters will show that after many difficult months in Iraq, during which the US military scrambled to address the insurgency, COIN eventually encountered such an overwhelming success in the late 2000s that, for a time, it finally seemed definitively inscribed in the US military doctrinal canon.

Chapter 2: The Road to COIN is Paved with Good Intentions: Civil-Military Tensions and the Rise of Insurgency in Iraq, 2002-2004

When US troops crossed the border into Iraq from Kuwait on March 20, 2003, they were essentially anticipating a rerun of Operation Desert Storm a decade prior, a swift victory over Iraqi forces soon followed by a deployment back to the United States. At first, the war did in fact look a lot like the 1991 campaign. American tanks were once again rolling into the desert, all but blasting through the Iraqi defense forces as they made their way north. Coalition troops entered Baghdad on April 5, and in the following weeks people around the globe saw pictures of Saddam's statues coming down. "No more Hitler, no more Stalin, no more Saddam," a resident of Mosul told a journalist.[1] At first, it appeared that the United States had replicated its success in the First Gulf War, but the parallel turned out to be short-lived. By May 1, President George W. Bush was standing in front of a banner reading "Mission Accomplished," but at the same time as major combat operations were winding down, an insurgency had begun to simmer.[2] By the summer, it had spread throughout most of Iraq. Instead of a rapid transition and redeployment of troops back to the United States, American soldiers and Marines were suddenly responsible for a collapsing country and involved in the kind of large-scale counterinsurgency operations the US military had sworn off three decades prior.

How did a war of choice end up forcing the military into the exact kind of situation it historically sought to eschew? As this chapter will show, the story of counterinsurgency in Iraq

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[1] Daniel Williams, "Rampant Looting Sweeps Iraq: Last Major City Falls to Allied Forces, but Hussein's Home Town Still Unoccupied," *The Washington Post*, April 12, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2263831525/abstract/DC3BEC6B9E8B46A3PQ/321.
[2] Bush, "President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended."

cannot remain narrowly focused on the armed forces but needs to take into account the role played by its civilian leadership. Not only did civilians frame the options available to the military once the insurgency unfolded, but the rise of the insurgency itself had its roots in civil-military tensions, in the Department of Defense in particular, that hampered planning in the months leading up to the invasion. Combined with a series of mistakes during the early stages of post-conflict operations, they set the US military up for a situation in which it eventually had little choice but to resurrect counterinsurgency.

The Leadup to the War

In 2003, the Iraqi insurgency appeared to catch everyone involved in overseeing the war effort by surprise. Yet for those who had been paying attention, there were many warning signs, rooted in tensions between civilian and military leadership. First, the Bush administration discarded the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine. The doctrine that had been first formulated in 1985 by Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, and reinforced in 1989 by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, to prevent another Vietnam-like protracted engagement. Second, the administration failed to heed the lesson of the First Gulf War and President George H. W. Bush's decision to stick to limited objectives. Lastly, Bush administration war planners and military officers charged with defeating Saddam's regime failed to agree on the number of troops required to achieve that end and never planned sufficiently for post-conflict operations.

Abandoning the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent rise of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), the Bush administration chose to adopt a preemptive war approach to foreign policy—that is to say, striking potential enemies before they threaten US

security. In doing so, the administration simultaneously rejected the principles outlined by the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine, which had legitimated the US military's focus on conventional, peer-to-peer warfare since the end of the Vietnam War.

The Weinberger doctrine had been reiterated by General Colin Powell when he became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1989 under President George H. W. Bush, and helped set the stage for the success of Operation Desert Storm.[3] Following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the United States led a coalition of thirty-five countries under UN Security Council Resolution 678 to drive Iraqi troops out of Kuwait and restore the country's sovereignty. Outpacing even the most optimistic previsions by a wide margin, Operation Desert Storm accomplished its objectives in a hundred hours. The United States and its allies had routed the world's fourth largest military in less than a week, Kuwait was liberated, and there was nothing left standing between them and the Iraqi capital. However, abiding by President Bush's intent, coalition troops stopped short of Baghdad. Even though the United States would leave troops in the region for the following decade and implement no-fly zones over the north and south of Iraq, it chose not to topple Saddam's regime.

Intent on avoiding another Vietnam-like protracted engagement, the administration used overwhelming force and intentionally established limited objectives. A textbook application of the Weinberger-Powell doctrine, the conflict was widely perceived as an unqualified success for the United States. Years later, General Jim Mattis praised Bush's leadership in the First Gulf War, explaining that "President George H. W. Bush had demonstrated a trifecta of statesmanship" by "pulling together a coalition of Western and Arab states," providing "generals with the forces and policy direction they needed," and not overreaching once the initial objective

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[3] Colin Powell had been senior military assistant to Defense Secretary Weinberg and assisted in the creation of the original iteration of the doctrine.

was accomplished.[4] The fact that the Weinberger-Powell doctrine led to the success of Operation Desert Storm in 1991 should have ensured its longevity and reinforced cohesion between the armed forces and their civilian leadership, yet both slowly faded away. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the development of new military technologies—known as the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)—over the last decade of the 20th century, the United States' civilian leaders and military leaders grew more and more confident in their ability to solve a broad array of international problems by force.

The final nail in the Weinberger-Powell doctrine's coffin came in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. As Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz explained, "9/11 basically brought home to all of us, including me, just what the stakes were in leaving threats like that untended."[5] In the hours following the attacks, President George Bush declared a Global War on Terror to "find those responsible [for the attacks] and bring them to justice."[6] This declaration initially led to the invasion of Afghanistan. That invasion, President Bush declared, was intended to defeat al-Qaeda, kill Osama bin Laden, and put an end to the Taliban regime that had allowed al-Qaeda to flourish in Afghanistan. The story could have ended there. Yet, believing that the United States should strike first in order to defeat potential enemies before they had a chance to attack on US soil, the new Bush administration, under the presidency of George W. Bush, son of the former president, enacted a complete overhaul of the nation's foreign policy and chose to replace the Weinberger-Powell doctrine with a preemptive war

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[4] James N. Mattis and Francis J. West, *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead* (New York, NY: Random House, 2019), 37. The general was specifically contrasting the unfolding of Operation Desert Storm with what happened during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

[5] Romesh Ratnesar, "Bush's Brainiest Hawk," *Time*, January 27, 2003, http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1004101,00.html.

[6] George W. Bush, "Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation," The White House, President George W. Bush, September 11, 2001, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html.

approach. This new approach would soon become known as the Bush doctrine. The Bush administration, in creating this new doctrine, unwittingly began to drive a wedge between the military and the White House.

Starting in 2002, it was by relying on this new policy and in conjunction with the Global War on Terror narrative, that the administration endeavored to justify its decision to invade Iraq. Under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, Iraq had repeatedly defied the United Nation's requests to examine its nuclear facilities, all but suggesting that Iraq was getting close to obtaining nuclear weapons. While Iraq's weapons of mass destruction had been a remote threat for several years, with the rise of the Bush doctrine advocating for preemptive strikes, the threat of such weapons suddenly became exigent, and the administration proceeded to prepare for a war against Iraq. By the time the dictator allowed inspectors back into the country in November 2002, preparations for the war were already well under way in the United States. "The lesson of 9/11," the president wrote in his memoir, "was that if we waited for a danger to fully materialize, we would have waited too long."[7] As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice put it at the time during an interview on CNN, the administration did not want to wait for "the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud."[8]

Throughout the Iraq War, the US effort was impeded by repeated changes in the war's objectives—something that should have been clearly set from the beginning. Renowned military

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[7] George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Broadway Paperbacks, 2011), 229.
[8] "CNN Late Edition With Wolf Blitzer: Interview With Condoleezza Rice; Pataki Talks About 9-11; Graham, Shelby Discuss War on Terrorism," CNN Transcripts, September 8, 2002, http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0209/08/le.00.html. While the threat of nuclear weapons was by far the most remote compared to other chemical and biological ones, the administration's rhetoric intentionally conflated them under the WMD umbrella and chose to focus on the most spectacular one to scare the American people into supporting the war, when in fact the administration's own intelligence reports indicated that Saddam's regime was still years away from possessing nuclear weapons. Bush, *Decision Points*, 240.

strategist Carl von Clausewitz warned, "no one starts a war—or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so—without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it."[9] As we saw, the importance of clearly defined war objectives was also reinforced by the Weinberger-Powell doctrine. However, from the start, the invasion's goals were elusive at best. Even Colin Powell, who had become secretary of state in 2001, failed to abide by the principles of a doctrine that bore his name.[10] In a telegram addressed to embassies in July 2002, Powell described the goal of the impending war in Iraq as follows: "The United States seeks an Iraqi government that is broad-based, representative, and respects principles of justice, the rule of law and the rights of the Iraqi people; is at peace with its neighbors; obeys Security Council resolutions; and maintains Iraq's territorial integrity."[11] As this description demonstrates, the objectives of the war left significant room for interpretation and their achievement would be hard to quantify, which complicated the military's task.

Even *On Point*, a rather triumphant narrative of the first months of combat operations in Iraq published by the Army's Combat Studies Institute the year following the invasion, unwittingly acknowledged that problem when it stated that "the military campaign supported goals that transcended removing Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athists from power."[12] The publication went on to state that "the strategic goal included establishing a stable, secure,

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[9] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War, Indexed Edition*, trans. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret, Reprint edition (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1989), 579. Clausewitz has been widely embraced by the US military and is taught at length in military schools; he is also no stranger to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld who mentioned him in the author's note to his memoire, see Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir*, Paperback (New York, NY: Sentinel, 2012), xvii.

[10] While Colin Powell expressed his concerns to the president in private, in public he offered his full support to the administration and even addressed the US to convince the security council to support military intervention in Iraq. Bush, *Decision Points*, 251, 245.

[11] "Confidential Telegram on 'Future of Iraq' Expert Working Groups," July 8, 2002, https://ahec.armywarcollege.edu/CENTCOM-IRAQ-papers/index.cfm.

[12] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, 1:xxii–xxiii. Throughout the volume, authors systematically praised the Army's preparation and execution of the operation, calling it a success even though the situation in Iraq had already deteriorated significantly at the time of publication. Later Army publications would become more critical.

prosperous, peaceful, and democratic nation that is a fully functioning member of the community of nation," and that, "within this context, the end of major combat operations did not signify the end of combat or operations, just the transition to the next phase of the long-term campaign."[13] However, such language papers over the fact that, when the invasion first started, nobody in the military was truly prepared for the phase following "major combat operations," let alone a "long-term campaign."

In fact, because of this lack of clear objectives, neither Army nor Marine troops preparing to deploy to Iraq knew what to expect or for what to prepare. Reminiscing on the months leading up to the American invasion of Iraq in his memoir, General Jim Mattis wrote that he "was planning without knowing the answers to the most basic questions [which] required [troops] to plan largely in a vacuum. [Ground forces] didn't know the ultimate political intent."[14] This encapsulates an additional issue with the operation, in that it did not follow another of Clausewitz's most essential teachings: instead of being the continuation of policy, with the invasion of Iraq, war became a goal in itself. In more abrupt terms, one foreign policy expert asserted that "the Powell doctrine essentially saw the military as a precious national asset that stupid civilians should not be able to deploy too casually," adding that, "by violating aspects of the Powell doctrine in Iraq, Rumsfeld and his subordinates arguably showed themselves to be precisely the stupid civilians the doctrine was meant to guard against."[15]

Colonel H. R. McMaster too criticized the divide between the Pentagon's civilian leadership and its military. Holding a PhD in military history from the University of North Carolina, McMaster was familiar with potential lessons of the US war in Vietnam, and knew as

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[13] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 1:xxiii.
[14] Mattis and West, *Call Sign Chaos*, 85.
[15] Robert D. Kaplan, "What Rumsfeld Got Right," *The Atlantic*, July 1, 2008, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/what-rumsfeld-got-right/306870/.

well as anyone what a disconnect between civilian and military in the Pentagon like that which plagued OIF planning could cost. By the time preparations for the Iraq War got underway, his dissertation had been published under the title *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* and had become a standard reading on the Vietnam War. McMaster's main argument was that the failures of the Vietnam War could be traced back to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who failed to properly advise their civilian leaders, thereby allowing them to send troops into a quagmire. His expertise on the matter would have made McMaster acutely aware of the difficulties caused by the ambient dissent in the Pentagon in the early 2000s. He has since expressed his frustration at "the wide gap between the assumptions on which some policies and strategies were based and the reality of situation on the ground in places like Iraq," and explained that he "was often on the receiving end of ill-conceived plans disconnected from the problems they were ostensibly meant to address. That is because strategic narcissism leads to policies and strategies based on what the purveyor prefers, rather than on what the situation demands."[16] Iraq was a prime example of what McMaster identifies as "strategic narcissism"; not only did the executive branch fail to appreciate the long-term implications of toppling the Saddam regime but, by the time the invasion occurred, the military had spent the better part of three decades avoiding considering the potential necessity for nation-building operations, wishfully thinking that civilians would not send them into a situation that would require such capabilities.

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[16] H. R McMaster, *Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World.* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2020), 4, 16.

What Means to What End?

The Bush administration's inability to set clear objectives for the war would have been problematic enough for the conduct of operations, but it was worsened by disagreements between civilians and senior military personnel in the Pentagon on the means necessary to achieve these elusive goals.

Throughout the war, the civilian leadership of the armed forces inscribed in the constitution was never in question. Yet, as the civilian branch, under Rumsfeld's impetus, sought to increase its involvement in military affairs, the two groups struggled to find common ground and develop an approach to the war that would satisfy both. The dissention that resulted led a journalist to go so far as to write that "disagreements between the Army and the Pentagon civilian leadership had grown toxic."[17] President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address, which foreshadowed his intention to go to war with Iraq, started a war within the government that hardly relented once the invasion was underway the following spring. Throughout 2002, articles appeared in the press with subtitles like "Rumsfeld's bid to kill the Crusader is the first step in his campaign to modernize the military-the opening shot in a long war with his own troops," and "The road to Baghdad begins with a battle in Washington."[18] These stories of internal conflict suggested that the war with Iraq would not be as straightforward as the White House claimed and they persisted for all of the secretary's tenure. By the time Rumsfeld was replaced by Robert

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[17] Rick Atkinson, *In the Company of Soldiers: A Chronicle of Combat* (New York: Picador, 2005), 68.
[18] John Barry, "Choose Your Weapons - Rumsfeld's Bid to Kill the Crusader Is the First Step in His Campaign to Modernize the Military-the Opening Shot in a Long War with His Own Troops," *Newsweek*, May 20, 2002; John Barry and Roy Gutman, "Rumors of War - The Way Some Civilian Leaders Talk, a Showdown with Iraq Is All but Inevitable. That Has the Brass Worried. The Road to Baghdad Begins with a Battle in Washington.," *Newsweek*, August 12, 2002.

Gates in December 2006, one commentator wrote that "relations between the Office of the Secretary of Defense and senior officers are the worst they've been in more than a generation."[19]

Chief among the issues dividing the military and civilians within the Department of Defense (DOD) were questions regarding troop levels. In the months leading up to the invasion, civilian leaders in the Pentagon systematically downplayed the difficulties associated with the upcoming operation and the means necessary to achieve a successful outcome—both in terms of troops and of financial cost. In front of Congress, in what a *New York Times* article called a "war of words on Capitol Hill," the Pentagon's top civilian leadership repeatedly rejected both recommendations and estimates of senior military leaders.[20] Deputy Secretary of the Defense Paul Wolfowitz systematically refused to answer questions that demanded an estimate of the war's cost during his February 2003 testimony in front of the House's Committee on the Budget. "Fundamentally," he argued, "we have no idea what is needed unless and until we get there on the ground."[21] At the same time, throughout his testimony, Wolfowitz insisted that estimates quoted in the press were "wildly off the mark," as he could not conceive stability operations requiring more than the invasion itself, whether in terms of troops or treasure.[22] Without naming him directly, Wolfowitz was here referring to Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki, who had previously stated that operations in Iraq would require several hundred thousand soldiers.[23]

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[19] Ralph Peters, "Letter to the New Secretary," *Armed Forces Journal*, December 1, 2006, Access World News.
[20] Eric Schmitt, "Threats and Responses: Military Spending; Pentagon Contradicts General On Iraq Occupation Force's Size," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/28/us/threats-responses-military-spending-pentagon-contradicts-general-iraq-occupation.html.
[21] "Department of Defense Budget Priorities for Fiscal Year 2004," § Committee on the Budget (2003), 10, https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CHRG-108hhrg85421/CHRG-108hhrg85421.
[22] Department of Defense Budget Priorities for Fiscal Year 2004, 8.
[23] This was part of an ongoing clash between the Army Chief of Staff and the office of the secretary of defense—the previous year Rumsfeld had announced that Shinseki was a lame duck 15 months before the end of his term. Mark Thompson and Michael Duffy, "Pentagon Warlord," *Time*, January 27, 2003, http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1004099,00.html.

Wolfowitz's testimony reveals the Pentagon civilian leadership's lack of understanding of post-conflict operations, but also of the particularities of the state of Iraq.

Wolfowitz claimed that stability would be achieved rather seamlessly because, contrary to the Balkans, in the event of a war Iraq would not be the stage of ethnic conflict. With this claim, the deputy secretary showed how little he knew about Iraq. In fact, the borders of Iraq were less than a century old when the 2003 invasion took place. They were created by the British at the end of the First World War and brought together three provinces of the defunct Ottoman empire (Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul). As those consisted of widely different communities, the new borders sowed the seeds of decades of discord to come. It was only Saddam's ruthless dictatorship that kept the country's different factions in check, creating the illusion of a unified Iraqi nation. This fact was not obscure in the early 2000s. Anyone who picked up the September 2002 issue of *Time* magazine, whose cover asked "Are We Ready For War?," would have read that "cobbled together from three provinces of the Ottoman Empire after World War I [Iraq] is a fragile state that could easily break up amid yet more violence."[24] Likewise, a *Washington Post* article published in December 2002 cautioned that "in Iraq, a large international military presence will be required for many years to provide security for a post-Hussein government and avert a civil war between ethnic factions, which include Kurds in the north, Sunnis in the center and Shiites in the south."[25] And, if that fact was thereafter conveniently forgotten or dismissed by Bush officials like Paul Wolfowitz, the week preceding the invasion, the *Time* cover story "Life After Saddam" once again raised similar points, arguing that "if invading troops topple

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[24] Michael Elliott, "Iraq: Not as Lonely as He Looks," *Time*, September 16, 2002, http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1003238,00.html.
[25] Michael Dobbs, "U.S. Facing Bigger Bill For Iraq War: Total Cost Could Run As High as $200 Billion," *The Washington Post*, December 1, 2002, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2076074744/abstract/83491BBC601943C9PQ/15.

Iraq's dictator, Washington will inherit responsibility for a bitter, factious country."[26] Whether the deputy secretary was intentionally disingenuous or truly believed the administration's narrative is for each to judge, but in either case, his testimony put additional pressure on already strained relationships within DOD.

Wolfowitz was not the only one in the Office of the Secretary of Defense who had a conflicting relationship with the uniformed personnel of the Pentagon. According to the official history of the war in Iraq published by the Army War College, much of the blame for the atmosphere of discord that reigned in the Pentagon rested with the Secretary of Defense himself.[27] Donald Rumsfeld held the distinction of being both the youngest and oldest man to hold the office of Secretary of Defense; he served as Reagan's secretary from 1975 to 1977 and then under Bush starting in 2001. During his second time in office, "the nation's hawk-in-chief" (as one journalist called him), came to crystallize many of the problems tied to Operation Iraqi Freedom.[28]

Having returned to the Pentagon with the goal of modernizing the United States' armed forces, a war with Iraq seemed replete with opportunities for Rumsfeld, who thought he could use it to demonstrate the efficacy of his light-footprint concept. According to the secretary's memoirs, this "transformation agenda" was actually that of the president who wanted the nation's defense forces to be "lethal, light and mobile."[29] In either case, Rumsfeld fully embraced the notion that the Pentagon needed reforming and set out to change the way that DOD

[26] Johanna McGeary, "Looking Beyond Saddam," *Time*, March 10, 2003, http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1004362,00.html.
[27] Rayburn and Sobchak, *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War*, 2019.
[28] Michael Hirsch, "Hawks, Doves and Dubya - To Move Forward on Iraq, the President Must First End the War between His Troops," *Newsweek*, September 2, 2002.
[29] Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 293–94.

handled just about everything—from intelligence gathering, to deployments, to personnel matters—and he did not back down once the wars in the Middle East went under way.[30]

Throughout the planning stages of the Iraq war, it was the secretary who repeatedly pushed back against recommendations of senior military leaders, especially when it came to the size of the force needed to successfully accomplish the mission.[31] Rumsfeld believed that "the strategic objectives of the Iraq campaign could be achieved with a small force of less than 30,000 personnel."[32] Intent on demonstrating the viability of his small-footprint force concept, reliant on speed, stealth, and precision weapons, the secretary insisted on a degree of involvement that left many senior officers uneasy. As journalists reported:

> As you move up the ranks to the men who are supposed to be scripting this fight, however, not everyone is convinced that Rumsfeld should be managing it down to the last dog tag. Retired Army General Norman Schwarzkopf, who led the first Gulf War, says he is "nervous" about the control Rumsfeld is exercising over the buildup. "It looks like Rumsfeld is totally, 100%, in charge," says Schwarzkopf. "He seems to be deeply immersed in the operational planning--to the chagrin of most of the armed forces."[33]

This high degree of involvement was intentional on the part of the secretary. In addition to his commitment to "modernize" the military, Rumsfeld had returned to the office of the secretary of defense with the belief that he needed to reassert the power of the secretary of defense. All the while criticizing Congress's oversight of DOD as "increasingly intrusive," Rumsfeld was eager "to adjust the arrangements that many in the Pentagon had grown comfortable with—that of a light-touch administration that sanctioned their activities from a

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[30] Rumsfeld, 297–304.

[31] Rayburn and Sobchak, *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War*, 2019, 1:36–40.

[32] Godfroy and Collins, "Iraq, 2003–2011," 143. Some people have since argued that the sheer number of troops in Iraq at the beginning of stability operations was not the main issue, since one can ask "what advantage would more soldiers who didn't understand the culture and didn't speak the language have given us?" see John S. Brown, "The Revolt of the Generals," *Army*, September 2006, 112.

[33] Thompson and Duffy, "Pentagon Warlord."

respectful distance."[34] In response, Rumsfeld adopted a hands-on approach that rubbed many in the defense department and in the military the wrong way. Resenting the secretary's micromanagement, his staff came to deride Rumsfeld's abundant memos as "snowflakes," falling from the ceiling in flurries.

Beyond the issues caused by Rumsfeld's micromanagement of troop numbers, the atmosphere of civil-military discord that reigned in the Pentagon in the months leading up to the invasion also severely hampered planning for post-conflict operations.

To Plan, or Not to Plan

General Eisenhower is said to have claimed that plans are worthless, but planning is everything. This notion has become somewhat of a cliché within military circles, and yet, many of the issues that started to rise in Iraq in the late-spring 2003 and contributed to the development of the insurgency, found their roots in failures at the planning stages of the war.

The US military traditionally divides operations into six phases, numbered 0 through V, and all were affected by civil-military tensions to various degrees. In the end, conflicts during the planning phase, corresponding to phase 0 in military parlance, did not disrupt main combat operations (phase III) too severely; they unfolded rather seamlessly. The degree of disarray of Saddam's armed forces helped offset the hubris of some of the planners. However, the choices pushed on the invading forces by the office of the secretary of defense rapidly came back to haunt US troops when they affected stabilization operations (phase IV) and paved the way for the unravelling that took place in the summer 2003.

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[34] Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 296, 280.

These disagreements between the Office of the Secretary of Defense and CENTCOM, the combatant command in charge of the Middle East, caused problems every step of the way during the planning phase of the invasion, often putting the success of the operation at risk.[35] Where it becomes most obvious is when one looks at the planning for post-conflict operations. Preparation for phase IV was rudimentary at best, in large part because of the problems that existed between different actors in government. One of the officers involved in the process, General George Casey, later claimed that during the planning stage of what would become Operation Iraqi Freedom, postwar planning "devolved, between October and December [2002], into a fight between State and Defense about who's going to be in charge. . . You had the Feith/Wolfowitz group that said this is going to be easy and we ought to be able to do this, and then you had the other group who said this is going to be hard; it's going to take a long time and we have to be more thoughtful about it."[36] Casey added that "in my mind, it was the intransigent attitude of Rumsfeld and Feith that really made working the interagency difficult, and it caused longer-term problems."[37]

Once again, core disagreements revolved around troop numbers. Rumsfeld eventually had his way and the number of troops available for phase IV stayed identical to those of phase III, which was about six brigades short of CFLCC projections.[38] This meant that once looting and unrest started to increase and progressively shift into a full-fledged insurgency following the fall of the Saddam regime, US troops were too understrength to react and prevent Iraq from

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[35] The US military divides the globe in six combatant commands that are each responsible for a specific area. CENTCOM refers to Central Command, in charge of the Middle East.

[36] George Casey, interview by Riley, Russell et al., September 25, 2014, 28, https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/george-casey-oral-history.

[37] Casey, 34.

[38] Conrad C. Crane, *Cassandra in Oz: Counterinsurgency and Future War* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 35. CFLCC stands for Coalition Forces Land Component Command. Before the start of the invasion, it was the component of CENTCOM in charge of planning ground operations in Iraq.

spiraling down into chaos. When the situation started to deteriorate significantly, Rumsfeld stuck

to his pre-invasion line in terms of numbers and maintained that no additional troops were

needed, assuring the president that troop levels were sufficient even as commanders in theater

stated that their troops were stretched too thin.[39]

Individual conflicts within DOD were only one of the reasons why the United States was

ill prepared to deal with the situation in Iraq once major combat operations had ended. There was

also an overall lack of collaboration within the government as a whole when it came to planning

for phase IV operations. While it is true that in the months preceding the invasion there were at

least half a dozen organizations in charge of developing a plan for post-conflict operations, not

only did they all work in near total isolation from each other but, in most cases, their

recommendations were not heeded by the administration.[40]

One such effort was sparked by the Army G-3 and led by retired colonel and military

historian Conrad Crane, who later became the lead author of the 2006 counterinsurgency field

manual.[41] Alongside Middle East expert Andrew Terrill, Crane spearheaded the writing of a brief

report published by the Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute in January 2003, which

detailed the challenges that US armed forces were likely to encounter if the administration chose

to invade Iraq. In their analysis, the two authors somewhat presciently cautioned that "it is

possible to win a war and lose the peace."[42] They subsequently published a longer version of the

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[39] "Analysis: Baghdad Car Bombings Revive Debate over US Troop Numbers for Successfully Occupying Iraq" (NPR, August 20, 2003); Bush, *Decision Points*, 258.

[40] Godfroy and Collins, "Iraq, 2003–2011," 144. See also Rayburn and Sobchak, *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War*, 2019, 1:64–68.

[41] The Army's G-3 is the general officer in charge of operations (in this case coordinating the planning, strategy, and conduct of the war) for the Army as a whole.

[42] Conrad C. Crane and W. Andrew Terrill, "Reconstructing Iraq: Challenges and Missions for Military Forces in a Post-Conflict Scenario" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, January 29, 2003), 1.

report in February. While they did not specifically predict the rise of an insurgency, Crane and

Terrill highlighted many of the difficulties that American troops were going to encounter during

the occupation phase of the campaign, only to see their warnings ignored.

This study was only one among many that analyzed the numerous difficulties that the

United States was likely to encounter in Iraq. The State Department spearheaded a project

entitled "The Future of Iraq" that brought together exiled Iraqis and scholars and eventually

published a 13-volume study. The Office of the Secretary of Defense and Under Secretary for

Policy Douglas Feith created an Office of Special Plans to prepare a postwar plan. Meanwhile,

the military had no less than three different groups working independently on post-conflict

operations.[43]

In an attempt to streamline and concentrate the post-conflict planning process, the

president eventually issued National Security Presidential Directive 24 in January 2003. It

instructed DOD to "establish a Post-War Planning Office" that would "be responsible for

conducting detailed planning across the spectrum of issues that the United States Government

would face with respect to the post-war administration of Iraq," essentially putting the

Department of Defense in charge, much to the consternation of the State Department.[44] In

response, Rumsfeld created the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs, otherwise

known as ORHA, which he placed under the supervision of retired Lieutenant General Jay

Garner. Garner was a logical choice as he had previously directed humanitarian efforts in

northern Iraq after Operation Desert Storm and Rumsfeld hoped that a retired general who "knew

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[43] CFLCC worked on a general plan for Phase IV named "Eclipse II;" it eventually absorbed JTF-4 which had been tasked to develop a post-conflict plan; and EUCOM also created its own planning group for Phase IV, the Military Coordination and Liaison Command.

[44] "National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-24: Iraq Post War Planning Office," January 20, 2003, 1, https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/nspd-24.pdf.

many CENTCOM officers and understood military culture, would have the best chance of avoiding friction with the military personnel."[45] The creation of this office, however, was not sufficient for ORHA to later have an impact on the ground. As Garner explained in hindsight, "the problem is, at that time, everybody had 1,000 things they were doing, and the war was getting ready to start. A lot of focus was not so much on what I was doing, but more on what [CENTCOM commander] Tommy Franks was doing."[46] No matter how many programs were created and who was recruited to lead them, the invasion remained the main focus of planning.

In addition, as General Petraeus explained in an interview conducted a couple years after the end of the Iraq War, "there was the expectation of those who were presumably thinking about the Phase IV plan . . . that the invasion would lop off the top level of the Saddamists, and then we would relatively expeditiously be able to hand off the responsibilities of governance to some new governing entity."[47] In 2009, H. R. McMaster confirmed that "it is clear that the initial planning for the war misunderstood the nature of the conflict, underestimated the enemy, and underappreciated the difficulty of the mission."[48] In other words, to the extent that military planning took Phase IV into account, it often did so based on severely flawed assumptions, which explains why these efforts eventually proved incapable of preventing the country's infrastructure's collapse and the rise of the insurgency.[49] Despite, or maybe rather because of, the

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[45] "Interview with Lt. Gen. Jay Garner (Ret.)," *Frontline: The Lost Year in Iraq* (PBS, August 11, 2006), https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/yeariniraq/interviews/garner.html; Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 488.
[46] "Interview with Lt. Gen. Jay Garner (Ret.)."
[47] David Petraeus, Joseph Collins, and Nathan White, "Reflections by General David Petraeus, USA (Ret.) on the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq," *PRISM* 7, no. 1 (2017): 151.
[48] McMaster, "The Human Element: When Gadgetry Becomes Strategy," 39.
[49] Rayburn and Sobchak, *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War*, 2019, 1:68. This reliance on flawed assumptions is not a uniquely American problem. According to Bruce Hoffman from RAND, "the fact that military planners apparently didn't consider the possibility that sustained and organized resistance could gather momentum and transform itself into an insurgency reflects a pathology that has long afflicted governments and militaries everywhere: the failure not only to recognize the incipient conditions for insurgency, but also to ignore its nascent manifestations and arrest its growth before it is able to gain initial traction and in turn momentum." Bruce Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," *Special Warfare*, December 2004, 7.

endless number of groups instructed to develop a plan for post-conflict operations, there never was a clear idea of what would happen once major combat operations ended.

Compounding the countless issues that stymied the planning process, the reports that came out of these efforts were not consulted by the people who eventually had to oversee Phase IV operations. One journalist directly questioned the administration's preparation for post-conflict operations, arguing that "top Bush advisers spent much of the week knocking down news reports and sweeping aside official statements that hinted at just how difficult and costly it would be to achieved this post-Saddam vision."[50] Paul Bremer, the main individual in charge of Iraq's reconstruction and, by all accounts, a man of stunning arrogance, later acknowledged that he did not consult any of those studies. Instead, he explained, he acted on what he understood as the President's intent, and "wasn't looking for a 40-page memorandum on what it was going to take to do it in Iraq."[51] Bremer was not alone in his approach. As one journalist wrote presciently in a 2004 article for *The Atlantic*: "The Administration will be admired in retrospect for how much knowledge it created about the challenge it was taking on. U.S. government predictions about postwar Iraq's problems have proved as accurate as the assessments of pre-war Iraq's strategic threat have proved flawed. But the Administration will be condemned for what it did with what was known."[52]

The likelihood of a long, protracted engagement in Iraq was an open secret from the start. Illustrating the idea that the administration was either delusional or downright deceitful in its claim that the war would be rapid, one magazine article from spring 2003 stated that "a long

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[50] McGeary, "Looking Beyond Saddam."
[51] L. Paul Bremer III, interview by Russell Riley, Melvyn Leffler, and Barbara Perry, August 28-29, 2012, 29, George W. Bush Oral History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia, https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/l-paul-bremer-iii-oral-history.
[52] James Fallows, "Blind Into Baghdad," *The Atlantic*, 2004, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/01/blind-into-baghdad/302860/.

postwar occupation looks inevitable"; another warned that "even if the Bush Administration proves correct in assuming a quick military success, the postwar peace, by all accounts, would be a messy affair."[53] Yet, by highlighting the issues that the United States would likely encounter following the invasion of Iraq, reports and articles were going against the optimistic narrative peddled by the Pentagon leadership and the White House, which likely explains why they were dismissed. Incapable of getting civilian and military leaders on the same page but intent on waging a war, the Bush administration charged into Iraq with blinders on and a very limited understanding of the long-term implications of such a campaign. It did not take long for worst-case scenario predictions to materialize.

The Pottery Barn Rule

After about a year of debate and preparation, the Bush administration moved forward with the invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003. Military planners favored a two-pronged approach with forces coming from the north or the southwest in addition to the south, but, as in the case of troop numbers, they did not get their wish. This time they were stymied by geo-political forces: opposed to the United States' intervention in the region, Turkey and Jordan refused to grant Americans use of their air space or territory to launch operations. Instead, the coalition was forced to depend on a single approach out of Kuwait.[54] Building upon the American infrastructure that had been maintained there since the First Gulf War twelve years prior, the US military started a progressive build-up of forces in Kuwait in the fall 2002 that continued well into the invasion.[55] A combination of ships, planes, trains, and trucks moved

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[53] Thompson and Duffy, "Pentagon Warlord"; McGeary, "Looking Beyond Saddam."
[54] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, 1:47.
[55] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 1:32, 73.

entire divisions (around 25,000 troops and all their equipment) from their posts and bases in the United States to the Gulf in an often chaotic ballet. A reporter embedded with an Army unit in Kuwait witnessed the arrival of equipment in theater and described ships' decks "covered by elliptical fuel tanks and square crates containing fire control radars, neatly stacked despite a warning chalked on each one: "Do Not Stack!" and later recounted the search for a misplaced tent that ought to host a division's tactical operations center, two examples among many that illustrate the friction that inevitably incurs when undertaking a move of this scale.[56]

Still, the military overcame all these obstacles—some unavoidable and some created by Rumsfeld in his effort to make the force more mobile—and deployed five divisions to the gulf. On the Army side, the units that initially deployed for the invasion were the 3rd Infantry Division, the 101st Airborne Division, the 82nd Airborne Division, and the 4th Infantry Division.[57] They were joined by the Marine Corps' 1st Division. These units provided the invasion forces with a combination of ground and air-support capabilities to conduct a "shock and awe" campaign.

Because the Office of the Secretary of Defense chose to rely on a "running start" as part of Rumsfeld's ongoing effort to make the force more agile, various units deployed to the Middle East on vastly different schedules. Some kept trickling in even after the invasion already began, while others, abiding by the military's proverbial "hurry up and wait," sat in the Kuwaiti desert for weeks and in some cases even months. They were waiting for units to assemble, but also for Washington to conclude its diplomatic wrangling with the UN's Security Council and give the go-ahead for the invasion. In the meantime, units conducted large-scale training exercises in the desert and at the Udairi Range complex. One embedded reporter described the conditions in the desert in the weeks prior to the invasion:

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[56] Atkinson, *In the Company of Soldiers*, 58, 69–74.
[57] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, 1:76.

> Everyone is covered in dust . . . winds gust at up to fifty miles an hour, sometimes blowing over the twenty-meter-long platoon tents Marines sleep in, shredding apart the canvas and burying them in several feet of sand . . . The Marines who've been here for weeks have runny noses and inflamed eyes from constant dust . . . several develop walking pneumonia even before the invasion begins.[58]

Still, the Marines of the unit he was shadowing were "practicing martial arts in the sand, or running on the gravel track, wearing combat boots, loaded down with weapons and carrying packs weighing more than 100 pounds." "Their only entertainment," he added, "is talking, reading and playing cards or chess."[59] Trusting that their mission was critical to the United States' national security, troops patiently awaited Washington's orders.

By mid-March, it was finally time for US servicemen and women to do what they had been training for and waiting for in the Kuwaiti desert: fight a war. The ground assault was conducted by both Army and Marine units, with the assistance of a contingent of British troops.[60] Barely a few hours after the first air strikes were launched, to maintain the element of surprise, the 1st Marine Division, flanked on the left by the 3rd Infantry Division, and with the British 1st Armored Division on its right, crossed the southern Iraqi border from Kuwait on the evening of March 20 and started making their way up to Baghdad. The 101st Airborne Division would soon follow in order to establish forward air refueling points to expand the reach of the Army's attack aviation.

What was expected to be a difficult campaign for the coalition troops turned out to be practically effortless. Step by step, vehicle after vehicle, the Army and the Marine Corps units all

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[58] Evan Wright, *Generation Kill: Devil Dogs, Iceman, Captain America, and the New Face of American War*, Fourth edition (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2016), 16.

[59] Wright, 16–17, 21.

[60] The so-called "coalition of the willing" assembled by President George W. Bush purportedly included dozens of nations, but it paled in comparison to that put together by his father prior to Operation Desert Storm. This time around, only Great Britain provided substantial number of troops. Meanwhile, the French government was very vocal in its opposition of the war, which created significant tensions within the UN Security Council.

made their way across the fortified border and continued northward along the Euphrates River. While V Corps moved towards Baghdad, the Marines (I MEF) and British forces secured the oil fields and infrastructure in the South of the country.[61] Despite fears of the contrary, no chemical weapons were used against coalition troops, WMDs were nowhere to be found, and the Iraqi Army was in far worse shape than anticipated, all of which made progress towards the capital so quick that some units were at times forced to halt their advance in order to allow for support to catch up. In a few weeks, US troops were in Baghdad, the Iraqi Army put to rout, and pictures of Saddam Hussein's statues being torn down were featured on the front cover of newspapers around the globe. It was the end of the Baathist dictatorship.

However, past the initial victory, it soon turned out that virtually all the assumptions made by the US government in the lead up to the invasion were wrong. Critically, despite the military's efforts, American troops were unable to locate weapons of mass destruction, calling into question the Bush administration's main rationale for the war. And, soon after, optimistic assumptions regarding the Iraqi people's favorable response to the invasion proved just as flawed. In the lead up to the invasion, the Bush administration had drummed up support for the war by using analogies to the Second World War and the liberation of Europe from the Nazi regime. Instead of adoring Europeans lining the streets to cheer American troops, Bush officials claimed, it would now be cheering Iraqis who, freed from Saddam's dictatorial regime, would welcome Americans as liberators.[62] Reality turned out quite different.

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[61] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, 1:89.
[62] In the months leading up to the invasion, the Bush administration repeatedly drew parallels between WWII and the liberation of Europe with the upcoming invasion of Iraq. See Marjorie Galelli and Michael Stricof, "Haunted by the Lessons of 'the Good War': Post-Cold War Contestation of World War II Narratives," in *Ghosts, Memory and Identity*, (Routledge, forthcoming).

In lieu of parades welcoming American GIs, within days of the country's "liberation," Iraq started its descent into chaos. Police forces scattered, government buildings were systematically looted, and sectarian violence broke out between Sunnis and Shia. Coalition forces, perceived by many Iraqis as invaders, increasingly became the targets of ambushes and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). In June, an NPR report explained that "in the last three weeks, an average of one US soldier or Marine has been killed every two days in Iraq. That figure, counting only service members killed by hostile action, is actually an increase over the casualty rate in the first month after major combat operations were said to have concluded."[63] Because of the Secretary of Defense' decisions at the planning stage of the war, coalition troops were now too short-staffed and ill-prepared to react effectively to either looting, internal violence, or targeted attacks on coalition troops.

Even though the Iraqis were for the most part glad to see Saddam's tyrannical dictatorship come to an end, the American presence in Iraq rapidly caused discontent. Far from being welcomed as liberators, US troops were increasingly perceived as occupiers. As General Petraeus observed, "every Army of liberation has a half-life beyond which it turns into an Army of occupation."[64] Yet Petraeus's statement may be only half right, as it assumes that, at least for a while, the American-led force was indeed perceived by Iraqis as a liberating force. In fact, a few weeks into the conflict, US troops in various cities were already noticing an uptick in anti-American sentiment.[65] Coalition troops' status as an army of occupation was not simply theoretical. Beyond Iraqi perceptions, this was their legal status on the international stage. In

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[63] "Profile: Growing Pentagon Concerns over Situation in Iraq," *All Things Considered* (NPR, June 27, 2003).

[64] David H. Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq," *Military Review*, February 2006, 4.

[65] Cooper, Dreazen, and Fassihi, "U.S. Sends Seasoned Peacekeepers to Baghdad --- Getting Handle on Episodes Of Armed Resistance Is Key To Withdrawal of Soldiers."

May 2003, a short two months after the beginning of the invasion, the United Nations adopted a resolution which explicitly recognized the United States and the United Kingdom as "occupying powers" under international law.[66] In addition, the military's apparent difficulty and slowness at rehabilitating Iraq's infrastructure, which the war had disrupted or outright destroyed, further contributed to Iraqis' discontent.

The United States' meager efforts to transition into Phase IV at the end of major combat operations ended up setting the stage for a massive insurgency instead of creating the conditions for stability. A few weeks after the beginning of the invasion American military and civilian leaders believed that the bulk of the fighting was over and that they could begin post-conflict operations. The military had largely assumed that once the brunt of the fight was over it would simply turn over responsibility to civilian organizations who would then work on rebuilding the country while the military redeployed back to the United States. However, not only was there barely any plan for that transition, but military leaders on the ground soon realized that their civilian counterparts were even more ill-equipped to deal with the situation than they were.

These issues were compounded by the rapid and rather disorganized turnover within US civilian and military command structures in Iraq, which further hampered the country's transition towards stability. During the first year of the war, repeated changes in leadership in Iraq prevented any sense of continuity or even a general sense of direction for the country. Even though the National Security Presidential Directive 24 had established the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs, the organization never really had a chance to take over the reconstruction of Iraq. Instead, only a few weeks after Garner and his team arrived in

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[66] UN Security Council, Resolution 1483, S/RES/1483 (May 22, 2003), 2, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/resolutions-adopted-security-council-2003.

country, the president chose to name a new administrator and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was created.[67]

Ambassador L. Paul Bremer was named Presidential Envoy to Iraq on May 6 and put in charge of the organization.[68] He effectively governed Iraq between May 12, 2003 and June 28, 2004.[69] The degree of latitude from which he benefited in that regard was astonishing and contributed to the creation of the conditions that made the country ripe for an insurgency. Describing this change of authority a couple of years later, a journalist wrote that "Bremer became the American proconsul in Iraq, technically reporting to Rumsfeld's Defense Department but exercising a degree of authority that came to surprise even Rumsfeld."[70] This sentiment would later be echoed by Rumsfeld who mused in his memoir that Bremer "had a robust definition of the term 'latitude,'" which the secretary had decided to give him given that he was the "man on the ground."[71] Bremer later claimed that many of the issues encountered by the CPA, some would say created by the CPA, were in fact the product of disconnects within the national security apparatus in the United States, but according to Rumsfeld, these disconnects were of Bremer's own making.[72] Allowing Bremer to chose with whom he interacted in the National Security Council (NSC) and granting him privileged access to the president meant that various members were regularly left in the dark.[73]

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[67] Bush, *Decision Points*, 258. Even in his memoir, the president does not explain his decision to name Ambassador Bremer as administrator instead of continuing with ORHA and Jay Garner. The decision appears out of the blue.
[68] "CPA Iraq," accessed February 25, 2020, https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/cpa-iraq/bremerbio.html.
[69] James Dobbins et al., *Occupying Iraq: A History of the Coalition Provisional Authority* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 2009), iii.
[70] Peter J. Boyer, "Downfall: How Donald Rumsfeld Reformed the Army and Lost Iraq," *The New Yorker*, November 13, 2006, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/11/20/downfall-2.
[71] Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 506.
[72] Bremer, interview; Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 506–7.
[73] Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 506–7.

Rather than moving forward with the organization that had been created for that purpose, ORHA, Bremer and the CPA were parachuted in seemingly out of the blue and given a degree of latitude outside of the chain of command that allowed him to adopt measures that ran contrary to everything that had been envisioned by the rest of the parties involved. The few measures that were taken by the CPA in the early days of the organization ended up adding fueled to the fire and contributed to the exponential rise in violence. What had started as looting and small-scale violence by a range of factions quickly turned into a full-fledged insurgency often led by former members of the Iraqi army following two particularly ill-considered decisions made by Paul Bremer.[74]

On May 23, 2003, the day following the UN Resolution, the CPA issued a decree that ordered both the de-Baathification of Iraq, as well as the disbandment of the Iraqi armed forces. The result of those decisions should not have been a surprise to Bremer. His orders created a large body of armed, trained men without employment, and seemingly without a future.[75] According to many American officers, this poorly conceived measure taken by Ambassador Paul Bremer directly contributed to the rise of the insurgency in the following weeks.[76]

Bremer made his decision unilaterally. He did so with no respect for or acknowledgement of pre-war planning or even of publicly-disseminated conventional wisdom. Indeed, even in the

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[74] Interpreting the degree to which the CPA sawed the seeds of the insurgency, as opposed to simply fueling it, is one of the issues that caused the greatest amount of debate regarding the Iraq war.

[75] Paul Bremer, "Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 2: Dissolution of Entities," May 23, 2003, https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/cpa-iraq/regulations/20030823_CPAORD_2_Dissolution_of_Entities_with_Annex_A.pdf. In June 2003, coalition officials announced that Iraqis would be allowed to keep AK-47s in their homes and businesses to ensure their own safety. However, allowing civilians to protect their families and homes against looters simultaneously complicated the task of troops attempting to restore law and order. Edmund L. Andrews, "Iraqi Civilians Allowed To Keep Assault Rifles," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/docview/432433735/abstract/7B0EE96A10EB4AD5PQ/5.

[76] Peter R. Mansoor, *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War*, The Yale Library of Military History (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014); John A. Nagl, "COIN Fights: A Response to Etzioni," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 26, no. 3 (May 4, 2015): 381, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2014.982935.

fall 2002, the American people could read in *Time* magazine that "the U.S. also would spare, as far as possible, the 300,000-strong regular Iraqi army in the hope that it would end up siding with American forces and forming the foundation for a post-Saddam military."[77] It appears that Bremer never got the memo.

Bremer's decision put additional pressure on an already strained relationship between civilians and military personnel in charge of the war theater. Several generals later insisted that Bremer acted unilaterally. General Casey for instance stated that when the military was planning for the invasion, it "actually planned to have a very low level of de-Ba'athification."[78] General Mattis wrote that "without consulting our military commanders in the field, Bremer disbanded the Iraqi Army and banned most members of the Baath Party from government positions."[79] There was no sense that Bremer's CPA and the military cadre in charge of Iraq were on the same team, let alone on the same page.

The ambassador pushed back against this narrative. He explained in a September 2007 op-ed in *The New York Times* that "it has become conventional wisdom that the decision to disband Saddam Hussein's army, was contrary to American prewar planning and was a decision that I made on my own. In fact the policy was carefully considered by top civilian and military members of the American government. And it was the right decision."[80] According to Bremer, Saddam's armed forces had *de facto* disbanded following the American invasion and re-creating new armed forces instead of recalling the old ones was not controversial among decision makers at the time. Even in the light of the insurgency that spread across the country, the ambassador

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[77] Mark Thompson, "Going Door To Door," *Time*, September 16, 2002, http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1003241,00.html.
[78] Casey, interview, 27.
[79] Mattis and West, *Call Sign Chaos*, 113.
[80] Paul L. Bremer, "How I Didn't Dismantle Iraq's Army," *The New York Times*, September 6, 2007, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/06/opinion/06bremer.html.

still defended his choice, arguing that the creation of a new military had proven more successful than the recalling of Baathist-era police forces, who were "unreliable" and "mistrusted by the very Iraqi people it is supposed to protect," making his decision the right one.[81]

Bremer chose not to recall any specific documentary evidence in making his case. In fact, NSPD-24, which had established the Post-War Planning Office for Iraq, did not call for the dismantling of the Iraqi army. The planning document said the opposite, calling for a "reshaping [of] the Iraqi military by establishing a reformed, civilian-controlled armed forces."[82] General Petraeus would later offer a more careful analysis, stating that "the issue was not really disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). It was about not telling them [soldiers] what their future was, as they needed to know what they were going to have to do to feed their families."[83] Bremer's orders were at the very least severe communication errors. By dismantling the Iraqi military without simultaneously explaining what the future would look like for the troops, the CPA pushed them straight into insurgents' arms.

While most of the debate over Bremer's decisions and decision-making process has focused on the disbanding of the Iraqi Army, critics also raised questions regarding the decision to de-Baathify the country and the degree to which that decision contributed to the Iraqi civil war. Bremer said that the decision "was modeled on de-Nazification, though much milder, directed really at only the top 1 percent of the party."[84] He additionally claimed that the ministries—and by extension the government—did not actually collapse, but rather kept functioning—thanks to civil servants.[85] Bremer would later argue that it was not the decree itself,

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[81] Bremer.
[82] "National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-24: Iraq Post War Planning Office," 2.
[83] Petraeus, Collins, and White, "Reflections by General David Petraeus, USA (Ret.) on the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq," 154.
[84] Bremer, interview, 78.
[85] Bremer, 78–79.

but its implementation, that was the issue. According to Bremer this implementation failure was explained by the fact that de-Baathification had been delegated to Ahmed Chalabi by the Iraqi Governing Council.[86] A controversial figure, Chalabi had been in exile for years before returning to Iraq after Saddam was removed from power to play a part in the reconstruction government. He had long tried to wield his influence to help shape US policy regarding Iraq and had been involved with the CIA and the US State Department in the 1990s, but the failure of operations in northern Iraq left both organizations distrustful of Chalabi.[87] Bremer ultimately claimed that it was Chalabi who "immediately started a campaign to broaden the reach of the decree far beyond what was in the decree."[88] In addition to the current Iraqi leaders, Bremer also deflected some of the responsibility to the defunct Saddam regime, under which, according to Bremer, the government was already hardly functioning.[89] Even years after the events unfolded, Bremer refused to take responsibility for CPA's part in Iraq's unraveling.

Regardless of the appropriateness of the CPA's decision to disband the Iraqi armed forces and to take stringent de-Baathification measures in the months following the invasion, what is undebatable is that Iraq quickly fell into chaos. Former soldiers, still armed and well trained, were now left to their own devices, with little prospects for the future. They played a major role in the looting that became endemic in large swathes of Iraq in the weeks following the invasion. Additionally, after decades of oppression and repression from the Baathist regime, lifting Saddam's yoke from the Iraqi people caused old entrenched divisions to resurface. Sectarian violence rose rapidly as the Shia majority sought to take advantage of their newfound freedom,

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[86] Bremer, 73.
[87] Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 489.
[88] Bremer, interview, 73.
[89] Bremer, 83.

while the Sunni minority who had controlled every aspect of the government under Saddam suddenly had to adapt to a new order in which they were no longer at the top.

The creation of the CPA to take over the task initially handed out to the ORHA was not the only case of a rushed transfer of authority in the early months of OIF. The military side also reorganized and this, too lead to serious problems. Shortly before the end of the CPA's tenure, Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) took over for Combined Joint Taskforce-7 (CJTF-7) and Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) was created. This finally provided headquarters on the ground with enough manpower to "link tactics and operations to strategy and policy" but disrupted the continuity in leadership.[90] In addition to these multiple structural changes, the US military chose to use unit rotation instead of individual rotation, and those units doing multiple tours would not always re-deploy to the same area of operation. As a consequence, throughout the whole war every time a new unit would take over an area, despite efforts to smooth the transition, there was a significant slump in the progress while the incoming unit learned to operate in the environment. Not only did the incoming unit not necessarily understand the area but the personnel relationships built between American troops and locals did not carry over to the new unit.

Because of the degree of chaos that enveloped the country, it soon became clear to policymakers that the rapid exit favored by the Bush administration during the planning stages of the war would be difficult to execute. According to the media, Secretary of State Powell had adopted the "Pottery Barn rule," telling President Bush that since they were responsible for "breaking" Iraq, they would have to stay to fix it. Powell later clarified that while he had never literally said that if "you break it, you own it," he did state that "if you get yourself involved—if

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[90] David E. Johnson et al., *The U.S. Army and the Battle for Baghdad: Lessons Learned--and Still to Be Learned* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2019), xiv.

you break a government, if you cause it to come down, by invading or other means, remember that you are now the government. You have a responsibility to care for the people of that country."[91] Because of the inherent difficulties of the task at hand—nation building—the United States ended up stuck in Iraq for eight years.

From the very beginning, existing and growing tensions between civilian and military leadership in Washington paved the way for the invasion of Iraq to turn into a long, protracted engagement—the exact opposite of the rapid war of liberation that the administration had been advertising to the American people. The more Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld inserted himself in the planning of operations and in the specific way the war ought to be fought, the more he pushed the armed forces down a path for which they had not prepared. You initially, as the saying goes, go to war with the army you have. Yet Rumsfeld designed the plans for Operation Iraqi Freedom for the military he wished he had and hoped to will it into existence fast enough to have it fight the war. Instead, he ended up sending an unprepared army to the Middle East. The forces were too small to rely on the overwhelming force that had been a staple of the previous Gulf War and their superior technology failed to tip the balance of forces into the United States' favor in the face of the growing insurgency. The experiment was a failure. When those initial miscalculations were then compounded by Ambassador Bremer's ill-advised decision to disband the Iraqi military and de-Baathify the country, Iraq spiraled into chaos and attacks between various Iraqi factions and against coalition forces started to ramp up. By the summer, the military was caught in a race against the clock to repair the civilian-made damage and devise a way to defeat the insurgency before the entire country fell to the hands of the insurgents. As the next

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[91] Kathy Gilsinan, "The Pottery Barn Rule: Syria Edition," The Atlantic, September 30, 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/the-pottery-barn-rule-syria-edition/408193/.

chapter will show, the task at hand forced the US military to resurrect, once again, the

counterinsurgency tactics that it had sought to eschew for decades.

Chapter 3: Counterinsurgency from the Bottom-Up, 2003-2004[1]

Starting in the summer of 2003, the level of insecurity rose exponentially throughout

Iraq. Removing Saddam from power freed the Iraqi people from a ruthless dictator, but it also

opened the door to sectarian violence between the long-repressed Shia majority and Sunnis, who

had controlled the country under the Baathist dictatorship. The extended presence of foreign

troops and the crumbling of the country's infrastructure added to the chaos. In the weeks

following the so-called "end of major combat operations" in May, anti-American demonstrations

and confrontations between coalition troops and Iraqis became commonplace.[2] Government

buildings, museums, banks, factories, libraries, and even hospitals were ransacked by unruly

mobs, essentially bringing the country to a standstill. US troops lacked the manpower necessary

to stop the looting.[3] The Iraqi population could no longer count on the most basic services like

clean water and electricity, which fed into a never-ending spiral of unrest.[4] Coalition convoys

and patrols regularly came under fire and bases were repeatedly struck by mortar rounds. Enemy

combatants used weapons ranging from roadside IEDs to RPGs to target foreign troops and then

vanished by blending into the population, making it extremely difficult for the United States and

its allies to kill or capture their elusive enemies. IEDs were the insurgents' weapon of choice as

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[1] Thomas, "Operation Hearts and Minds."

[2] Bush, "President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended."

[3] Williams, "Rampant Looting Sweeps Iraq"; William Branigin and Rick Atkinson, "Anything, and Everything, Goes: With No Authority to Stop Them, Iraqis Plunder Capital of Goods," *The Washington Post*, April 12, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2263832198/abstract/DC3BEC6B9E8B46A3PQ/322.

[4] David Finkel, "In Need Of Help, Nowhere To Turn: System Lacking Basic Necessities," *The Washington Post*, April 12, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2263855078/abstract/DC3BEC6B9E8B46A3PQ/323; Richard Leiby, "For Crime Victims in Iraq, No Place to Turn: Anger, Fear Rise as Anarchy Continues," *The Washington Post*, May 12, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2267530789/abstract/DC3BEC6B9E8B46A3PQ/427.

they are both cheap to manufacture and deadly. As one embedded reporter pointed out, "at most, the IED cost $100 to make, and against it the $150,000 Humvee might as well have been constructed of lace."[5] The increasing level of violence caused tensions to run high. In the city of Fallujah, 40 miles west of Baghdad, a patrol of soldiers mistook celebratory gunfire—a common practice in Iraq for weddings and many other occasions—for an attack and retaliated, leaving four Iraqis civilians dead and seven wounded.[6] Such incidents, often rooted in a lack of cultural understanding, happened time and time again across the country. Each time, they worsened resentment towards occupation forces. Rather than liberators, Iraqis saw US troops as invaders: "We're against the occupation, we refuse the occupation—not 100 percent, but 1,000 percent," one Iraqi told a reporter.[7]

By the end of the year, the violence was such that, according to a journalist, a joke among foreign personnel in Iraq asked: "What does the front desk ask you when you check into the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad? Which side of the hotel do you want: the bullet side or the rocket side?"[8] And yet, even as more and more newspapers highlighted the rise of the insurgency, in the White House and the Pentagon, people still argued that the unrest in Iraq was mostly due to a few dead-enders from the Saddam regime.[9] This disconnect between the reality of the situation on the ground and the standpoint of the Beltway's civilian leadership lasted for months.

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[5] David Finkel, *The Good Soldiers* (New York, NY: Picador, 2010), 21.

[6] Anthony Shadid, "Iraq's Once-Privileged Sunnis Increasingly See U.S. as Enemy," *The Washington Post*, June 1, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/docview/409475572/abstract/7B0EE96A10EB4AD5PQ/12.

[7] Thomas E. Ricks and Anthony Shadid, "A Tale of Two Baghdads: As U.S. Soldiers Perceive Warm Welcome, Residents Express Anger," *The Washington Post*, June 2, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2267530129/abstract/BDEAECC51E44D7DPQ/1.

[8] Thomas, "Operation Hearts and Minds."

[9] Michael Elliott, "So, What Went Wrong?," *Time*, October 6, 2003, http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1005814,00.html; Anthony Shadid, "U.S. Troops Kill 27 After Iraqi Ambush: Clash Signals Escalation of Guerrilla-Style War," *The Washington Post*, June 14, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2263534065/abstract/46E55643EE1D43FCPQ/1; Thomas E. Ricks and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "In Postwar Iraq, the Battle Widens: Recent Attacks on U.S. Forces Raise Concerns of a Guerrilla Conflict," *The Washington Post*, July 7, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2267498115/abstract/4586B639259C436APQ/48.

Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld in particular, dismissed the fundamental nature of the insurgency, in an attempt to deflect responsibility for the war's unraveling.[10] Desperate to prove the validity of his light-footprint concept, the secretary rejected any implication that US forces in Iraq were stretched too thin to maintain control over the situation.[11] In November, Rumsfeld still argued in an interview on Fox News that the perpetrators of the violence were "criminals in that country who will do things for money. There are foreign terrorists in that country, like the Ansar al-Islam, who have come back in from Iran and are trying to kill people. And there are the remnants of the Baathist regime. And they want to take that country back, and they're not going to. They're not going to come close to taking that country back."[12] However, regardless of the secretary's assurances, the United States still had to find an actual way out of the crisis—or at the very least out of the country. And the military units doing the lion's share of the work in the war theater had the strongest incentive to devise a solution to the task at hand.[13] Troops were left with no choice but to adapt under pressure, as the conflict unfolded.

Reinforced, on the one hand, by the administration's reluctance to acknowledge the existence of an insurgency, and by the military's historical aversion to COIN on the other, it took several months for counterinsurgency to become a priority at the strategic level.[14] Yet, even as

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[10] Vernon Loeb, "No Iraq 'Quagmire,' Rumsfeld Asserts: Secretary Disputes Vietnam Comparison," *The Washington Post*, July 1, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2267550565/abstract/ED7A595EEB084F7EPQ/7.

[11] Somewhat ironically, the secretary later wrote in his memoir about the looting that occurred following the invasion that "it would have been impossible to gather a force large enough to stop it all," conveniently glossing over the fact that he was the one behind the decision to maintain such low numbers during phase IV of the operations. Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 474.

[12] "Interview With Donald Rumsfeld," *Fox News Sunday* (Fox News, November 2, 2003).

[13] By the end of the 2003, US casualties in Iraq had risen over 3,100. Well over three quarters of them had been tallied in the months following the so-called "end of major combat operations" declared by President Bush in May and the rate kept growing through the fall. Vernon Loeb, "Pace of Casualties In Iraq Has Risen: Counterinsurgency Costlier Than Combat," *The Washington Post*, December 28, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2267766925/abstract/ED7A595EEB084F7EPQ/10.

[14] The military distinguishes between three levels of war: tactical, operational, and strategic—the first one concerns individual actions on the ground, the next, the conduct of operations in an entire war theater, and the last the overall

the top brass refused to acknowledge the true nature of the issue, soldiers and Marines in Iraq rapidly came to understand the violence as the symptom of an insurgency. At that point, like a phoenix rising back from its ashes (or more accurately from the dust of military schools' bookshelves), the counterinsurgency doctrine that had been integral to so many of the wars of the 20th century, and usually dismissed immediately after, found its way back to yet another theater of war. Because of the military's historical reluctance to embrace counterinsurgency, this was not the product of a coordinated top-down decision, but rather that of a variety of *ad hoc* grass-roots efforts spearheaded by military leaders on the ground, who most acutely felt the need to curb the violence.

COIN Resurrected from the Ground Up

With the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent ousting of Saddam Hussein, the equilibrium that had been maintained over decades by the yoke of the ruthless dictator crumbled. The Shia majority rejoiced at the prospect of a representative government, but that same possibility simultaneously struck fear for the Sunni minority now out of power. After years of benefiting from a superior status, they could not help but fear reprisals from the formerly oppressed Shia. Ambassador Bremer's ill-fated decision to disband the Iraqi military and his broad-sweeping de-Baathification decree further upset an already volatile situation.[15]

The best-case scenario imagined by naive American leaders, in which the end of combat operations would seamlessly, maybe even magically, transition into a peaceful, free-standing Iraq and allow coalition troops to withdraw, never materialized. Once the regime fell, there was

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approach for the war. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the adoption of counterinsurgency measures started at the tactical level, then rose to the operational level several months later, and eventually became the war's overarching strategy by 2007.

[15] Bremer, "CPA Order Number 2."

no cadre of Iraqi bureaucrats left to ensure day-to-day governance. Instead, the country's whole infrastructure fell apart, essential services like electricity and health care came to a halt, and coalition troops were left holding the bag. Soon, soldiers and Marines found themselves in a war that had little to do with the types of maneuvers that they trained for and many of them struggled to adjust to the situation they were facing. As one reporter pointed out, this frustration and general lack of understanding could be seen in troops "screaming at the locals, 'Don't you understand English, you f---ing idiot!'"[16] Dealing with Iraqi civilians while on foot patrol proved particularly challenging for young, enlisted soldiers and Marines who were often traveling outside of the United States and interacting with a foreign culture for the first time.

Lacking guidelines from Washington and forced to reckon with growing unrest across the country, US troops across Iraq looked for ways to defeat the insurgency. In doing so, leaders on the ground sometimes intentionally, but often unwittingly, revived practices from the past and counterinsurgency once again found its way to the heart of an American war.

Soldiers Reinvent the Wheel

There is hardly any doubt that soldiers' extensive education and training had not prepared them for the situation they were now encountering.[17] For decades, counterinsurgency had been virtually absent from both the programs of the Army schools that shape the education of the officer corps and the training of enlisted soldiers. Thus, in Iraq, it was up to individuals to devise ways to address the situation at hand. They relied on their own individual knowledge and ideas rather than an agreed upon formal set of principles.

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[16] Thomas, "Operation Hearts and Minds."
[17] Johnson et al., *The U.S. Army and the Battle for Baghdad*, xviii.

On the eve of the war in Iraq, Army schools offered little or no education in counterinsurgency—and this had been true for decades.[18] This gap in the curriculum meant that commanders on the ground—from the platoon level on up—had little or no shared knowledge to draw upon once confronted to the Iraqi insurgency. Therefore, when soldiers tried to confront the Iraqi insurgency in their areas of operations (AO), this already difficult task was further complicated by the troops' lack of training in counterinsurgency methods. As Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl later pointed out, "in the absence of instructions and the absence of much training or any doctrine on how to conduct COIN, units were developing it from the bottom up."[19] Lieutenant General William Wallace too concurred that innovative and adaptive leadership from junior officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) was essential to figuring out a way to wage a type of conflict that the Army had sought to avoid for decades.[20] In other words, the development of counterinsurgency practices in Iraq and their degree of success was contingent upon the knowledge and abilities of individual commanders on all echelons of the hierarchy. In essence, that meant that during the first months of the conflict, some soldiers were drawing upon their knowledge of history and past conflicts to implement old methods, while others were essentially reinventing the wheel. All had the same goal: taming the unrest and reestablishing a functioning Iraqi government, in other words, nation-building.

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[18] In 1979, a mere six years after the last American troops left Vietnam, the curriculum at CGSC only included eight hours of instruction on stability and support operations. Wright and Reese, *On Point II*, 2:63.

[19] Nagl, interview, October 20, 2010, 9; Moyar, *A Question of Command*.

[20] Steven Komarow, "Unexpected Insurgency Changed Way of War; With Conventional Warfare Outdated, the U.S. Military Is Taking Its Lessons from Troops on the Ground Instead of High-Level Strategic Planners," *USA TODAY*, March 21, 2005, https://search.proquest.com/docview/408978859/abstract/8DB0211619B64350PQ/497.

Image 1: Soldiers interacting with local Iraqis near COB Cedar 2 in January 2006[21]

The methods developed by officers varied based on their prior knowledge, as well as the priorities they identified. They ranged from adopting broad theoretical concepts to mundane tactics like handing out candy and soccer balls to children. Most believed that they needed to find ways to defeat individual insurgents while at the same time gaining the support of the population, or at the very least without alienating it. As early as the fall of 2003, a major stationed in Sadr City, a volatile neighborhood north-east of Baghdad, told a journalist: "the center of gravity is the attitude of the Shia population."[22] However, moving from theory to practice was far from easy. Troops were stretched thin and did not have enough interpreters to interact and build relationships with the locals. Even more challenging was the fact that coalition forces were trying to rebuild Iraq while simultaneously targeting and defeating elusive insurgents—an age-old problem in counterinsurgency operations. As one colonel explained: "It's

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[21] Personal papers of Mike Hill.

[22] Vernon Loeb, "In Shiite Slum, Army's New Caution," *The Washington Post*, October 22, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2263899243/abstract/F475279144C04251PQ/1.

like Jekyll and Hyde out here."[23] Describing the complex and dual nature of his mission, he explained that "by day, we're putting on a happy face," but "by night, we are hunting down and killing our enemies."[24] Not only were these two attitudes difficult to reconcile for the twenty-year-old enlisted soldiers who did the bulk of the work on the ground—one journalist described it as "switching from kindness to killing and back, sometimes within minutes or hours"—but the night-time operations that included house-searches to kill or capture insurgents and seize weapons could easily set back progress made during the day.[25] Previously neutral Iraqis could, understandably so, turn to support the insurgency after their homes were ransacked by foreign forces who kicked in doors and treated their families like common criminals.

The tactics adopted in order to kill or capture insurgents, or even to simply disrupt their operations, were relatively similar across units. It usually came down to setting up checkpoints and conducting patrols and house-searches. By establishing checkpoints on major roads or between different neighborhoods within cities where soldiers would check people's papers and search them and their vehicles, coalition troops sought to control the ways people and goods moved around in an effort to restrict insurgents' activities and limit their access to weapons. In addition, by getting to know the population in an area and their daily routines from repeated interactions at the checkpoint, units would learn to spot changes in those patterns, a likely indicator of insurgent activity. Units in a given area would often see the same people day in and day out, both on their way to and back from work, school, the mosque, or the market, so over time, they would get to know their names, family relations, and even begin to build a rapport.[26]

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[23] Dexter Filkins, "G.I.'s Double Life in Iraq: Win Friends, Fight Foes," *New York Times*, November 2, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/docview/432588390/abstract/E95240E92FB74C15PQ/1.
[24] Filkins.
[25] Bradley Graham, "A Sharp Shift From Killing to Kindness: U.S. Troops in Iraq Torn by Competing Needs to Battle Insurgents and Win Over Populace," *The Washington Post*, December 4, 2004, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2463432710/abstract/DD9D5B4070724E4DPQ/74.
[26] Dominic Amaral, interview by Marjorie Galelli, May 24, 2021.

After being stationed in the same area for a while, soldiers could thus notice if something did not feel right. Likewise during patrols, the more familiar with the area and its population, the more likely troops would be to recognize a change in locals' behavior, which could then lead to uncovering insurgent activity, such as a hidden IED or an impending attack.

While the methods adopted to target insurgents, disrupt their activities, and stop the flow of weapons were usually quite similar, commanders took different approaches to try to win the population over—or at least create a sense of stability. A lot of these approaches hinged on money. For instance, one captain chose to organize—and pay for—trash collection, in order to prevent insurgents from using piles of trash on the streets to hide IEDs.[27] In addition to removing a potential threat to both coalition troops and local civilians, giving work to otherwise unemployed Iraqis helped eliminate money as an incentive to join the insurgency. A unit station in Sadr City tried to decrease violence in its area of operations by having a weapons buyback. A journalist described the operation: "for days, men, women, and children lined up outside a sports stadium on the neighborhood's dusty edge. They clutched burlap sacks filled with AK-47s, each selling for $200." By the end of the week, over 800 assault rifles had been collected—"that many fewer guns that will shoot at us down the road," according to a captain overseeing the operation.[28] Another captain, from the 490th Civil Affairs Battalion, thought that distributing propane fuel would help bringing life back to normal in the increasingly volatile city of Fallujah—which one of the soldiers stationed in the area compared to both Saigon and the Alamo.[29] His hope was that restoring some of the local population's basic amenities would partly

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[27] Komarow, "Unexpected Insurgency Changed Way of War."
[28] Scott Wilson, "A Different Street Fight in Iraq: U.S. General Turns to Public Works in Battle for Hearts and Minds," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2004, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2459880518/abstract/B9EC4B2C72114701PQ/34.
[29] Daniel Williams, "Fueling Pacification With Propane: In Fallujah, Army Seeks to Stem Unrest With Aid, Troop Reinforcements," *The Washington Post*, June 4, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2264102162/abstract/1882F589173246DEPQ/1.

alleviate their resentment towards US troops. Although difficult because of the small number of

interpreters and lack of Arabic speakers within the ranks, building personal relationships with

locals also became key. One Staff Sergeant, who sought to bring a Baghdad neighborhood back

to life at night, offered to stay to provide security to the owner of an internet café if she agreed to

stay open after nightfall. The sergeant's hope was that more shops would follow suit, which

would in turn bring back a sense of normalcy and decrease criminality.[30] While many of these

makeshift initiatives proved successful, at least temporarily, not all the measures devised by

leaders on the ground yielded the intended results.

As there is no foolproof way for foreign occupying forces to win the support of the local

population, sometimes well-meaning efforts had the exact opposite outcome of what soldiers

intended to achieve. On one of their patrols, soldiers from Bravo Company (a unit belonging to a

battalion in the Army's 1st Armored Division) spent half an hour talking with children at a school

in a neighborhood in west Baghdad in an effort to build a rapport and demonstrate their intention

to protect the school. However, no matter how well-intentioned, their presence in the Sunni

neighborhood and especially around a school run by women angered residents, which entirely

defeated the visit's purpose.[31] Meanwhile, a civil affairs officer acknowledged in an article he

wrote for the *Washington Post*, that "Iraqis may see our help as something else," adding that

"paying them to collect trash might be demeaning and remote from their hopes for prosperity in a

new Iraq."[32] Counterinsurgency operations are extremely difficult to navigate in the best

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[30] Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "A Soldier's Business Deal Aims to Aid Baghdad Security: Keeping Shops Open And Criminals Away," *The Washington Post*, June 12, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2263809151/abstract/DC3BEC6B9E8B46A3PQ/478.
[31] Ricks and Shadid, "A Tale of Two Baghdads."
[32] Oscar R. Estrada, "Outsiders, Looking In: The Military: Losing Hearts and Minds?," *The Washington Post*, June 6, 2004, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2459892846/abstract/B9EC4B2C72114701PQ/41.

circumstances and without clear guidance or an understanding of the local population and culture, soldiers were left to stumble their way through.

In addition to the sheer requirements of the situation, the rise of the internet also altered the dynamic within the military's hierarchy and favored the development of ideas at the grass-roots level, by-passing the chain of command. Relying on informal conversations on internet chat rooms or longer blog posts, enlisted personnel, NCOs, and officers alike were able to discuss with each other in real time across the entire theater of operations and built upon each other's experiences. The topics of the exchanges were extremely varied, but a lot of them focused on how to best ensure convoys' security and avoiding roadside bombs, which had become increasingly common over the first year of the conflict and were responsible for a growing share of the coalition's casualties.[33]

Still, such online sharing mechanisms were not streamlined and the degree to which the insights they provided were used depended on each unit's commander's inclination towards such methods. Besides, the blogs' authors, otherwise known as "milbloggers," formed a very eclectic group. In a 2005 *Wired* article, one journalist described them as "activists, angry contrarians, jolly testosterone fuckups, self-appointed pundits, and would-be poets," whose "collective voice competes with and occasionally undermines the DOD's elaborate message machine and the much-loathed mainstream media."[34] In fact, most of the blogs were closely monitored by the Pentagon. Over the course of the conflict, some of the servicemembers' blogs became so widely popular that authors like Colby Buzzell, Matt Gallagher, or Jason Hartley eventually got book

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[33] Thomas E. Ricks, "Soldiers Record Lessons From Iraq: Unvarnished Tales Serve as Warning," *The Washington Post*, February 8, 2004, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2459852532/abstract/223EA344C9B14B75PQ/1.
[34] John Hockenberry, "The Blogs of War," *Wired*, August 1, 2005, https://www.wired.com/2005/08/milblogs/.

deals.[35] But in several instances, like Gallagher and Hartley's, the Army ended up ordering soldiers to shut down blogs they judged too controversial.

On the whole, for the first year of the conflict, there were nearly as many approaches to counterinsurgency as there were units on the ground, all trying their best to palliate both their lack of preparation and the overall lack of planning for post-conflict operations, in order to bring back stability.

Popular Success Stories

Given officers' and NCOs' general lack of experience with counterinsurgency, either in training or in practice, the outcome of their efforts was quite variable, even when individuals explicitly endeavored to apply what they understood as counterinsurgency measures. Still, over time, a handful of individuals came to be known for the success they encountered in their areas of operations after they adopted counterinsurgency practices. Their accomplishments and the way they were reported in the media helped paved the way for the eventual large-scale adoption of counterinsurgency by the US military and government.

One of the most famous among them was then-Major General David Petraeus. According to General Keane, a mentor to Petraeus who visited Iraq as acting Chief of Staff of the Army in late June 2003, Petraeus was "the only general officer that I dealt with who understood what was happening."[36] As it turns out, Petraeus's adept grasp of the situation was not an accident. Even

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[35] Colby Buzzell, *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* (New York, NY: Berkley Caliber, 2006); Matt Gallagher, *Kaboom: Embracing the Suck in a Savage Little War* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 2011); Jason Christopher Hartley, *Just Another Soldier: A Year on the Ground in Iraq* (Harper Perennial, 2006).

[36] John M. "Jack" Keane, interview by Aaron Crawford and Timothy Sayle, August 18, 2015, 5, The Surge - Collective Memory Project, SMU Center for Presidential History, https://www.smu.edu/-/media/Site/CPH/Collective-Memory-Project/The-Surge/Keane-Jack--FINAL--20199.pdf?la=en. Gen. Keane, was a veteran of the Vietnam War where he served as a platoon leader and company commander. Keane believed that Creighton Abrams had effectively addressed and defeated the insurgency in South Vietnam, and consequently

though counterinsurgency was not a central tenet of his military education, the Army had sent Petraeus to graduate school at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton. There, he dedicated his research to the lessons of the Vietnam War. His dissertation, "The American Military and the Lessons of Vietnam: A Study of Military Influence and the Use of Force in the post-Vietnam Era," which he defended in 1987, significantly influenced his thinking on military leadership and, to a degree, counterinsurgency. In 1986, he published an article in the Army War College journal on the "Lessons of History and Lessons of Vietnam," in which he already advocated for a greater focus on preparation for counterinsurgency operations as, he argued, "America's involvement in counterinsurgencies is almost universally regarded as more likely than involvement in most other types of combat."[37] Given that Petraeus had drawn this lesson from his study of the Vietnam War, it should come as no surprise that, when confronted with chaos in the north of Iraq in 2003, Petraeus turned to Vietnam-era measures.

At the time of the invasion, Petraeus was commanding the 17,000 soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division—the famous "Screaming Eagles," best known for their exploits during WWII, from the Normandy landings to the Battle of the Bulge. Having only received its orders in January, it was one of the last units to deploy to the Gulf, which led it into a frantic race against the clock to be ready on time for the beginning of the invasion.[38] The division's initial mission was to follow in the footsteps of the 3rd Infantry Division and establish forward air refueling

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became one of the most fervent proponents of adopting a counterinsurgency strategy during the Iraq War. By the time the insurgency begun in Iraq, Petraeus and Keane had a relationship going back many years. Petraeus had served as Keane battalion commander, his S3 when Keane was a division commander, lead a brigade in the 82nd Airborne while Keane was a corps commander at Ft. Bragg, etc.

[37] David H Petraeus, "Lessons of History and Lessons of Vietnam," *Parameters: The Journal of the Army War College* XVI, no. 3 (Autumn 1986): 49.

[38] Atkinson, *In the Company of Soldiers*, 34; Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, 1:76–77.

points for the Apache helicopters that would provide air support to the invasion.[39] After much effort and with only days to spare, the division was assembled on time for the invasion.

After they helped seize the capital, the Screaming Eagles were dispatched 250 miles north to Mosul. There, Petraeus became the area's *de facto* authority since the Iraqi government and police forces had virtually vanished, which meant that he had to find a way to rebuild the region's infrastructure. According to Petraeus,

> The first thing that we needed to do was re-establish some degree of security and start rebuilding respect for the law—and a culture, if you will, of law and order—because that had totally broken down. There were private armies roaming the streets. There were political leaders who were proclaiming themselves to be the governor and mayor and all the other officials. All the government buildings had been looted. The looting was still continuing, and basic law-and-order policing was just non-existent.[40]

Reestablishing law and order in this city of nearly two million people was no mean feat, especially since the entire area was unstable. Looting was rampant, as residents tried to cope with shortages, and protests against the occupying forces were common.[41] As one of Iraq's largest cities, Mosul, along with its surroundings, remained a point of contention long after the initial invasion. Months after the Screaming Eagles' arrival in the area, the city was still described by one of the soldiers who eventually came to replace the 101st as "an ideal location for any soldier who wanted to spend his combat deployment living in hell."[42] Still, Petraeus's occupation was quite successful, especially when compared with the situation in other parts of the country.

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[39] Atkinson, *In the Company of Soldiers*, 66.
[40] "Interview Maj. Gen. David Petraeus," *Frontline* (PBS, February 12, 2004), https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/beyond/interviews/petraeus.html.
[41] Cooper, Dreazen, and Fassihi, "U.S. Sends Seasoned Peacekeepers to Baghdad --- Getting Handle on Episodes Of Armed Resistance Is Key To Withdrawal of Soldiers."
[42] Buzzell, *My War*, 118.

During his testimony in front of Congress in February 2003, Deputy Secretary of the

Defense Paul Wolfowitz had specifically contrasted Iraq with the Balkans. He claimed that the

war in Iraq would not cause problems akin to the ethnic strife that hampered operations in the

Balkans, thus implying that the kind of operations that would take place in Iraq would not be

anything like those of the late 1990s.[43] Yet, beyond his book-knowledge of the Vietnam War, it

is precisely his first-hand experience in Bosnia that Petraeus credited with his success in

Mosul.[44] According to Petraeus, "Our first task, once a degree of order had been restored, was to

determine how to establish governance. That entailed getting Iraqi partners to help run the city of

nearly 2 million people and the rest of Nineveh Province — a very large area about which we

knew very little."[45]

In order to do so, Petraeus established a series of measures, which he later described in a

Military Review article entitled "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in

Iraq."[46] Chief among the fourteen points Petraeus detailed, was his belief, shared by many across

the theater of operations, that "money is ammunition."[47] Petraeus argued that Commander's

Emergency Reconstruction Program (CERP) funds were invaluable to the stabilization of the

country. Such funds allowed units on the ground to conduct "small projects that were, despite

their low cost, of enormous importance to local citizens," and, by working directly to alleviate

local concerns, the hope was that these projects would make civilians less likely to support the

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[43] Department of Defense Budget Priorities for Fiscal Year 2004.
[44] "Interview Maj. Gen. David Petraeus." Between 2001 and 2002, Petraeus spent a year as the assistant chief of staff for military operations of the NATO Stabilization Force, which made him familiar with what governance and reconstruction work entails.
[45] David Petraeus, "The Challenge in Mosul Won't Be to Defeat the Islamic State. It Will Be What Comes After.," *Washington Post*, August 12, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-challenge-in-mosul-wont-be-to-defeat-the-islamic-state-it-will-be-what-comes-after/2016/08/12/ce972904-5f2a-11e6-af8e-54aa2e849447_story.html.
[46] Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq."
[47] Graham, "A Sharp Shift From Killing to Kindness."

insurgency. Putting theory into practice, the 101st Airborne Division carried out hundreds of school repairs.[48] A *Newsweek* article reporting on Petraeus and the Screaming Eagles at the end of the year described his approach as "spreading around cash as a reward for good behavior," adding that "Petraeus has not ended the fighting in the territory controlled by the 101st Airborne in northern Iraq, but his troops have done a better job than most at restoring Iraqi pride through self-rule."[49] Petraeus also explained that over time his unit realized that "more important than our winning Iraqi hearts and minds was doing all that we could to ensure that as many Iraqis as possible felt a stake in the success of the new Iraq," and that before each operation his team would ask itself whether it would "take more bad guys off the street than it creates by the way it is conducted."[50] This latter observation meant that, while actively pursuing irreconcilable insurgents was indispensable to ensure the area's stability, units should only move forward if doing so did not simultaneously alienate the rest of the population.

Yet another one of Petraeus's points was that "knowledge of the cultural 'terrain' can be as important as, and sometimes even more important than, knowledge of the geographic terrain."[51] This was not the last time that Petraeus emphasized the importance of culture. Petraeus would stress the critical significance of culture throughout the entire war, and it played a key part in the development of the 2006 *Counterinsurgency* field manual. One practical example of Petraeus's understanding of the importance of culture and symbols occurred during his time in Mosul when he ordered his troops to paint over murals of Saddam Hussein—the fresh

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[48] Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq," 4–5.
[49] Thomas, "Operation Hearts and Minds."
[50] Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq," 5.
[51] Petraeus, 8.

coat of paint symbolized a fresh start for the country now free of its dictator's looming shadow.[52]

Thanks to his successful implementation of all of these measures, and his unparalleled ability to get his story told by the media, by the end of 2003, Petraeus was praised in the news as a "warrior intellectual," "an American commander who approached so-called nation-building as a central military mission and who was prepared to act while the civilian authority in Baghdad was still getting organized."[53] The legend had begun.

Besides Petraeus, another Army officer who came to be hailed for his successful counterinsurgency operations was Colonel H. R. McMaster who, in 2005-2006, was commanding the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in the north of Iraq.[54] McMaster's expertise on the Vietnam War also stemmed from his PhD degree, except his was in military history instead of social sciences. McMaster's understanding of the conduct of the Vietnam War was grounded in years of study, which meant that, once in Tal Afar, he was able to draw upon his expertise to implement counterinsurgency measures in his area of operations. He later wrote that he had "applied COIN theory and doctrine every step of the way."[55] Like Petraeus, McMaster has repeatedly expressed the belief that it is possible to draw insights from history, and the Vietnam War specifically. "As long as we resist the temptation to expect simple answers from history, strategic and operational insights from the war in Vietnam can be relevant and helpful to our efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq," he wrote, but also cautioned that "the problems you have in the

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[52] Charles M. Sennott, "The Petraeus Doctrine: General David Petraeus Rewrote the Book on Counterinsurgency. But Will He Have the Troops -- and the Time -- to Complete the Mission He's Spent His Career Preparing For?," *The Boston Globe*, January 28, 2007, http://archive.boston.com/news/education/higher/articles/2007/01/28/the_petraeus_doctrine/.

[53] Thomas, "Operation Hearts and Minds"; Michael R. Gordon, "The Struggle for Iraq: Reconstruction; 101st Airborne Scores Success In Northern Iraq," *The New York Times*, September 4, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/04/world/struggle-for-iraq-reconstruction-101st-airborne-scores-success-northern-iraq.html.

[54] Packer, "The Lesson of Tal Afar."

[55] Herbert McMaster to Conrad Crane and Jan Horvath, "RE: Request to Review, Correct, Andor Approve Tal Afar Case Study (Dr Aft) for Dual Service FM 3-24 (Counterinsurgency) (UNCLASSIFIED)," February 5, 2006.

next war are oftentimes because you studied your last war only superficially—didn't study it enough really to learn the lessons."[56]

Charged with "liberating" the city of Tal Afar located in northern Iraq, 40 miles west of Mosul, a couple years after Petraeus's Screaming Eagles left the region, McMaster adopted classic counterinsurgency tactics to suppress the sectarian violence that was flaring up throughout the area.[57] At the time, Petraeus wrote that he "wish his unit could have followed the 101st up there," because McMaster "has clearly been the one who most 'gets it' in the current rotation in Iraq."[58] Specifically, McMaster focused on developing relations with the population and ensuring its security, in addition to targeting insurgents.

Because of his success, McMaster's story in Tal Afar is best known for his efforts to reconstruct the city's infrastructure and recruit and train Iraqi police.[59] Yet, contrary to what some critics would later allege, securing an area did require the use of force in order to rid it from insurgents and was not solely about "soft" power. In fact, the US presence in the area was far from innocuous. McMaster's unit first built an eight-foot berm around the city to cut off the insurgents from outside support by controlling everyone's comings and goings at checkpoints and subsequently "cleared" the city of insurgents by conducting house searches.[60] "From before dawn until well after dark, we swept through the city—house by house, block by block, often

[56] McMaster, "The Human Element: When Gadgetry Becomes Strategy," 34; Chuck Williams, "Q&A: Maj. Gen. H.R. McMaster, Outgoing Fort Benning Commander," *Stars and Stripes*, July 11, 2014, https://www.stripes.com/news/us/q-a-maj-gen-h-r-mcmaster-outgoing-fort-benning-commander-1.292978.

[57] As one journalist pointed out "Tal Afar, which before the 2003 U.S. invasion was home to some 200,000 people, has the dubious distinction of being one of the most frequently 'liberated' cities in Iraq, to use the U.S. military's term of art; which, of course, also means it has been among the most often conquered. After the invasion, it was one of the earliest cities to be taken by insurgents. In 2004 the U.S. Army pushed them out but left only 500 troops behind, and by 2005 Tal Afar had been recaptured." Jon Finer, "McMaster Is Hailed for Liberating Iraq's Tal Afar. Here's What That Looked like up Close.," *Stars and Stripes*, February 24, 2017, https://www.stripes.com/news/middle-east/mcmaster-is-hailed-for-liberating-iraq-s-tal-afar-here-s-what-that-looked-like-up-close-1.455708.

[58] David Petraeus to George Packer, "Re: From George Packer," February 6, 2006.

[59] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 5:22-23.

[60] Department of the Army, 5:23.

under fire that could not be located—in search of terrorists who had made it their home," explained a reporter embedded with the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment at the time.[61] Even though the operation came to be known as a COIN success, that same journalist reported that while "U.S. forces were more restrained than I had observed elsewhere, . . . they still tore apart hundreds of Iraqi homes they entered, often after breaking down or blowing through doors, shouting in English at terrified residents, and leaving a wake of crying women and children and seething men."[62] As this example illustrates, even the most successful counterinsurgency operations by Army standards are by no means benign and often run the risk of alienating previously indifferent civilians.[63] Once again, one of the key reasons why McMaster's operations in Tal Afar came to be widely known as a success story was that, like Petraeus, McMaster was able to take advantage of the reporters embedded with his unit to get his story into the media, thus showcasing the results of counterinsurgency methods outside of military circles and his chain of command. These articles helped set the stage for the upbeat reporting that later surrounded the military's creation of counterinsurgency programs and the 2006 *Counterinsurgency* field manual in mainstream media.

Adaptation, Marine Corps-Style

As in the US Army's case, in the early months of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the implementation of counterinsurgency by Marines rested heavily on the personal experience of individual commanders and both efforts and results were disparate across the theater of operations.

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[61] Finer, "McMaster Is Hailed for Liberating Iraq's Tal Afar. Here's What That Looked like up Close."
[62] Finer.
[63] Attesting to the Army's belief that McMaster's approach in Tal Afar was correct is the fact that his operations became the object of a vignette in the fifth chapter of the 2006 *Counterinsurgency* field manual.

Despite the Marine Corps' long history with "small wars" and their associated occupation functions, the early months of Operation Iraqi Freedom revealed that many officers on the ground were not better prepared than their Army counterparts when it came to unconventional warfare. Oblivious to his service's actual history, one USMC colonel in southern Iraq told a reporter in April 2003 that "we're not designed to be an army of occupation," even adding that "we're making this up as we go along. In the history of the Marine Corps, I don't think we have ever done this kind of thing. It's wild stuff."[64] Another Marine later complained to his commanding officer, "There's nobody to shoot here, sir. If it's just going to be building schools and hospitals, that's what the Army is for, isn't it?"[65] Clearly, some of the Marine Corps' hard-learned lessons had not stuck.

Still, in the early days of the Iraq War, Marine Corps units on average fared better than Army ones. One of the factors behind this divergence was the fact that while most Army units were confronted with the height of the insurgency in the north of the country, most Marine units were initially responsible for a Shia area of Iraq where they faced a markedly different situation, largely devoid of sectarian tensions. In July 2003, a *Marine Corps Times* article explained:

> In Baghdad and the northern Iraqi towns that once were Saddam Hussein's base of power, Army troops are locked in an increasingly organized guerrilla war and suffering casualties at a slow but steady rate. Yet among the towns in the Marine sector, not one of the 17 leathernecks killed since major combat was declared at an end May 1 died as a result of hostile fire. And the populace has been remarkably receptive to the Marines and the Army civil-affairs teams who accompany them.[66]

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[64] Dion Nissenbaum, "Marines Getting up to Task of Nation-Building in Iraq," *Knight Ridder Tribune News Service*, April 30, 2003.

[65] Michael A. Ledeen, "Victory Is Within Reach in Iraq," *Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 2007, https://www.proquest.com/docview/399084558/abstract/AED5B805FE9945B8PQ/1.

[66] Christian Lowe, "Part Warrior, Part Diplomat-Marines Won the War in Iraq. Now, They Must Rebuild the Communities--and the Trust--of the Iraqi People," *Marine Corps Times*, July 28, 2003.

The fact that the population was much more homogeneous compared to areas under Army control, and composed of people who largely benefited from Saddam's removal, allowed the Marines to hit the ground running in terms of civil-affairs programs, which further reinforced their positive relationship to the locals.[67] Descriptions of Marine-controlled areas in the media in the summer 2003 offered a stark contrast to those occupied by soldiers: "On the streets during two mid-July patrols, the residents of Karbala showed their enthusiasm for the Marines' presence here. Crowds of children chased the Humvees as they cruised the busy streets, packed with people even at 11 p.m., shouting 'Mister, mister! What's your name?' and 'Salaam Alaikum,' a traditional Arabic greeting."[68] Quoting an officer, the article continued: "It's not all about kicking down doors in Karbala. Although the Marines clearly maintain their aggressive edge, they use it only when they need to. 'It's much more of a "hearts and minds" kind of approach,' said Col. Larry Brown, I MEF operations chief. 'We'd rather knock on the door and ask to come in than kick it down.'"[69] The Corps' insistence on adaptability as an essential trait for Marines and their more moderate rejection of COIN after the Vietnam War also made the USMC somewhat better suited to the challenges created by the insurgency. This combination of factors, some derived from the Marine Corps' historical mission, and some circumstantial, explains why and how they adopted classic counterinsurgency measures on a large scale so rapidly.

Over time, the Marine Corps started to draw more explicitly on its past experiences with counterinsurgency and other so-called small wars. In January 2004, the Marine Corps was set to take over the so-called "Sunni Triangle," the area north-west of Baghdad populated mostly by Sunnis that includes the towns of Fallujah, Habbaniyah, Ramadi, and Tikrit. There, they planned

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[67] Lowe.
[68] Lowe.
[69] Lowe.

to emphasize "restraint in the use of force, cultural sensitivity and a public message that the new troops aren't from the Army," and aimed to spend most of their time in close contact with the local population to try to gain their support.[70] These dispositions clearly reflected classical counterinsurgency methods that the corps had relied on in the past. General Mattis explicitly described it to a journalist as an effort to revive Combined Action Platoons (CAP), the famous Marine Corps units that lived among the people in rural villages during the Vietnam War in order to help them ensure their own safety.[71] Donovan Campbell, a Marine Lieutenant who later chronicled the story of his platoon's deployment in Ramadi in mid-2004 explained that his unit lived on an outpost and conducted dismounted patrols across the city and to clear the highway from potential IEDs—a marked change from the soldiers who had previously controlled the area. Going into the city's butcher area for the first time, the platoon met "incredulous Iraqis" who "stopped everything to stare."[72] According to the platoon leader, up until then "U.S. forces had rarely, if ever ventured down here, and they certainly had not done so on foot."[73] While not necessarily a generalized and consistent approach, this example goes to show that Marine units did try to implement counterinsurgency methods that proved successful in the past. Deploying to Iraq in February 2004, one Marine Corps major packed a copy of the 1940 *Small Wars Manual*, telling a journalist that it "pretty much describes the intent of everything I do over here: rebuild schools, roads and police stations."[74] Drawing parallels between past conflicts and the Iraq War

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[70] Thomas E. Ricks, "Marines to Offer New Tactics in Iraq: Reduced Use of Force Planned After Takeover From Army," *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2004, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2459866933/abstract/7B0EE96A10EB4AD5PQ/80.
[71] Ricks.
[72] Donovan Campbell, *Joker One: A Marine Platoon's Story of Courage, Leadership, and Brotherhood* (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010), 109. The rotating nature of the schedule meant that the unit was conducting daily patrols in the area.
[73] Campbell, 109.
[74] Greg Jaffe, "For Guidance in Iraq, Marines Rediscover A 1940s Manual; Small-War Secrets Include: Tips on Nation-Building, The Care of Pack Mules," *Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition*, April 8, 2004.

allowed Marines to recall old practices and use past methods as a template for their own operations.

As these various examples demonstrate, the early months of the war in Iraq proved to be an unexpected challenge for the troops taking part to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Very little in their formal training or in the planning for the invasion had prepared them for the situation that eventually unfolded—even though, on the whole, Marines fared better than their Army counterparts. Yet, drawing upon personal experience and historical analogies, individuals across the battlefield were able to rise to the task's requirements. Though *ad hoc* and often improvised, many developed counterinsurgency approaches that would come to be hailed as textbook COIN.

Even though Petraeus's story in Mosul eventually became the most well-known, its popularity is mostly the product of the general's close relationship with the media and his relentless self-promotion. The examples highlighted throughout the section demonstrate that the drive behind counterinsurgency tactics existed on many echelons of the hierarchy and not just within Petraeus's division. The general himself acknowledged that fact. In an interview discussing reconstruction in the Nineveh province, Petraeus emphasized the "tremendous amount of decentralization," adding that "the initiative by our young leaders and soldiers is incredible, and we applaud it and encourage it."[75] In fact, across all the troops deployed in the theater of operations, the first ten months of the Iraq War led to great amounts of innovation and adaptation in the face of tremendous pressure from the growing insurgency, but only some commanders were able to translate their units' achievements into success stories for the media. Not for the last time, the most communication-savvy leaders framed counterinsurgency's story.

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[75] "Interview Maj. Gen. David Petraeus."

COIN at the Operational Level

In May 2004, General George Casey, then Army Vice Chief of Staff, was chosen by President Bush to take over the command of coalition forces in Iraq. He was confirmed by the Senate on June 24 and headed to the Middle East on June 28. There, he remained in charge of MNF-I for a total of thirty-two months, during which he sought to defeat the insurgency and establish a new Iraqi government. From the start, Casey was working with a shrinking number of troops, and with the secretary of defense's explicit directive to put an end to the US presence in the country as quickly as possible. Therefore, in order to accomplish his mission, Casey focused on standing up new military and police forces, which, he hoped, would in turn lead to a stable country and allow US forces to depart. Still, despite his best efforts, Casey ended up commanding MNF-I during Iraq's descent into chaos. Over time, he came to embody a bumbling pre-surge era of the war in Iraq, while Petraeus represented the enlightened counterinsurgency campaign of 2007-2008 that finally put an end to the violence. As is frequently true, the reality was far more complex.

When Casey took command of MNF-I in the summer of 2004, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld still hoped for a quick exit, achieved with limited means—what political scientist Francis Fukuyama labeled "nation-building lite"—and "did not think resolving other countries' internal political disputes, paving roads, erecting power lines, policing streets, building stock markets, and organizing democratic governmental bodies were missions for our men and women in uniform."[76] Rejecting the premise of a nation-building mission outright and trying to prove the validity of his light footprint concept supported by precision weapons, Rumsfeld argued that the

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[76] Francis Fukuyama, "Nation-Building 'Lite,'" *Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition*, October 1, 2003; Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 482.

sheer presence of US troops in Iraq was adding fuel to the insurgency fire and that it was therefore crucial to transfer authority to Iraqis as quickly as possible.[77] His mantra: "The sooner Iraqis can take responsibility for their own affairs the sooner U.S. forces can come home."[78] Because of the secretary's emphasis on transferring authority and limiting US troops' visibility, headquarters in Iraq were severely limited in their adoption of counterinsurgency throughout Rumsfeld's entire tenure.

Still, Casey understood insurgency as the root of the problem in Iraq and made counterinsurgency a key part of his strategy. When he started to prepare for his new command, he immediately began "to update [his] knowledge on counterinsurgency operations and the region."[79] On the list of "immediate priorities" that he then communicated to the President when he took over the command of MNF-I, developing "an integrated counterinsurgency strategy to defeat the insurgency" came first.[80] Counterinsurgency, he also assured readers in his memoir, remained a key preoccupation throughout his tenure, and he rapidly instructed his subordinates to study COIN's best practices.[81] Looking back to 20th century counterinsurgency campaigns, Casey's staff developed a list of thirteen key practices for successful counterinsurgency, which the general subsequently shared with the secretary of defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). Among those was an emphasis on intelligence; a focus on populations (their needs and security); the establishment and subsequent expansion of secured areas; isolating insurgents from the population; unity of effort; and the reorientation of conventional military forces for

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[77] Donald H. Rumsfeld, "Beyond 'Nation-Building,'" *The Washington Post*, September 25, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/docview/409552325/abstract/ED5F507B3D604F96PQ/1.
[78] Rumsfeld.
[79] George W. Jr Casey, *Strategic Reflections: Operation Iraqi Freedom, July 2004-February 2007:* (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, 2012), 6, https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA570401.
[80] Casey, 20.
[81] Casey, 44.

counterinsurgency.[82] Clearly, even though critics later focused on Casey's insistence on standing

up Iraqi forces and an Iraqi government—which were indeed key priorities—these did not

indicate a lack of understanding of classic counterinsurgency practices. The list Casey developed

in 2004 could have just as easily been put together by Petraeus, and in fact, appears in quasi-

identical terms at the end of FM 3-24's first chapter.[83] This direct link between Casey's

theoretical framework for counterinsurgency at the very beginning of his tenure as MNF-I

commander and the publication that was later heralded as a key turning point in the United

States' conceptual approach to the war, demonstrates that the turn to COIN narrative was

dramatically exaggerated for political purposes.

In addition to understanding the requirements of successful counterinsurgency operations,

Casey also believed that one of the main insights to be drawn from the past was that "the average

successful COIN campaign" lasts 9 years.[84] While shorter than unsuccessful campaigns, it was

still a far longer timeline than anything considered by the Pentagon leadership at the time, which

severely limited Casey's options. It is also worth noting that during Secretary of Defense

Rumsfeld's visit to Iraq in 2005, Casey gave him a copy of Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup with a*

Knife, indicating that he not only understood the importance of counterinsurgency in Iraq, but

also tried to convey it to his obtuse commander in the Pentagon.[85]

An MNF-I report from July 2004 further supports the fact that Casey understood that the

insurgency called for a different approach to the military's mission than conventional operations.

The document read: "now that the war-fighting and pre-insurgency phases of the conflict are

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[82] Casey, 45.
[83] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1:29.
[84] Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 46.
[85] Donald Rumsfeld to George Casey, December 27, 2005, Papers of Gen. George Casey Jr., US Army (Ret.), Box 121, National Defense University.

over, military power must be employed differently."[86] However, the analysis also added that

"unless framed within a convincing political rationale and precisely targeted, the application of

force strengthens the insurgency and causes it to grow," before concluding that "the coalition's

military capability (MNF-I) has to assume a lower profile, push the ISF forward when trained

and ready (especially the police, who are well-regarded by the public), and emphasize

intelligence-generated precision strikes."[87] This approach reflects that which would guide

General Casey throughout his tenure as MNF-I commander.

Contrary to some of his subordinates' efforts to build relationships with local Iraqis and

attempts to live among the population to ensure its safety, Casey aimed to reduce the role and

footprint of US forces and to instead implement counterinsurgency measures using Iraqi forces

as proxy. According to the MNF-I Campaign Plan, "Operation Iraqi Freedom—Partnership:

From Occupation to Constitutional Elections," published in August 2004: "in partnership with

the Iraqi Government, MNF-I conducts full spectrum counterinsurgency operations to isolate and

neutralize former regime extremists and foreign terrorists and organizes, trains and equips Iraqi

security forces."[88] A common belief at the time was that "the very presence of [US] troops is a

worsening irritant to the Iraqi public and a rallying point for nationalist opponents."[89] In other

words, the simple presence of American troops in Iraqi neighborhoods would agitate the

populations and lead to more violence, which in turn meant that the coalition should limit its

troops' visibility and instead rely on Iraqi forces. It is this emphasis on transitioning

responsibilities over to the Iraqi that eventually came to fuel most of the critiques, but Casey was

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[86] "Building Legitimacy and Confronting Insurgency in Iraq," July 15, 2004, 3, Papers of Gen. George Casey Jr., US Army (Ret.), Box 117, National Defense University.
[87] "Building Legitimacy and Confronting Insurgency in Iraq," 3.
[88] Cited in Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 29.
[89] James Fallows, "Why Iraq Has No Army," *The Atlantic*, December 1, 2005, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/12/why-iraq-has-no-army/304428/.

following a key COIN principle, as well as the line dictated by his hierarchy and the number of troops at his disposal.[90]

In addition to focusing on transferring authority to the Iraqis as fast as possible, under Casey's leadership, most US and coalition troops remained stationed in bases and "commuted" to the fight, rather than living among the Iraqi population in outposts. Illustrating this type of framework, Army Specialist Luis Gerardo Arguelles described a typical day in Camp Taji during his deployment in 2005: "we would do 12-hour rotations, which meant we had to spend 12 hours outside the wire, pulling security, looking for either insurgents or making sure that streets were clear, going into homes to grab individuals, look for informants, look for places where they were hiding explosives, or pulling some type of detail outside.[91] The other 12 hours were spent inside the camp, away from the local population. Without a continuous presence in urban areas, Casey's troops were *de facto* ceding some ground to insurgents. Still, this was not evidence of Casey's lack of concern with securing Iraq's civilian population as some detractors later claimed.[92] Rather, it is the product of Casey's attempt to conduct counterinsurgency within the framework imparted by his superiors in the Pentagon.

One particularly telling testament to Casey's dedication to counterinsurgency, was his spearheading of the creation of the MNF-I Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence (CCE), what became known as a "COIN Academy," at Camp Taji, to train officers in counterinsurgency methods. This was a place "where incoming officers attend classes taught by those they've come

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[90] Even John Nagl acknowledged that this understanding of the situation did not originate with Casey. Rather, he wrote, "Casey suffered from a fundamental misunderstanding of the situation in Iraq that his boss, CENTCOM Commander General John Abizaid, had inflicted on him." John A Nagl, *Knife Fights: A Memoir of Modern War in Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 140.

[91] "Interview Transcript: Luis Gerardo Arguelles: Veterans History Project (Library of Congress," accessed February 26, 2021, https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.73517/transcript?ID=mv0001.

[92] Andrew Krepinevich, for instance, argued that under Casey's command, troops were focused on killing insurgents instead of providing security to the Iraqi people. Krepinevich, "How to Win in Iraq," 88–89.

to relieve."[93] It was part of the larger Phoenix Academy that aimed to provide officers some

additional training before their units took over in Iraq in an effort to better bridge the knowledge

gap between incoming and outgoing units.[94] The Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence was

created in August 2005 and its goal was "to teach the nuances of applying counterinsurgency

doctrine in Iraq to incoming commanders to ensure more commanders started at the same

level."[95] One officer who attended the week-long COIN Academy program in the fall 2005 later

stated that "if we look back on it now it would be very basic but at the time it was a great review

of trends in theater . . . as well as some real basic COIN tactics."[96] By the spring of 2007, over

6,600 Army and Marine officers had gone through the five-day course at CCE, which

represented just about every American commanding officers who rotated into the country, from

captains to colonels.[97]

In May 2006, the COIN Academy published a *Counterinsurgency Handbook*, primarily

intended for squad leaders, platoon leaders, and company commanders, and geared towards

operations in Iraq specifically.[98] According to Casey, whose endorsement letter was featured on

the second page, the handbook included "the most effective tactics, techniques, and procedures

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[93] Packer, "The Lesson of Tal Afar."
[94] According to Petraeus, the Phoenix Academy was his initiative and was created "in early 2005 because we saw there needed to be additional prep, in particular focused prep on what individual teams were going to do as advisor elements." See David H. Petraeus, interview by Steven Clay, December 11, 2006, 9–10, Operational Leadership Experiences Interview Collection, Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library, http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4013coll13/id/328/rec/3. No matter who the idea originated with, Casey's support for the Center was undeniable.
[95] "Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence (COIN CFE) Command Brief," December 19, 2005, 4, Papers of Gen. George Casey Jr., US Army (Ret.), Box 112, National Defense University; Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 73.
[96] Jeffrey Palazzini, interview by Jenna Fike, August 22, 2011, 5, Operational Leadership Experiences Interview Collection, Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library, https://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4013coll13/id/2425.
[97] Mike Shuster, "Baghdad School Trains Troops to Combat Insurgents," *NPR*, April 30, 2007, sec. World, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9910522.
[98] Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence, "Counterinsurgency Handbook," May 2006, 3, Papers of Gen. George Casey Jr., US Army (Ret.), Box 96, National Defense University.

from current operations in Iraq."[99] Remarkably, the handbook opened with David Kilcullen's

T.E. Lawrence-inspired article, "Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level

Counterinsurgency," that had been published in *Small Wars Journal* that same year. The list

included recommendations ranging from "know your turf," to "find a political/cultural adviser,"

to "practice deterrent patrolling," to "keep your extraction plan secret."[100] The inclusion of

Kilcullen's work, which also played a key part in the development of FM 3-24 occurring at the

same time at Ft. Leavenworth, further demonstrates that there was much more continuity

between Casey and Petraeus's approaches to COIN than the traditional narrative suggests.[101]

In addition to providing a primer on the fundamentals of insurgency and

counterinsurgency, one of the imperatives of the academy was to "stress and explore the

implications of culture on COIN operations."[102] The *Counterinsurgency Handbook* included

sections on both historical and cultural context for the war in Iraq. The latter highlighted the

importance of family, tribal, and Islamic networks to the Iraqi population, indicating that

learning about these cultural differences was critical and that soldiers and Marines should care

"because if you ignore these things, you end up with Pissed-Off Iraqis (POIs)."[103] It also

included no less than eight pages dedicated to "Cultural Awareness" broadly speaking, that

opened with a section on beliefs and values because "the first step in understanding any culture is

to identify their basic beliefs and values," delved into social formalities and etiquette, before

ending by addressing specific disconnects between locals and Westerners and ways to deal with

sensitive topics. The list included general recommendations like "never openly refuse a friend's

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[99] Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence, 2.
[100] Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence, 6–8.
[101] The twenty-eight points outlined by Kilcullen in *Small Wars Journal* and reproduced in the CCE's *Counterinsurgency Handbook* also formed the basis of FM 3-24's first appendix. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, A.1-9.
[102] "Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence (COIN CFE) Command Brief," 8.
[103] Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence, "Counterinsurgency Handbook," 9–18.

request," or "never omit greetings," as well as more specific ones like "accept and hold the cup with the right hand" when offered a drink.[104] The section ended with recommendation like "be prepared for controversial politics like Palestine and colonialism and imperialism," for which the handbook suggested that "the safest response would be to express concern for the victims of war, and offer your hope for lasting peace. Then, wait for the subject to change!"[105] While cursory, these pages were an attempt at bridging the cultural gap between US troops and local Iraqis to help them conduct successful counterinsurgency operations. The rest of the handbook also included section on intelligence gathering, conduct of operations, advisory mission, and appendixes with, among other things, a sample target packet, a few Iraqi words and phrases in transliteration, and Iraqi ranks and insignia.

All the measures taken during Casey's command of MNF-I support the notion that counterinsurgency was indeed one of his key preoccupations, which goes against the narrative popularized during the creation of the 2006 *Counterinsurgency* field manual. Still, the outcome was at best mixed. Because Casey was forced to deal with the results of Ambassador Bremer's initial post-conflict decisions that enabled Iraq's sinking into chaos in the first place, he was at a disadvantage from the start. In addition, the directives issued by his leadership meant that Casey operated within a markedly different framework than that which later existed during Petraeus's tenure in 2007-2008. General Casey did worry that the coalition's visible presence in the country fueled the insurgency and therefore chose to focus on standing up Iraqi forces in order to prevent the American presence from causing additional unrest. However, that was at least as much the product of the orders he received from Rumsfeld and Abizaid and a significant troops shortage, which together prevented Casey from implementing counterinsurgency operations on the scale of

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[104] Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence, 31–32.
[105] Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence, 36.

those that later took place during the surge. Straining to offer signs of progress, one journalist wrote in 2006 that "on most mornings, the streets in Baghdad echo not just with the sounds of car bombs but also with shots fired from the police shooting range."[106] Despite the efforts of the coalition forces under Casey's leadership, the situation in Iraq was hardly improving.

The Pentagon's reluctance to acknowledge the existence of an insurgency for months meant that soldiers and Marines on the ground were largely left to their own devices while Iraq spiraled into chaos. Even though they tried to develop measures that would allow them to quell the unrest, the *ad hoc*, haphazard nature of these efforts meant that there was no coherent approach across the whole theater of operations. Some units were very successful, while others simply could not prevent the rise of sectarian violence or increasing attacks against coalition troops. Even if one unit was particularly successful at ridding its area of insurgents, the enemy could still relocate to a new one and resume its activities.

Once Casey took command of MNF-I in the spring 2004, he did his best to develop a coherent approach to implement over the entire war theater, but at that point, he had to deal with the consequences of fifteen months of chaos. In addition, his superiors' emphasis on transitioning power to Iraqis as quickly as possible and reducing the number of coalition troops in theater further limited Casey's options, which meant that the focus on counterinsurgency during his tenure remained superficial. However, by the time Casey attempted to stem the tide of the insurgency in Iraq by giving incoming officers a crash course in counterinsurgency, the US military as a whole had begun to accept the validity of this approach and developed programs states-side in order to increase the troops' ability to fight as counterinsurgents.

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[106] Dexter Filkins, "Strategy Tragedy?," *New York Times Magazine*, February 19, 2006, http://search.proquest.com/docview/215468711/F72440A77DCF4EBEPQ/92?accountid=14556.

Chapter 4: Counterinsurgency on the Domestic Front: Training and Education, 2004-2006

The military's efforts to develop new approaches to address the growing insurgency did not end at the Iraqi borders. As field commanders on various echelons of the hierarchy sought to adapt the lessons of the Vietnam War and other past conflicts to their current circumstances, and while others unwittingly reinvented old concepts, counterinsurgency slowly found its way back into the curriculum of Army and Marine Corps schools across the United States, as well as in the training programs of troops about to deploy to the Gulf. A year and a half after the beginning of the conflict, the Army published an interim field manual on *Counterinsurgency Operations* designed to provide soldiers with an updated version of the old Vietnam-era manuals and the military stood up a variety of programs and centers dedicated to counterinsurgency and culture.

Because of the growing pressure exerted by the insurgency in Iraq, by the end of 2005, counterinsurgency and its associated emphasis on cultural training were well on their way to become cornerstones of professional military education. These efforts were not yet the product of a single top-down directive, as the Pentagon's civilian leadership still did not want to deal with counterinsurgency, but the military had nonetheless begun to shift its focus in order to address the requirements of the war in Iraq.

So Many Tasks, So Little Time: Training for War in the 21st Century

There is no question that when the insurgency emerged in Iraq in 2003, American officers—despite extensive education and training—were not prepared for the situation they

faced.[1] While they had prepared for and executed the invasion impeccably, the rise of the violence and civilian unrest suddenly confronted them with a situation in which their training was not applicable—the skills required to defeat the Iraqi military and take over Baghdad had little to do with the stability operations that followed. Describing his unit's actions in northern Iraq during the summer 2003, one Army Lieutenant Colonel stated that "the battalion's pre-Iraq training was not adequate for reacting to ambushes and an increasing number of the direct fire engagements were just that."[2] As one journalist put it: "How do you walk a beat in an M-1 tank?"[3] This lack of preparation is a major theme in most accounts of the early years of the war, emphasized by soldiers and Marines alike. Just as the color of many invading troops' uniforms did not match the desert shades of tan because the Pentagon had failed to anticipate the demand for desert fatigues, troops' training did not match the reality that they faced once in Iraq.[4]

Because the military focused primarily on phase III, major combat operations, pre-deployment training for troops ordered to conduct the invasion overwhelmingly focused on conventional military operations. Describing the preparation of the Red Devils in 2002 in anticipation of their eventual deployment to Iraq, Lieutenant Colonel Harry Tunnell said that they had focused primarily on "routine infantry training."[5] This was time well spent. In order to make it to Baghdad, seize the capital, and topple Saddam's regime, troops would need to navigate in the desert, drive and maneuver as part of large convoys (including at night), stretch supply lines over hundreds of miles, and most important of all, engage with and defeat the Iraqi

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[1] Johnson et al., *The U.S. Army and the Battle for Baghdad*, xviii.
[2] Harry D. Tunnell, *Red Devils: Tactical Perspectives from Iraq* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 33.
[3] Patrick E. Tyler, "There's a New Enemy in Iraq: The Nasty Surprise," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2003, https://www.proquest.com/docview/432433806/abstract/7B0EE96A10EB4AD5PQ/10.
[4] Brendan Koerner, "Why Are U.S. Troops Wearing Dark-Green Camouflage?," *Slate Magazine*, March 26, 2003, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2003/03/why-are-u-s-troops-wearing-dark-green-camouflage.html.
[5] The Red Devils are the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 508th Infantry, 173rd Brigade; Tunnell, *Red Devils: Tactical Perspectives from Iraq*, 3.

army. Training for each of these tasks takes a significant amount of time. Soldiers and Marines need to practice until actions becomes second nature, to ensure that the unit will keep performing its task even once it finds itself in the confusion of combat instead of a simulated exercise. As one Marine lieutenant explained: "I knew that the little things we learned during this endless repetition might very well make the difference between life and death."[6] In addition, much of this pre-deployment training was occurring as units were preparing to ship both personnel and material halfway around the world, a colossal, time-consuming undertaking of its own.

Given all the tasks deploying units had to accomplish before shipping out, even if military leaders had wanted to provide the troops with additional counterinsurgency training, fitting it into the schedule would have been very difficult. One Marine Corps Sergeant described the difficulties NCOs encountered when attempting to train their men for the upcoming operation: "I had no time to waste training the squad because it was already the second week of January, and we would leave in early February 2003. Every morning, my squad was up at 0500 to conduct physical training. Because the days were so condensed with administrative preparation, there was hardly any time to schedule in training. I do not remember conducting Backyard training—just getting up early, doing physical training, and fitting classes in between inspections."[7] Once in Kuwait, he added, his unit "received limited language and culture training prior to executing the push to Baghdad."[8] Until troops crossed the border into Iraq, they were essentially engaged in a race against the clock. What would happen once Saddam's regime fell was hardly a priority.

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[6] Campbell, *Joker One*, 71.
[7] Nicanor A. Galvan, "Crowd Control," in *Marines at War* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2016), 155.
[8] Galvan, 156.

While the training of invading troops for post-conflict operations was understandably lacking, one would expect that units rotating into Iraq in the following months would have benefited from training exercises better tailored to the task they would actually be conducting once in country. And yet, because of the time it took for the Pentagon's leadership to recognize the existence of an insurgency, states-side training adapted very slowly.

During the war's first summer, counterinsurgency remained mostly absent from training. As John Nagl later noted, "certainly we did not have much to draw upon by way of counterinsurgency doctrine as we were preparing to deploy and beginning combat operations in Al Anbar in September 2003."[9] Even once troops rotating into Iraq were obviously going to be confronted to a different kind of campaign, nearly a year into the conflict, training still lagged behind. "Our troops are in down-and-dirty fights in the streets of the Fallujahs of this country, and mostly the Army still trains for the Big Fight," an officer told a journalist in early 2004.[10] Even limited efforts to prepare troops for the kind of urban counterinsurgency warfare they would face in Iraq fell short. One unit training to deploy to the Iraqi desert was doing so in several inches of snow up in Washington state in late 2005, and practiced clearing homes in buildings simulated by string stretched between posts (see figure 1)—hardly an accurate representation of the conditions soldiers would be facing once in the Middle East.[11]

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[9] John A. Nagl, interview by Christopher K. Ives, Email, January 9, 2007, 4, Operational Leadership Experiences Interview Collection, Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library, http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll13/id/331.
[10] Ricks, "Soldiers Record Lessons From Iraq."
[11] Mike Hill, conversation with author.

Image 2: Soldiers from the 21st Military Police Detachment conducting field training at Ft. Lewis, Washington in 2005[12]

Still, over time, small changes started to take place. While adaptation was far from systematized across the force, some commandants identified gaps in the troops' preparation ahead of their deployment and tried to fill them. For instance, Major General Pete Chiarelli, whose 1st Cavalry Division was set to take over Baghdad in March 2004, sent his officers to attend local-government meetings in towns around Fort Hood, TX to help them prepare them for the tasks they would have to perform in Iraq.[13] Similarly, when discussing the preparation of his 1st Marine Division on its way to Iraq a full year into the conflict, General Mattis pointed to many of the same difficulties mentioned by officers before him. He too implemented some changes in his troops' training. He explained that he "rapidly established 'pre-deployment training' at an abandoned Air Force base near Camp Pendleton."[14] The training included a reading list on counterinsurgency operations, as well as rudimentary Arabic language training.

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[12] Personal papers of Mike Hill.
[13] Lee Hockstader, "Army Learns Ropes From City of Austin: 1st Cavalry Prepares to Run Baghdad," *The Washington Post*, February 22, 2004, https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/2459846902/abstract/1CB81DE33B954505PQ/1.
[14] Mattis and West, *Call Sign Chaos*, 120.

Interestingly, Mattis also asked Marine vets from the Combined Action Platoons to talk to his Marines and explain the techniques they had used in Vietnam. Once again, an officer with a keen understanding of history was one of the firsts to adapt to the changing requirements of the Iraq War. Lastly, Mattis had Los Angeles Police Department officers share community and barrio policing techniques with the 1st Marine Division. Officers like Chiarelli and Mattis were able to draw upon history as well as local resources around their units' posts and bases, to supplement soldiers and Marines' traditional training in order to familiarize them with the requirements of the policing and stability operations that they would have to conduct once deployed.

This sort of training slowly became more common. However, even when efforts were made to better prepare the troops to the situation they would likely face in Iraq, there was a gap between the training received by officers and the rest of their unit. A retired First Sergeant, Hans Hull, explained that when his battalion prepared to deploy to Iraq in 2004, the commissioned leadership received some degree of training in anticipation of the stability operations they would have to conduct, but that "hadn't filtered down to the lowest level."[15] Once in theater, Hull said, he and his soldiers "would do our best to interact with the civilians, however we did not have the training, like later years, . . . on how to interact with the civilian populace."[16] Instead, they "had to go off the counterinsurgency classes that our commander had gotten" as the military only "flew the company commanders up to Baghdad for classes" when the unit was in Kuwait.[17] It was a move in the right direction, but scarcely sufficient. The soldiers and Marines conducting

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[15] Hans Hull, interview by Lisa Beckenbaugh, June 26, 2014, 4, Operational Leadership Experiences Interview Collection, Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library, http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4013coll13/id/3192/rec/5.
[16] Hull, 9.
[17] Hull, 9.

operations on the ground needed training, not a hoped-for trickle down of COIN's best practices based on the limited instruction received by their hierarchy.

Training proved even more complicated when it came to culture—even as more military leaders acknowledged cultural awareness as a critical aspect of counterinsurgency. Some cultural experts and scholars later suggested that cultural training held the key to winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people and thus the war. However, as with similar arguments about counterinsurgency as a whole, they were crafting a self-interested narrative that glossed over the fact that this idea was far from new, and that there had been attempts to educate the troops on matters of culture since the beginning of the war.

Despite efforts to educate troops about the cultural differences they might notice once in Iraq, these remained superficial and their impact was quite limited. When the First Infantry Division, known as the "Big Red One," deployed to Iraq in 2003, it had already sought to ensure that its soldiers would behave in a culturally appropriate way by providing the troops with a *Soldier's Handbook to Iraq*—not without similarities to the *Instructions for American Servicemen in Iraq during World War II* published by the US War Department in 1943 (down to the antiquated spelling of "Moslem" on page 2-2).[18] The commander's introduction to the guide stated that "combined with your warrior ethos, a thorough cultural understanding of your environment is a major combat multiplier that makes you all the more lethal on the front lines in the war on terrorism."[19] A couple years later, the pre-deployment training of the 22nd MP Battalion conducted ahead of its deployment in November 2005 did include "Cultural

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[18] *Instructions for American Servicemen in Iraq during World War II* was reedited in a facsimile edition by Chicago University Press in 2007 with a foreword by John Nagl. The content of the booklet is very similar to that detailed in the 1ID handbook, although it is written in a much more informal way. "1st Infantry Division Soldier's Handbook to Iraq," 2003, 2.2. I have yet to find information about the number of handbooks that were printed and how widely they were distributed.
[19] "1st Infantry Division Soldier's Handbook to Iraq," ii.

Awareness" and a "Country Brief."[20] However, those were drowned in a sea of information as the briefs took place on the same day as the "Chaplain Brief/Combat Stress & Suicide" brief, and three additional ones on "Force Protection," "Code of Conduct/Rules of Engagement," and "Laws of Land Warfare/Geneva Hague."[21] And yet, as the examples in the previous chapter demonstrated, such perfunctory cultural awareness training and handing out of handbooks or smart cards had little effect on troops' conduct in theater. As one can easily imagine, the information provided to soldiers on Iraqi culture in less than an hour did not have a major impact on their understanding of the local population once deployed, let alone lead to the development of meaningful inter-cultural relations with Iraqis.

Cultural and language training were not ignored by the military at the beginning of the war—as some critics later claimed— but they were drowned in a long list of boxes units had to check before deploying, and therefore could not be the object of in-depth focus. In addition, according to troops who did pay close attention and made efforts to better understand the Iraqi culture and Arabic language, training was often flawed. One Staff Sergeant went as far as stating that not only "the training we received was not reality" but "a lot of the culture training I got I found to be untrue."[22] An Army Specialist who later learned Arabic, pointed out that the language cards that were distributed to his unit ahead of his deployment in 2004 were actually in the wrong dialect.[23] In sum, both culture and language were part of troops training since the beginning of the war, but only in a perfunctory way and their eventual impact on the conduct of

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[20] "22nd MP BN (CID) Individual Deployment Readiness / Validation Checklist," November 2005, Personal Papers of Mike Hill.
[21] "22nd MP BN (CID) Individual Deployment Readiness / Validation Checklist."
[22] Steven Jackson, interview by Dennis Van Wey, March 9, 2006, 4, Operational Leadership Experiences Interview Collection, Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library, https://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/api/collection/p4013coll13/id/695/page/0/inline/p4013coll13_695_0.
[23] Amaral, interview.

operations was limited and highly dependent on each soldier and Marine's receptivity to the concepts.[24]

Even for units redeploying to Iraq for an additional tour, pre-deployment training was not necessarily more relevant and did not always translate into a better-prepared unit, since the situation in theater was always evolving. Lieutenant Colonel Ross Brown explained in an interview that "each time you prepare in the Continental United States (CONUS) for that deployment, it takes a certain amount of time for the training institutions or the training base to catch up with what's happening in Iraq."[25] As Brown observed when his unit redeployed to Iraq the enemy's "tactics had evolved and the war had evolved but we hadn't trained for that."[26] In addition, units would also often redeploy to a different area than where they had previously been stationed, which meant that, because of the multiplicity of subdivisions that exist within the Iraqi population, the cultural and local knowledge that they had gained on their last tour might not even be applicable.

Well into the war, troops' cultural training was still haphazard and COIN instruction was far from systematized, especially for enlisted troops. Still, over time, key military training programs started to address the challenges of counterinsurgency operations. By the spring of 2004, the National Training Center, set in the Mojave Desert at Fort Irwin, California, had

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[24] While it is difficult to assess the actual impact of such training on the conduct of operations in theater, based on anecdotal evidence, the interviews I conducted, and informal conversations I had with servicemembers who served in Iraq throughout the conflict, most soldiers and Marines were not particularly interested in learning about Iraqi culture or language. Even those who genuinely believed that they were in Iraq to free the local population and create a democracy, still perceived Iraqis as "other" and often referred to them as "haji." As one Marine lieutenant explained, the term is supposed to be "an honorific bestowed on someone who has completed the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca," but troops' "use was more in the grand tradition of soldiers faced with a populace with whom we couldn't communicate and who often seemed difficult to understand to say the least." Campbell, *Joker One*, 148.

[25] Ross Brown, interview by John McCool, January 5, 2007, 3–4, Operational Leadership Experiences Interview Collection, Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library, http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4013coll13/id/373/rec/3.

[26] Brown, 4.

created six mock Iraqi villages made out of shipping containers and plywood facades that were populated with a hundred Iraqi Americans playing both civilians and insurgents. The training range had also adapted its exercises to feature scenarios that more closely reflected the wide range of situations that soldiers were likely encounter once in Iraq. Instead of racing tanks across the desert, soldiers returning to prepare for their second deployment were now confronted with a variety of scenarios, in which they got to practice dealing with roadside IEDs as well as overseeing reconstruction work, confronting convoy ambushes and establishing crowed control, conducting patrols and negotiating with village elders.[27] One journalist called it "a dramatic shift from the Army post's historical role as the venue for massive war games involving heavy artillery and battle tanks."[28] According to another journalist who observed one of the training exercises, by the end of the year, the Army had invested $34 millions into the project to give troops the chance "to encounter angry, Arabic-speaking citizens, gun-toting insurgents who shoot and run, and a world of new customs that life in a Muslim country presents" before deploying to the Gulf.[29] The training center's commander, Brigadier General Robert Cone believed that the military could not ever move away from this type of training. He told a journalist that "the notion that you can fight a war in a foreign country and not know anything about that country or the people or the customs is not acceptable."[30] Slowly but surely, counterinsurgency warfare and its cultural training corollary were making their way into the fabric of military institutions.

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[27] Kaplan, "Clear and Fold: Forgetting the Lessons of Vietnam"; Komarow, "Unexpected Insurgency Changed Way of War."

[28] Ron Tempest, "National Guard Readies for Iraq: The Pentagon Says That by April, 40% of U.S. Troops in the Mideast Nation Will Be from the Force. Former Civilians Train in Mojave Desert," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 2004, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2173883897/abstract/593D6B8373374336PQ/1.

[29] Stephen J. Hedges, "Mock Village Helps GIs See Iraq Reality: Soldiers Practice Scenarios before Deployment," *Chicago Tribune*, December 14, 2004,
https://www.proquest.com/docview/2329175090/abstract/95E81294CBE04270PQ/1.

[30] Hedges.

Counterinsurgency and Culture in the Curriculum

While training is usually designed to prepare units and personnel for their missions from a practical standpoint, soldiers and Marines also learn new doctrinal approaches through theoretical education in various professional military education institutions, otherwise known as PMEs. Those schools are intended for officers and NCOs to attend at different stages of their careers and their programs evolve to reflect the preoccupations of the institution at large. As the war in Iraq dragged on, military schools started to emphasize counterinsurgency. Similar to the *ad hoc* manner in which COIN was adopted in the war theater and in training, there was little cohesion to the way various schools chose to integrate counterinsurgency into their curricula. One Army major, writing about the introduction of counterinsurgency in professional military education, criticized the "lack of consistency" and suggested that "graduates of separate branch schools commonly emerge with differing interpretations of counterinsurgency, usually based on the personal and professional experiences of the instructors rather than clear doctrinal foundations augmented by experience and case studies."[31]

Both the Army Command General Staff College and the Marine Corps Command Staff College increased their focus on counterinsurgency and culture over the course of the war.[32] Each built upon portions of their existing or past curricula, and the knowledge and experience of their faculty. In 2003, as the United States invaded Iraq, the curriculum at the US Marine Corps'

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[31] Niel Smith, "Overdue Bill: Integrating Counterinsurgency into Army Professional Education," *Small Wars Journal*, 2009, 1–2, https://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/326-smith.pdf. According to Smith, "most current instruction exists as PowerPoint slides adapted from instructor to instructor, institutionally generated material, or direct lifts of presentations from COIN luminaries such as Dr. David Kilcullen," but it is not systematized across the armed forces' schools.

[32] In order to compare the evolution of Army and Marine Corps curricula over the first decade of the 21st century, I chose to focus specifically on the two schools that officers attend when they reach the rank of major, the Command General Staff College at Leavenworth for the Army and the Command Staff College at Quantico for the Marine Corps. I chose those rather than the war colleges or any other because two of the key characters in this story, Petraeus and Mattis, had direct influence on these schools' curricula during our period of interest.

Command and Staff College in Quantico was divided into two semesters, the first dedicated to the "Operational Level of War" and the second to "Warfighting…From the Sea." This latter course included three sub-sections: Warfighting; the Final Exercise; and Military Operations Other Than War.[33] The MOOTW course began with a two-day block of instruction based on the classic texts of small wars: Clausewitz, Jomini, C.E. Callwell, and the USMC Small Wars Manual. It then moved on to case studies, including (in the language of the course catalog) "the British experience in Malaya, the French experience in Algeria, the American experience in Vietnam, the British experience in Northern Ireland, and the UN experience in Somalia."[34]

The course description offered the following justification for studying asymmetrical warfare: "Each of these case studies embrace a range of MOOTW missions and complex social conflicts that proved difficult for armies to address. Each experience gave rise to a body of writings that sought to codify what the military had learned. Taken collectively, these case studies and the writings they generated have shaped contemporary American MOOTW doctrine."[35] The course concluded with a discussion of such operations in the age of the GWOT.[36] Even though COIN was not in the course's title, the Marine Corps was in essence teaching about counterinsurgency under another name. Given the case studies on which the course focused and its reliance on the *Small Wars Manual*, a simple substitution of COIN for MOOTW would easily yield a class on counterinsurgency. Likewise, the curriculum of CGSC at

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[33] "Marine Corps University Command and Staff College Catalog, AY 2002-2003," n.d., 46, CSC AY 2002-2003, Administration, Box 1, Marine Corps Archives.
[34] "Marine Corps University Command and Staff College Catalog, AY 2002-2003," 48.
[35] "Marine Corps University Command and Staff College Catalog, AY 2002-2003," 48.
[36] "Marine Corps University Command and Staff College Catalog, AY 2002-2003," 48.

Ft. Leavenworth included core courses on low intensity conflicts and stability operations since the 1990s, even though counterinsurgency was only taught as an elective.[37]

Still, over the course of Operation Iraqi Freedom, both schools' curricula evolved to give more importance to the war in Iraq and to explicitly emphasized counterinsurgency. By the summer 2004, CSC's MOOTW course had been amended and offered this description: "The course discusses the ongoing 'war against terrorism,' the military operations against the transnational terrorist organization al Qaeda and the problems of homeland defense associated with such threats. It concludes with a lesson on the interagency and coalition efforts to rebuild Iraq while quelling violence directed against Americanism, NGO employees, and Iraqi 'collaborators.'"[38]

At the Army's CGSC, counterinsurgency grew in importance under the impetus of Generals Petraeus.[39] By 2005, COIN went from an elective course taken by a few dozen majors each year to a core part of the curriculum.[40] Building upon the content of the elective course, instructors in the military history department created a new block in the curriculum: Insurgency 100.[41] The course initially included case studies on Vietnam; Algeria (including watching the movie, *The Battle of Algiers*) and reading the French counterinsurgency expert David Galula; classes on the people's war according to Mao; as well as a study of the draft of the new counterinsurgency field manual, FM 3-24; and specifics regarding the unfolding situation Iraq.[42]

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[37] Geoff Babb, interview by Marjorie Galelli, Phone, September 14, 2021. I have not yet been able to get access to copies of syllabi or course catalogs for the time period—when I checked with the CARL library, I was told they did not have the complete CGSC curriculum; I will look into other ways to piece it together.

[38] "Marine Corps University Command and Staff College Catalog, AY 2004-2005," n.d., 35, CSC AY 2004-2005, Administration, Box 1, Marine Corps Archives.

[39] Set to take command of the Combined Arms Center in October 2005, Petraeus had reached out to the previous commander, General Wallace, to ask him about the place of COIN in the curriculum. In response, General Wallace ordered the integration of the counterinsurgency elective into CGSC's core curriculum. Babb, interview.

[40] Babb.

[41] Babb.

[42] Geoff Babb, "CGSC I100 Introduction to Stability Operations," 2006.

Since many of the majors attending classes at Ft. Leavenworth would soon be returning to Iraq, Petraeus thought it essential to prepare them for the situation that they would be confronting and aimed to increase the amount of instruction dedicated to counterinsurgency from 10 to 30 percent.[43] Meanwhile the MOOTW core course taught at CSC in Quantico was replaced by one on "Culture and Interagency Operations" starting in the school year 2005-2006. The course's goal was to "improve students' ability to understand and analyze cultures," as well as to "develop students' critical thinking skills and their understanding of small wars [and] peace operations," through the use of case studies.[44] These case studies spanned a wide range of conflicts, from the Huk Insurrection in the Philippines, to the Congo in the 1960s, while also including the Vietnam War, Kosovo, and Iraq. Two years into the conflict, the two schools were squarely focused on preparing officers for the unfolding conflict in Iraq.

Since cultural awareness was becoming widely understood as a key element in counterinsurgency operations, the military also made changes to its schools' curriculum that, it hoped, would help soldiers and Marines gain a better awareness of the cultural context in which they would operate.[45] Colonel Daniel Henk, who served as Director of the Air Force Culture and Language Center, later explained that scholars working for the Department of Defense found that "some training measures could assist Service personnel in coping with the immediate cultural complexity of their assignments," but "they also found that a true capability to communicate,

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[43] Steve Boylan, interview by Marjorie Galelli, September 21, 2021.

[44] "Marine Corps University Command and Staff College Culture and Interagency Operations Faculty Guide Volume 1 AY2005-06," 2005, CSC AY 2005-2006, Culture and Interagency Operations, Box 1, Marine Corps Archives.

[45] A tenet of counterinsurgency doctrine as defined in the 2000s is that successfully fending off an insurgency requires the cooperation of the local population and that "building that kind of trust across cultures requires that the counterinsurgent deeply understand the local history and the people's culture, their customs, and their language." John A Nagl, "A Short Guide to 'A Short Guide to Iraq' (1943)," in *Instructions for American Servicemen in Iraq during World War II*, Reprint (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), x.

collaborate, influence, and lead in culturally complex circumstances required a process of long-term education."[46]

Changes to the military's training and education in terms culture were addressing issues identified by a British officer who served with US troops in Iraq from the winter 2003 to late 2004. In an article published a year later in *Military Review*, on Petraeus's recommendation, Nigel Aylwin-Foster explained that while American troops "were almost unfailingly courteous and considerate, at times their cultural insensitivity, almost certainly inadvertent, arguably amounted to institutional racism."[47] This scathing critique shed light on the US military's dire need for cultural training in the early 2000s and American officers were quick to agree. In addition to Petraeus, the point of view of the British officer was later endorsed by Lieutenant General Peter Chiarelli, who was the second-ranking American officer in Iraq when he shared the article with journalist Roger Cohen in early 2006.[48] A U.S. special-forces officer interviewed in Baghdad also agreed with Aylwin-Foster's claim: "'We should have been culturally sensitive,' he says. In places like Fallujah, he argues, 'we should never have gone into people's houses. Saddam's soldiers never went into houses—they would negotiate and settle things with money. We don't understand how things work around here.'"[49] By February 2006, according to journalist George Packer who had just spent a week in Iraq, Aylwin-Foster's article "was on every senior officer's desk in Iraq while I was there and was being read, as far as I could tell,

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[46] Daniel Henk, "Foreword," in *The Rise and Decline of U.S. Military Culture Programs, 2004-20* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2021), ix–x.

[47] Nigel R.F. Aylwin-Foster, "Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations," *Military Review*, December 2005, 3; Boylan, interview.

[48] Roger Cohen, "U.S. Army in Iraq Takes a Radical Look at Itself," *International Herald Tribune*, February 1, 2006, http://search.proquest.com/docview/318729970/citation/B38A44BECF574FD8PQ/1.

[49] Elliott, "So, What Went Wrong?"

without defensiveness."[50] For officers serving in Iraq, the notion that cultural training would help the military fulfill its mission was generally accepted as common sense.

At the same time as counterinsurgency and culture came to play a prominent role in their curriculum, which a lot of officers welcomed, military schools also placed more emphasis on language training. Also, as more and more officers attending military schools were coming back from deployments to the Middle East and likely to go back, the languages that were emphasized were geared towards that region. For the school year 2005-2006, the Marine Corps' CSC's curriculum was modified to include 200 hours of mandatory Arabic. According to the language program overview, "in today's security environment, the importance of understanding foreign languages and cultures has become an operational priority requirement." Therefore, the school noted that "in order to respond to both the immediate and future needs of the Operational Forces, the Command and Staff College has made language study an integral part of its curriculum." While commander of the Combined Arms Center, General Petraeus also insisted on soldiers learning either Arabic or Dari.[51]

By 2005, the shift towards greater emphasis on culture and language training was no longer limited to individual schools but part of a larger trend within the military. In January 2003, when General Michael Hagee became commandant of the Marine Corps, his guidance focused on training and education for future warfare, and included no mention of irregular warfare or culture. His revised directive in 2005, though, shifted focus to cultural awareness. Marines, he explained, are trained to "exploit the advantages of cultural understanding," and thus his plan for the Corps was to "place renewed emphasis on [its] greatest asset – the individual Marine – through improved training and education in foreign language, cultural awareness,

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[50] George Packer to David Petraeus, "Re: From George Packer," February 6, 2006.
[51] Babb, interview.

tactical intelligence and urban operations," in order to "[blend] the need for combat skills and counter-insurgency skills with those required for civil-affairs."[52] This insistence on culture throughout the Commandant's directive reveals the degree of traction that culture had achieved within the Marine Corps institution at the time.

Over time, all services developed their own culture centers. The Army established a Culture Center at Ft. Huachuca, the Air Force had a Culture and Language Center at Maxwell Air Force Base, and the Navy stood up a Center for Language, Regional Expertise and Culture in Pensacola.[53] Within the Marine Corps, General Mattis established a Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL) in 2005 at Quantico "to provide the background needed to permeate [Marine Corps] thinking and training."[54] Per its charter, CAOCL's mission was to "serve as the central Marine Corps agency for operational culture training and operational language familiarization training programs and issues within the Doctrine, Organization, Training, Material, Leadership and education, Personnel, Facilities (DOTMLPF) process in order to synchronize and provide for training and education requirements."[55] Part of the US Marine Corps University, the center was operationally focused, it developed training on both culture and languages and coordinated their integration into overall Marine Corps training.

By the following year, linguistic abilities and cultural knowledge were stressed as a core military skill in the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*. Meant to "[reflect] the thinking of the senior civilian and military leaders of the Department of Defense," the report insisted that

[52] M. W. Hagee, "33rd Commandant of the Marine Corps Updated Guidance (The 21st Century Marine Corps - Creating Stability in an Unstable World)," April 2005, https://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/ALMARS/Article/886798/33rd-commandant-of-the-marine-corps-updated-guidance-the-21st-century-marine-co.
[53] Fosher and Mackenzie, *The Rise and Decline of U.S. Military Culture Programs, 2004-20*, 5.
[54] Mattis and West, *Call Sign Chaos*, 155.
[55] Mattis, J. N., "Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning Center of Excellence Charter (CAOCL COE)," January 14, 2006, 1.

"recent operations have reinforced the need for U.S. forces to have greater language skills and cultural awareness." [56] " Military Departments," the authors noted, "have also begun more intensive cultural and language training, which over time will create a more culturally aware, linguistically capable force, better able to forge victory in the long war."[57] This inclusion of cultural understanding and linguistic abilities as essential military capabilities in one of the nation's key guiding documents demonstrates a clear shift in mentalities.

As military leaders began to embrace cultural and linguistic training, they looked for experts in those fields. In doing so, they intersected with the claims of Montgomery McFate—an anthropologist with a long history of work as a consultant for the US government— who argued that if the military made greater use of anthropology, it would be more likely to defeat the Iraqi insurgency. In several professional journals, such as *Military Review* and *Joint Force Quarterly*, she argued that "although it may not seem like a priority when bullets are flying, cultural ignorance can kill."[58]

In response to McFate's lobbying and the defense community's general turn towards culture, in the summer 2006, the US Army initiated the Human Terrain System, otherwise known as HTS. The program's goal was to embed civilian anthropologists, or social scientists more broadly, within Army units in theater in order to "support field commanders by filling their cultural knowledge gap in the current operating environment and providing cultural interpretations of events occurring within their area of operations."[59] In doing so, the Human Terrain Teams, or HTTs, would help "discern soft-power means of achieving desired effects," in

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[56] Department of Defense, "Quadrennial Defense Review Report" (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, February 6, 2006), vi, 14, https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=459870.
[57] Department of Defense, 15.
[58] Montgomery McFate, "Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of Their Curious Relationship," *Military Review*, April 2005; Montgomery McFate, "The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, July 2005, 44.
[59] Nathan Finney, *Human Terrain Team Handbook* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Department of the Army, 2008), 2.

other words, they would diminish the need for the military to use force, and thus lower casualties among local populations as well as American troops.[60]

According to the HTS charter, the teams would offer "direct social-science support in the form of ethnographic and social research, cultural information research, and social data analysis."[61] Team members would conduct interviews with locals to gain a better understanding of the socio-political context and then brief the unit's commander on the situation and recommend non-kinetic ways to improve it. The first teams deployed in Iraq in early 2007, and by 2013, the HTS had expanded to a thirty-team program with over 530 personnel.[62]

As these various examples demonstrate, over the course of the war, both the Army and the Marine Corps began a series of efforts to better prepare troops for the situation unfolding in Iraq. To this end, they relied on historical case studies of past counterinsurgencies—some that ended with a counterinsurgent victory, but also many others that saw the insurgents' triumph—as well as recent iterations of counterinsurgency doctrine. In addition, because of counterinsurgency's focus on local populations, often summed up by the notion that one needs to win the "hearts and minds" of the population in order to defeat an insurgency, COIN doctrine systematically highlighted the importance of gaining a deep understanding of the culture of the population that one wishes to win over. Therefore, when it came to the integration of COIN in their schools' curriculum, the Marine Corps and the Army also placed significant emphasis on

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[60] Statement by Colonel Martin P. Schweitzer, "Hearing on National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 and Oversight of Previously Authorized Programs," § Committee on Armed Services, Meeting Jointly with Committee on Science and Technology Subcommittee on Research and Science Education (2008), 6.

[61] Jacob Kipp et al., "The Human Terrain System: A CORDS for the 21st Century," *Military Review*, October 2006, 9.

[62] For a detailed recounting of the origins of the HTS program, see Montgomery McFate and Steve Fondacaro, "Reflections on the Human Terrain System During the First 4 Years," *Prism* 2, no. No. 4 (April 2013): 63–82. At that point, because of the beginning of the surge and the promotion effort surrounding the newly published *Counterinsurgency* field manual, the HTS program came under a lot of scrutiny from the American public and eventually became the target of a lot of critiques from the anthropology community, which I will address in the next chapter.

culture and language training and modified their curricula to make room for instruction on these subjects. By 2006, the importance of culture in counterinsurgency operations was widely acknowledged, so much so that some have since described culture as the "little black dress" of the defense community in the early 2000s.[63]

FMI 3-07.22: The Forgotten Manual

The changes that took place within the Army and Marine Corps' schools during the war in Iraq were nothing short of spectacular. Bureaucratic institutions, while slower to adapt than units on the ground, stood up programs focused on preparing soldiers and Marines to tackle the problems at the heart of the unfolding conflict at an impressive pace. In addition, barely a year and a half into the conflict, the Army published an interim field manual on counterinsurgency: FMI 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations*. After commanding V Corps during the invasion of Iraq, General William Wallace took command of the Combined Arms Center at Ft. Leavenworth, where he immediately put the writing of the interim doctrine in motion.[64] Published in October 2004 and set to expire in October 2006, the publication was meant to, in essence, put a temporary band aid on a hemorrhaging situation by providing troops in Iraq with an "expedited delivery of urgently needed doctrine."[65] As the manual's introduction explained: "The impetus for this FMI came from the Iraq insurgency and the realization that engagements in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) would likely use counterinsurgency."[66] The FMI included six chapters and ten appendixes spanning just over 180 pages that covered the many facets of counterinsurgency operations, from civil-military operations, to security during movements, to military police.

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[63] This turn of phrase was used on multiple occasions by several CAOCL personnel members during conversations with the author.
[64] Babb, interview.
[65] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, iv.
[66] Department of the Army, vi.

Contrary to the subsequent *Counterinsurgency* field manual published in December 2006, which was written for "leaders and planners at the battalion level and above," the interim field manual's audience was "conventional-force leaders at division-level and below."[67] As the wording indicates (and despite some overlap with battalion, brigade, and division commanders), the target audience envisioned by each of the publications was different from the start. During the early months of the war in Iraq, those most affected by their lack of counterinsurgency training were soldiers and Marines on the lowest echelons of the hierarchy, who experienced firsthand the violence brought about by the insurgency. Soldiers and Marines at the platoon level were the most likely to interact with the local population on a day-to-day basis. On patrol, at checkpoints, or even during house-searches, they set the tone for the coalition's presence in the area, thus making them critical pieces in the coopting—or alienation—of local civilians. The interim field manual therefore sought to provide junior leaders with a general understanding of counterinsurgency and "the fundamentals of military operations in a counterinsurgency environment."[68]

As a consequence, the FMI was highly practical and spent a lot of time dealing with operations at the tactical level, including sections on convoy operations, checkpoints, and crowd control. These all provided detailed instructions on how to go about conducting such operations and often included visual illustrations like diagrams and photographs. The section on checkpoints and roadblocks for instance, recommended "posting instructions in the indigenous languages on signs at the entrances to checkpoints," and outlined the proper setup for a heavy traffic checkpoint, such as the placement of obstacles, search areas for personnel and vehicles,

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[67] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, vii; Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, iv.
[68] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, vi.

and overwatch positions.[69] The one on crowd control offered various diagrams illustrating

control force formations at the platoon level.[70] Overall, the interim field manual provided its

readers with a much more practical set of instructions than its successor. While the 2006

Counterinsurgency field manual stated that clearing an area "is most effectively initiated by a

clear-in-zone or cordon-and-search operation," the interim field manual spent over a page

detailing the steps required by cordon-and-search operations, which it states "must have

sufficient forces to effectively cordon off and thoroughly search target areas, to include

subsurface areas," before going into details such as "room searches are conducted by two-person

teams," and insisting on "preserving and securing all records, files, and other archives."[71] This is

but one example illustrating the way the interim field manual focused on the tactical level of

operations to provide guidance to the troops actually conducting counterinsurgency operations,

while the next iteration of the manual left it to commanders to translate theory into practice.

It is also worth pointing out that the interim field manual already included several short

sections on culture, once again challenging the notion that this was a new development that

occurred in 2006. According to the 2004 manual, "the center of gravity in counterinsurgency

operations is the population," and therefore, "for US forces to operate effectively among a local

population and gain and maintain their support, it is important to develop a thorough

understanding of the society and its culture."[72] Specifically, it explained that an understanding of

the local culture was essential to intelligence gathering, psychological operations, and using

interpreters. The FMI also lamented that working with locals "is often the factor most neglected

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[69] Department of the Army, C.6-8.
[70] Department of the Army, 6.15-18.
[71] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 5.19; Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, 3.5-6.
[72] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, 4.3.

by US forces."[73] While in a less developed fashion than in FM 3-24—which was also a hundred pages longer—the interim field manual fully acknowledged the importance of taking the local culture into account in order to conduct successful counterinsurgency operations.

The creation of the interim field manual a year and a half into the conflict does demonstrate the military's ability to adapt under pressure. It also challenges the frequently expressed notion that counterinsurgency doctrine was something that suddenly appeared in 2006. Petraeus's XO in Iraq during the surge, Colonel Peter Mansoor, however, downplayed the significance of the interim field manual. Its creation was "very rapid," he said, but "it wasn't very well-conceived and it was clearly a stop gap measure until something better took place."[74] Such critiques painted the 2006 field manual as offering a brand new solution to the ongoing conflict in Iraq. In fact, FM 3-24 itself glossed over very the existence of the 2004 interim field manual. In its foreword, Petraeus actually told the reader that it had "been 20 years since the Army published a field manual devoted exclusively to counterinsurgency operations," effectively erasing the *Counterinsurgency Operations* interim field manual from the historical record.[75]

The formal doctrinal response to the Iraqi insurgency emerged slowly. Yet, even though it took several years before a new permanent field manual was published, the military sought to develop its counterinsurgency capabilities much earlier—first in theater and then on the domestic front. By October 2004, an interim doctrine on counterinsurgency operations was available to

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[73] Department of the Army, 4.3.

[74] Peter Mansoor, interview by Aaron Crawford and Timothy Sayle, June 12, 2015, 4, The Surge - Collective Memory Project, SMU Center for Presidential History, https://www.smu.edu/-/media/Site/CPH/Collective-Memory-Project/The-Surge/Mansoor-Peter--FINAL--20199.pdf?la=en.

[75] David H. Petraeus and James F. Amos, "Foreword," in *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2006).

help troops navigate the insurgency. Meanwhile, classes on counterinsurgency reappeared in the curricula of Army and USMC schools with faculty often rebranding and adjusting old modules to put counterinsurgency front and center rather than stability operations or MOOTW. Additionally, the military created programs to provide troops with a basic understanding of culture as military leaders increasingly acknowledged that soldiers and Marines needed assistance relating to local populations in the war theater. All of these changes in professional military education revolved around the same classical counterinsurgency concepts, but the initiatives remained disconnected, piecemeal, sometimes redundant, and severely lacking an overall sense of direction. With the creation of a new permanent multi-service counterinsurgency doctrine in 2006 the Army and the Marine Corps moved to provide a general, coherent overall framework for counterinsurgency operations in Iraq.

Part II: The Counterinsurgency Creed

Chapter 5: Creating and Promoting FM 3-24: A New Doctrine?

Since the early stages of the war in Iraq, the progressive rise of an insurgency throughout the country made counterinsurgency crucial to the war effort and yet, it took years for DOD to develop a comprehensive approach that placed COIN front and center. Eventually overcoming their historical qualms, by 2006, all parts of the American government focused on military capabilities agreed that the United States needed to develop its ability to "address the non-traditional, asymmetric challenges of [the] new century."[1] This goal, put forth by the Department of Defense, finally reflected changes that had been under way for several year at various echelons of the hierarchy.[2]

As we previously saw, the military's focus on COIN started with the adoption of counterinsurgency measures by soldiers and Marines in Iraq, and subsequently extended to a new emphasis on COIN and cultural awareness in military schools' curricula. However, the most visible attempt among the military's efforts to revamp its ability to fight an insurgency, was the Army and Marine Corps' multi-service 2006 publication, *Counterinsurgency*. This field manual's avowed purpose was to "fill a doctrinal gap."[3] As such, FM 3-24, the Army denomination under which it became known, sought to create an overarching framework for all the *ad hoc* counterinsurgency-oriented programs that the military had established up until that point and to provide coherent guidance to all commanders engaged in operations in Iraq.

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[1] Department of Defense, "Quadrennial Defense Review Report," 3. Despite that statement though, critics still pointed out that "instead of cutting back on hugely expensive weapons programs in order to build more troop divisions . . . the review favored the fighter jets and carriers that are the lifeblood of military contractors and members of Congress." Packer, "The Lesson of Tal Afar."

[2] Hagee, "33rd Commandant of the Marine Corps Updated Guidance."

[3] Petraeus and Amos, "Foreword."

The impetus behind this publication came from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where then-Lieutenant General David Petraeus had taken command of the Army's Combined Arms Center (CAC) in October 2005.[4] After spearheading what was, by all accounts, one of the most successful transitions from invasion to nation-building in Operation Iraqi Freedom by relying on counterinsurgency, Petraeus had moved to put COIN at the heart of CAC's mission. In fact, he had been sent to Leavenworth for that exact reason. While some have suggested that this assignment was a punishment from the Secretary of Defense, who did not appreciate the general's repeated appearances in the media, it provided Petraeus with the mandate to "shake up the Army," as General Shoomaker, the Army Chief of Staff, had instructed him.[5] As one reporter astutely pointed out, far from resigning himself to a glory-less command out of the spotlight, "Petraeus found a way to use his new assignment—and his intellect—to influence events on the ground despite being stationed in Kansas."[6] As CAC commander, Petraeus used his position to shape the military's doctrine. "Army doctrine," he wrote, "provides the fundamental principles and TTP [Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures] that Army forces use to train for and conduct full spectrum operations. It serves as a foundation for educating Army leaders. Doctrine should influence the Army's recruiting, training, equipping, organizing, and operations as well as leader development."[7] At the same time, Petraeus also kept up his efforts to get his story in the news and instructed his public affairs officer to put the Combined Arms Center and Ft. Leavenworth on the map.[8] Under Petraeus's leadership, COIN, or as it would soon come to be known, the "Petraeus doctrine," was about to find its way into every aspect of the US military.

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[4] "Leavenworth's New Commander Played Important Roles in Iraq," *LJWorld.Com* (blog), accessed September 27, 2021, https://www2.ljworld.com/news/2005/oct/22/leavenworths_new_commander_played_important_roles_/.
[5] Nagl, *Knife Fights*, 122; Nicholas J. Schlosser, *The Surge, 2007-2008*, CMH Pub 78-1 (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 2017), 22.
[6] Sennott, "The Petraeus Doctrine."
[7] David H. Petraeus, "Memorandum: FY 07 Commanding General's Priorities," July 24, 2006, 9.
[8] Boylan, interview.

While the original plan had been to update the interim field manual that had come out in the fall 2004, following Petraeus's guidance, the project rapidly morphed into a total overhaul of the doctrine and full rewrite of the manual. Drawing upon previous doctrinal publications and historical examples, the manual's authors sought to provide soldiers and Marines with "a framework for thinking... explaining what is an insurgency, what will it look like, what should you expect, in what type of environments will it thrive, how does it develop, how can we contribute to it inadvertently, what is our methodology and what is our way of thinking and assessing, what stage is it, how violent, how widespread in the public, how much support does it have?"[9] The writing process itself was singular in many ways, from the speed at which it took place (Colonel Peter Mansoor called it "a land speed record") to the number of people it involved, from both within and without the military, down to the manual's promotion to the American public through a full-fledge public affairs campaign.[10]

The Big Tent

From the start, the creation of FM 3-24 was unconventional. Traditionally, field manuals are written through an in-house process within the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate (CADD) at Fort Leavenworth. In this case, however, Petraeus chose to involve a much broader range of people. Not surprisingly, most still came from within the armed forces. The initial draft's authors included Lieutenant Colonel Richard Lacquement, who worked at the Pentagon in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability Operations; Lieutenant

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[9] Government Press Releases, "Army Writing New Counterinsurgency Field Manual," March 4, 2006, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.www2.lib.ku.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&t=&sort=_rank_%3AD&maxresults=20&f=advanced&val-base-0=counterinsurgency&fld-base-0=alltext&bln-base-1=and&val-base-1=2006&fld-base-1=YMD_date&fld-nav-1=YMD_date&val-nav-1=Jan%202006%20-%20Mar%202006&docref=news/11033EA9A2107968.
[10] Mansoor, interview, 4.

Colonel Jan Horvath, who had contributed to the interim counterinsurgency field manual in 2004; James Corum, a professor at the Army Command and General Staff College who specialized in Air Power and counterinsurgency; as well as Colonel Rick Swain and Colonel Don Snider, both of whom were teaching at West Point.[11] The writing team was led by none other than Conrad Crane, whose prescient report about the likely challenges of invading Iraq had been ignored by Washington in early 2003.[12] As it happens, Crane graduated West Point in 1974, the same year as Petraeus, and went on to serve in the Army until he retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 2000. While in the military, he, like Petraeus, obtained a PhD and the two men also taught at West Point at the same time.[13] When Petraeus tasked Crane with spearheading the writing of the new doctrine he suggested that it would be "a unique opportunity to be the 'Wass de Czege' of our generation"—the general was here referring to the founder and first director of the School of Advanced Military Studies who also developed the concept of the Army's AirLand Battle concept.[14] At the time, Crane was teaching at the Army War College in Pennsylvania where he also directed the US Army Military History Institute, and he later wrote that he "had no idea what [he] was getting into" when he accepted Petraeus's request.[15] Still, Crane threw himself

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[11] Richard Lacquement, "Curriculum Vitae," accessed March 23, 2021, https://www.carlisle.army.mil/kmn/curriculumVitae/319062_CurriculumVitae.pdf.

[12] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 51,56; Crane and Terrill, "Reconstructing Iraq." It was originally John Nagl, the author of *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, whom Petraeus had asked to write the manual, Conrad Crane stepped in when Nagl's superior declined to relieve him of his functions in the office of the deputy secretary of defense. Nagl, *Knife Fights*, 126; Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 46.

[13] Petraeus taught in the social science department (SOSH) as part of a three-year teaching tour, meanwhile Crane was part of the regular faculty in the history department. Crane obtained his PhD from Stanford University while Petraeus's received his at Princeton.

[14] David Petraeus to Conrad Crane, "RE: Counterinsurgency FM," November 17, 2005.

[15] "Curriculum Vitae Conrad Charles Crane," accessed May 8, 2020, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjUqv6k1KTpAhUNWqwKHedYDgkQFjAAegQIAhAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.carlisle.army.mil%2Fkmn%2FcurriculumVitae%2F229364_CurriculumVitae.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3ptcJfp8fCLo5gCTSJBCJW; Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 46.

into the endeavor wholeheartedly and became one of counterinsurgency's most fervent advocates.

The creation of the new doctrine began as an Army project, but in order for the publication to have the greatest impact on the military, General Petraeus decided to make the new manual a multi-service publication by roping in the Marine Corps. This collaboration was possible primarily because of his personal relationship with General Jim Mattis, who, at the time, was in charge of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC) in Quantico.[16] Both men shared an interest in historical scholarship and a belief that the military needed to adapt its approach following the rise of the insurgency in Iraq. By the time that the field manual project began, Mattis was already using his position at MCCDC to, in his words, "adapt [Marine Corps] doctrine to reenergize counterinsurgency techniques, with an emphasis on the key small-unit leaders charged with winning the trust and support of the local people," and when Petraeus contacted him, the two men agreed that the Army and the Marine Corps should work conjointly on the writing of the new doctrine.[17] As Mattis put it, their "views about the wars were aligned: we had to adapt, and quickly."[18]

At the time, Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, one of the most vocal proponents of COIN, argued that the presence of these two men at the head of institutions that frame the military's doctrine was not an accident, but rather demonstrated that "the Army and the Marine Corps recognized the general officers who really understand [counterinsurgency], and have put them in the right places to change the way the two organizations think."[19] Still, the collaboration between

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[16] Petraeus had also considered involving the British in the writing process, but this ultimately proved too complicated. Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 50–53.
[17] Mattis and West, *Call Sign Chaos*, 149.
[18] Mattis and West, 153.
[19] "Counterinsurgency Lesson."

the Army and the Marine Corps was not without friction. Even though the manual aimed to be a

multi-service publication, the Army had the lead on the project and the two services initially

struggled to find a division of labor that suited both parties. The scope of the manual envisioned

by the Army was broader than that originally anticipated by the Marine Corps.[20] Or as one of the

USMC writers put it, "a bit of a departure from where we thought the project was heading in

terms of construct, collaboration, content."[21] Over time though, both groups were able to find

enough common ground to work together. As Crane explained, "the Marines had already done

extensive work concerning the many lines of operation in COIN, were far ahead of the Army in

the intellectual area of operational design," and, eventually the group of Marine Corps writers

was put in charge of what would become chapter 4, entirely focused on operational art and

design for COIN.[22] In the end, each chapter was written conjointly by an Army and a Marine

author, making the field manual a true collaborative effort.[23]

While most of the manual's writers were affiliated with the military, Petraeus also

decided to ask outsiders to provide the authors with input and feedback—making the manual's

creation rather unconventional. Bringing in people from a wide range of backgrounds was typical

of Petraeus's approach. He sought to coopt people—including avowed or potential critics—and

integrate them into projects.[24] Petraeus's outreach campaign started informally through

individual exchanges in person and over email, but eventually, all these experts, coming from the

hallways of PMEs, civilian universities, the State Department, the CIA, and various humanitarian

organizations, gathered at Ft. Leavenworth for a two-day conference to help shape a field manual

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[20] Conrad Crane to David Petraeus and Clinton Ancker, "USMC Visit," December 21, 2005.
[21] Douglas King to Conrad Crane, "COIN," December 21, 2005.
[22] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 57.
[23] Conrad C. Crane, interview by Marjorie Galelli, May 21, 2021.
[24] Crane; Boylan, interview.

that—according to a conference PowerPoint presentation—was meant to "make up for 30 years of neglect of counterinsurgency doctrine."[25] As the general expressed in an email to the TRADOC commander: "I expect the COIN FM workshop to help us gain substantive input, and also hope it helps foster a degree of buy-in and stake-holding regarding the COIN doctrine from the participants to avert any future 'nay-saying' and to produce a superior, broadly-accepted product."[26] The conference eventually took place on February 23-24, 2006, and was co-sponsored by Harvard's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, then under the direction of Sarah Sewall, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense.

The co-sponsoring of the conference by a civilian, academic organization was part of COIN supporters' ongoing effort to strengthen the academic-military collaboration. In an email he wrote to Crane, Petraeus stated explicitly that Sewall's co-sponsoring of the event was "a good way to expand the size of the tent and the number of those in it," and to "strengthen the bridge with the academic world."[27] Petraeus valued civilian education and commonly sought points of view from outside of the military; according to his public affairs officer, he was always looking to incorporate good ideas.[28] In addition, including civilian academic perspectives offered a way to "bring a veneer of humanitarian and NGO involvement," to the conference, as Conrad Crane wrote in an email to Petraeus.[29] From the onset, the goal was clear: the doctrine was meant to have an impact well beyond the military.

However, Petraeus's insistence on bringing in outsiders and having them weigh in on the new doctrine ruffled some feathers. According to Crane, there was "some unease within CADD

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[25] "COIN FM Workshop" (PowerPoint Slides, Ft. Leavenworth, February 23, 2006), 48.
[26] David Petraeus to William Wallace, "CAC COIN FM Workshop, 23-24 FEB 06," December 24, 2005.
[27] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 53.
[28] Boylan, interview.
[29] Conrad Crane to David Petraeus et al., "RE: Carr Center vs. FPRI for COIN Conference," December 21, 2005.

about the outside involvement, special treatment, and unusual process involved with the COIN manual."[30] The expedited timeline for the manual's publication for one required its authors to scrap traditional bureaucratic processes, which challenged the established order within an institution that cherishes hierarchy and procedure. In addition, Petraeus made the unusual decision to involve academics from civilian institutions and NGOs in the manual's creation.

Some have argued that Petraeus's decision to include civilian academics—mainly political scientists, social scientists, and historians—indicated a desire to work outside, or maybe even against, the military establishment. Some took a more positive stance, pointing out that it reflected "a unity of effort between the military and academic worlds rarely seen at the doctrinal or operational level."[31] In fact, there were parallels between the collaboration of academics and the military in the early 2000s and that which took place during the Cold War. Yet, as historian Martin Clemis points out, during the Cold War, academics' involvement remained mostly restricted to the strategic level, while the writing of FM 3-24 brought their involvement down the operational, and to a degree, tactical level, as the manual addressed some of the day-to-day aspects of COIN operations. Others still, suggested that Petraeus's "big tent" was simply typical of his way of coopting people and gaining their support by listening to them and incorporating them and their ideas into a project.[32]

Regardless of the intent behind Petraeus's decision to involve various academic experts in the manual's writing, their inclusion reflected the type of officer profile favored by supporters of counterinsurgency. While the military institution traditionally harbors distrust towards academia that sometimes veers into downright anti-intellectualism, the people who backed COIN

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[30] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 48.
[31] Martin G. Clemis, "Crafting Non-Kinetic Warfare: The Academy-Military Nexus in US Counterinsurgency Doctrine," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20, no. 1 (March 2009): 160.
[32] Crane, interview.

were also staunch supporters of traditional civilian education and scholarly-soldiers.[33] After all, Petraeus, McMaster, and the likes had drawn on their graduate studies at civilian institutions (Princeton and North Carolina at Chapel Hill respectively) to develop their counterinsurgency approaches during the early years of OIF and had been more successful than many of their military-educated counterparts. In addition, thanks to the two men's understanding of, and great relationship with the press, their successes were highly visible.

By comparison, General Casey's Commander's Initiatives Group in Iraq, self-proclaimed "Casey Guys," arguably prided themselves in not having PhDs.[34] While the claim was part of a PowerPoint presentation clearly intended to be humorous, the repeated mention of the absence of people with a doctorate degree within Casey's team still indicates that tensions existed between academic-minded soldiers and some of their colleagues. Emblematic of this suspicion is retired Army Lieutenant Colonel and prolific columnist Ralph Peters, who became one of COIN's most fervent critics in the early 2000s. In a piece published in the *Armed Forces Journal*, he called Petraeus and his fellow COIN-enthusiasts "the Ph.D gang," "peace-through-palaver zealots," and lamented that they were "military intellectuals suffocating our service-college faculties, men so obsessed with defending their theses that they never stop to ask themselves why their COIN

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[33] For examples of reflection on anti-intellectualism in the military see "Soldier-Scholar (Pick One): Anti-Intellectualism in the American Military," War on the Rocks, August 25, 2020, http://warontherocks.com/2020/08/soldier-scholar-pick-one-anti-intellectualism-in-the-american-military/; Don M. Snider, "Strategic Insights: Whiskey over Books, Again? Anti-Intellectualism and the Future Effectiveness of Army 2025," February 23, 2016; Lloyd J. Matthews, "The Uniformed Intellectual and His Place in American Arms: Part I: Anti-Intellectualism in the Army Yesterday and Today," *Army* 52, no. 7 (July 2002): 17–25; Lloyd J. Matthews, "The Uniformed Intellectual and His Place in American Arms, Part II: The Effects of Anti-Intellectualism on the Army Profession Today," *Army* 52, no. 8 (August 2002): 31–40.

[34] This comment appears in a set of slides with pictures of General Casey likely intended as a joke on the occasion of his departure from Iraq. On one of the slides, a speech bubble made Casey say "My guys are this close to getting a PhD!" meanwhile the last slide was signed "From the Commander's Initiatives Group (we have no PhDs – we are Casey Guys)," with a picture of a caveman as background. "In Honor of the O'Reilly Factor 'Body Language Expert' Segments, We Bring You Some Thoughts behind GEN Casey's Infamous Hand Gestures...," February 2007, Papers of Gen. George Casey Jr., US Army (Ret.), Box 116, National Defense University.

templates haven't worked anywhere we've tried them."[35] Peters believed the stakes were high, and he was brutal in his conclusion: "it's immoral to throw away the lives of our troops in repeated attempts to validate somebody's doctoral thesis," he wrote.[36] As these examples demonstrate, despite the successes encountered by scholar-soldiers, not everyone was satisfied with the direction taken by the military under the leadership of Petraeus and his fellow COIN-supporters.

The February 2006 conference was initially supposed to bring together some thirty people, but it ended up swelling to 150 attendees, all of whom had extensive experience reflecting upon and writing about military matters—and specifically about counterinsurgency.[37] Not only did nearly everyone who was invited attend the event, but many asked to bring additional people. According to Crane, the participants shared the belief that they were doing something important.[38] In addition to the manual's authors, the attendees included some renowned scholars in the field like Brian Linn, a civilian professor at Texas A&M, who authored several acclaimed monographs on the American War in the Philippines and the associated counterinsurgency operations; Steve Metz, who taught at the Army War College and wrote extensively on strategy, including in relations to insurgency and counterinsurgency; Eliot Cohen, a well-known international relations scholar from Johns Hopkins; Thomas Marks from the National Defense University, who had co-authored the interim field manual; and many others.[39] Also present was Australian officer David Kilcullen, widely considered as one of the 21st

[35] Ralph Peters, "Progress and Peril New Counterinsurgency Manual Cheats on the History Exam," *Armed Forces Journal*, February 1, 2007, Access World News.
[36] Peters.
[37] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 64–65.
[38] Crane, interview.
[39] Brian Linn provided feedback on the manual via email regarding the Philippines and his book *The Philippine War, 1899-1902* was listed in FM 3-24's bibliography. Brian Linn to Conrad Crane, "COIN Comments," February 24, 2006; Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, Annotated Biliography.2.

century's most prominent experts on counterinsurgency, who served as an adviser to the US military throughout the war in Iraq. In sum, for two days, the conference regrouped the who's who of COIN experts to collaborate on shaping the way the US military would address insurgencies in the future.

Over the course of the conference, the attendees were broken into small groups and asked to discuss individual chapter drafts, circulated in advance on February 6 by the writing team, and then to provide comments on those drafts within the two weeks following the conference. These initial drafts were truly meant to be working documents, a starting point for people that would then evolve based on feedback.[40] The drafts were produced at record speed: the chapters had been divided between the writers only a couple months prior, in mid-December 2005, once again highlighting the compressed timeline for the production of the field manual.[41] According to one of the manual's authors, they "tried to write something and get a very accomplished group of people to look at that and tell us what they think of it early on so we can make significant adjustments where they are needed, or adjust and put in nuances."[42]

In addition to gaining feedback, the conference was also the occasion for Petraeus to start a promotion campaign around the new doctrine that would last for several years. The architect of this unprecedented and incredibly successful effort was Petraeus's public affairs officer, Colonel Steven Boylan. Boylan had served in Iraq as Director of the Combined Press Center before being assigned to Ft. Leavenworth and becoming Petraeus's Public Affairs Officer and Chief of Strategic Communication, and promoting the new field manual rapidly became a central part of his job.[43] To that end, Boylan developed a comprehensive strategic communication plan with

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[40] Crane, interview.
[41] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 55–58.
[42] Government Press Releases, "Army Writing New Counterinsurgency Field Manual."
[43] Boylan, interview.

several key audiences in mind. Not only was the communication effort geared towards Army

personnel, but it also aimed to reach key members of the Department of Defense, members of

Congress and their staff, retired Army senior leaders, and finally, the Pentagon press corps,

which would be "used as means to target other audiences."[44]

Therefore, in addition to the who's who of counterinsurgency, Petraeus and Boylan

invited several reporters to attend the February conference. Among them were Jane Arraf, Jim

Fallows, Elaine Grossman, Greg Jaffe, George Packer, and Linda Robinson.[45] All of them wrote

extensively on military affairs, and the war in Iraq in particular, and including them in the

crafting of the new doctrine ensured that they would likely pay particular attention to

counterinsurgency initiatives in their future reporting, thus increasing COIN's visibility for the

American public and Congress.

John Nagl later stated that that there was "an IO [Information Operations] component" to

the conference and the invitation of not only journalists but also of members of NGOs because,

to win the war, "you really need public support and that was ebbing."[46] Crane, too, confirmed

that "one of the goals of the conference had been to generate media buzz."[47] In fact, Boylan

believed that the "largest media interests will be from those that attended COIN development

work shops," and his approach paid off.[48] According to Nagl, inviting journalists to be part of the

manual's writing process did create "a constituency for the ideas that were being developed and

that constituency helped popularize those ideas in both the general public and inside the Army,

perhaps most dramatically after we published [FM 3-24] in December 2006."[49] While the

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[44] Steven Boylan, "Counterinsurgency (COIN) (FM 3-24) STRATCOM Strategy, Coordinating Draft," March 6, 2006, Personal Papers of Steven Boylan.
[45] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 64.
[46] Nagl, interview, October 20, 2010, 15.
[47] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 82.
[48] Boylan, "Counterinsurgency (COIN) (FM 3-24) STRATCOM Strategy, Coordinating Draft."
[49] Nagl, interview, October 20, 2010, 16.

involvement of journalists initially surprised some of the manual's writers, they eventually came to believe that Petraeus was relying on the field manual and the associated information campaign to pave the way for his potential return to Iraq.[50] It is worth noting, however, that the whole workshop was under a non-attribution policy, meant "to ensure an open, robust, and candid dialogue among all participants."[51]

Boylan and Petraeus's efforts were successful. Most of the initial media coverage of the manual was very enthusiastic and journalists were quick to present counterinsurgency as the silver bullet the US military needed to finally gain the upper hand in Iraq. Opening the *Boston Globe* in the summer 2006, while the manual was still in progress, one could read an article emblematic of the glowing reporting that prefaced the publication of FM 3-24. In this article, journalist Bryan Bender explained that "the first draft of the manual combines a heavy dose of military science and basic soldiering with history and politics. Drawing on lessons of the past two centuries, it provides a blueprint for how to run a foreign occupation where the central government is either weak or nonexistent and well-armed insurgents are launching hit-and-run attacks from within civilian areas."[52] Bender described the difficulties tied to changing the US military's modus operandi, but—typical of initial reporting on FM 3-24—did not questioned the feasibility of the new approach. Like many of his colleagues at the time, Bender readily embraced the possibility of a complex but achievable solution to the problems plaguing the United States in Iraq.

Around the same time, an article by conference attendee Linda Robinson in *U.S. News and World Report* appeared under the subtitle "A new Army manual shows the smart way to beat

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[50] Crane, interview.
[51] "COIN FM Workshop," 6.
[52] Bryan Bender, "Pentagon Studying Its War Errors; Analysts Assess Tactics in Iraq, Afghanistan," *Boston Globe*, August 16, 2006, https://search.proquest.com/docview/405019307/abstract/8DB0211619B64350PQ/1020.

insurgents."[53] She too gamely accepted the "paradoxes of counterinsurgency" listed by Conrad

Crane in the manual and stressed the importance of "avoiding civilian casualties."[54] Essentially,

her article read as if it had been authored by the military itself. Such glowing reporting on the

field manual and counterinsurgency, however, eventually drew its own critics. As we will see,

the media's endorsement of counterinsurgency as a softer form of warfare caused pushback from

a variety of parties opposed to counterinsurgency, the United States' military involvement in

Iraq, and/or American imperialism more broadly.

The Manual

After many drafts, much feedback, and a significant number of revisions, the new

Counterinsurgency field manual was published in December 2006. It spanned 282 pages divided

in eight chapters and five appendixes. Although the Iraq War was on everyone's minds at the

time, writers of FM 3-24 still intended it for use in any future conflict that required countering an

insurgency. Thus, the field manual covered facets of counterinsurgency ranging from an

historical overview, to integrating civilian and military activities, to intelligence, to sustainment,

to leadership and ethics, in an effort to provide a thorough picture of the requirements of such

operations in any context, but did not provide specifics for a particular region or country.

The stated goal of the field manual was to "institutionalize Army and Marine Corps

knowledge" of counterinsurgency, in order for the services to stop having to repeatedly learn

how to fight an insurgency while it is taking place.[55] To that end, the manual drew upon

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[53] Linda Robinson, "The Book on Bad Apples: A New Army Manual Shows the Smart Way to Beat Insurgents,"
U.S. News & World Report, July 24, 2006,
http://www2.lib.ku.edu/login?URL=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=21579726&s
ite=ehost-live.
[54] Robinson.
[55] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, ix.

historical examples, as well as old counterinsurgency publications by the military and other experts, both foreign and domestic. Even though counterinsurgency manuals and case studies had mostly been relegated to the dusty bookshelves of military schools' professors for several decades, the US military nonetheless had a lot of material to draw upon once it started to draft FM 3-24. As John Nagl once stated in an interview, "there really isn't much new under the sun" when it comes to counterinsurgency.[56]

Several key assumptions shaped the field manual. First, it had to be geared towards the upper echelons of the military hierarchy. It also had to stress the importance of cultural awareness as a core element of counterinsurgency operations. Lastly, because many people involved in its development were historians and strongly believed that historical parallels were essential, the field manual was to be grounded in history. Colonel Peter Mansoor (PhD, history, Ohio State University, 1995), for instance, stated that "historical grounding in counterinsurgency warfare, I think, was really crucial" and Conrad Crane (PhD, history, Stanford University, 1990) chose to open the manual with a chapter dedicated to the history of insurgency and counterinsurgency.[57] Crane also insisted on including "a lot of historical illustrations in each chapter" as he "believed they would be very helpful in getting our concepts understood."[58]

When the drafting process of the new field manual was put in motion in the fall 2005, one of Petraeus's directives for FM 3-24 was to write it at the graduate level. And, throughout the entire promotion campaign, the general kept describing COIN as the graduate level of warfare as a way to convey the degree of difficulty of counterinsurgency operations. The public affairs

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[56] "Counterinsurgency Lesson."
[57] Mansoor, interview, 25.
[58] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 61–62.

guidance for the release of the field manual, specifically explained that "this type of warfare is a thinking person's warfare or graduate level."[59] Likewise, in the preface of the counterinsurgency reader published by the *Military Review* in the fall 2006, Petraeus explained that "the conduct of counterinsurgency operations is a 'graduate level' endeavor, full of paradoxes and challenges."[60] Conrad Crane also insisted on the difficulty of the task, stating that "the manual is not going to give commanders on the ground a cookie cutter of how to solve each other problem. It's going to get them a set of tools to think about the process and to learn and to adapt and to come up with something that'll be effective in their area."[61] Crane, like Petraeus, emphasized the notion that counterinsurgency demanded adaptivity and broad contextual understanding. The authors' belief that counterinsurgency was a particularly difficult endeavor also explains why the field manual was geared towards "leaders and planners at the battalion level and above," rather than the "conventional-force leaders at division-level and below" the interim field manual had targeted.[62] That decision is somewhat surprising because, by the manual's own admission, one of the paradoxes of counterinsurgency operations is that "many important decisions are not made by generals" and "corporals and privates will have to make quick decisions that may result in actions with strategic implications."[63]

It is worth pointing out though that some people have taken exception to the "graduate level" analogy. Colonel Gian Gentile, for instance, believed that "COIN is arguably less complex, precisely because it is less 'kinetic' . . . COIN is executed at a slower pace and, thus, can be more forgiving"; he thought that the paradoxes of counterinsurgency as outlined in one of

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[59] Steven Boylan, "Public Affairs Guidance (PAG) for Release of Field Manual 3-24 'Counterinsurgency,' Draft (Pre-Decisional)," July 7, 2006, Personal Papers of Steven Boylan.
[60] David H. Petraeus, "Preface," *Military Review*, October 2006.
[61] "Counterinsurgency Lesson."
[62] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, vii; Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, iv.
[63] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1.28, A.2.

the manual's drafts were "factually wrong to the point of being ridiculous."[64] At the same time,

the "graduate level" analogy reiterated Petraeus's attachment to academia and the idea that he

was both a military man and a scholar. FM 3-24 thus claimed to be the first field manual to

include an extensive bibliography, for which the general had to wrangle approval himself.[65] In

fact, the interim field manual had also included a bibliography—nearly a full page of

recommended readings beyond official military publications.[66]

The field manual states that "victory is achieved when the populace consents to the

government's legitimacy and stops actively and passively supporting the insurgency," therefore,

coopting the population is essential to a successful counterinsurgency—which first requires to

understand said population.[67] As a consequence, at Petraeus's request, and with the full support

of the writing team, FM 3-24 set out to address cultural awareness from the start.[68] Throughout

the entire manual, authors repeatedly pointed out the importance of "well-informed, culturally

astute leaders" in COIN operations, stated that "cultural knowledge is essential to waging a

successful counterinsurgency," and that "effective COIN operations require a greater emphasis

on certain skills, such as language and cultural understanding, than does conventional warfare."[69]

The third chapter of the manual in particular, explained that "intelligence in COIN is about

people. U.S. forces must understand the people of the host nation, the insurgents, and the host-

nation (HN) government. Commanders and planners require insight into cultures, perceptions,

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[64] Gentile, Gian P., "A Strategy of Tactics: Population-Centric COIN and the Army," *Parameters: The Journal of the Army War College* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 2009): 12; Gian Gentile to Conrad Crane, "Back from Iraq," December 16, 2006.
[65] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 63.
[66] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, Bibliography 1-2.
[67] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1.3.
[68] Jan Horvath to Montgomery McFate, "RE: CONTEMPORARY COIN (UNCLASSIFIED)," January 24, 2006.
[69] Petraeus and Amos, "Foreword"; Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1.15, 1.23.

values, beliefs, interests and decision-making processes of individuals and groups. These requirements are the basis for collection and analytical efforts."[70] It also cautioned readers that "what members of a particular group believe to be rational, normal, or true may appear to outsiders to be strange, irrational or illogical," troops should thus expect not to necessarily understand the local population and for the population not to understand them.[71] Building a rapport with local civilians takes time and effort. In short, the manual enshrined in doctrine what most people in the defense community had already accepted: counterinsurgency was all about the local population and its culture.

The military traditionally tends to look at past experiences as a guide for new conflicts and the counterinsurgency field manual is no exception. FM 3-24 is a document grounded in history; its introduction announced that "knowledge of the history and principles of insurgency and COIN provides a solid foundation that informed leaders can use to assess insurgencies," because "broad historical trends underlie the factors motivating the insurgents."[72] In other words, one can learn from past conflicts how to defeat a contemporary insurgency. The media readily embraced that claim. In the weeks following the publication of the manual, a *Boston Globe* article explained: "The new manual, which was published last month, presents a thoroughly researched and innovative rethinking of counterinsurgency in the post-Sept. 11 world—a reassessment of strategy based on the history of counterinsurgency stretching from ancient Rome to the French debacle in Algeria to America's experience in Vietnam."[73] The Vietnam War was a familiar analogy. Because of the war's prominence in the military's—and the nation's—

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[70] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 3.1.
[71] Department of the Army, 3.8.
[72] Department of the Army, ix.
[73] Sennott, "The Petraeus Doctrine."

collective memory, when the insurgency started to rise in Iraq, the military, the government, and

the media had begun to draw comparisons between the war in Iraq and the 1960s conflict.[74] Yet

there were other references for the manual's authors to draw upon in the development of the new

doctrine, as the various examples included in PME curricula attest. These examples took the

form of small vignettes carefully selected by the authors; a total of twenty-one spanned the field

manual. The majority of historical examples offered lessons from the past to emulate in order to

achieve a successful outcome, but some of them also illustrated the type of behavior to avoid.

The Vietnam War permeated the manual far beyond the initial chapter dedicated to

history. In fact, references to the Vietnam War appeared in over half of the manual's chapters.[75]

By comparison, Malaya, where the British waged a large-scale counterinsurgency campaign in

the mid-20th century that usually was considered to have been a classical example of COIN's

success, only appeared in one vignette in chapter 6. The manual's authors used the Vietnam War

as an example of what went wrong in the past when the United States attempted to defeat an

insurgency, but they also highlighting elements that they saw as successful as potential templates

for the future. For instance, the manual's second chapter, "Unity of Effort," dedicated a vignette

to pacification and the CORDS program (Civil Operations and Revolutionary/Rural

Development Support), which the manual described as "one of the most valuable and successful

elements of COIN" during the Vietnam War.[76] The manual used this example as a model for the

integrating civilian and military activities, which the authors credited with the improvement of

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[74] Claudia Rosett, "The Real World: Iraq Another Vietnam? Vietnam Should Be So Lucky," *Wall Street Journal, Europe*, November 19, 2003; Craig R. Whitney, "Watching Iraq, Seeing Vietnam," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/09/weekinreview/the-world-tunnel-vision-watching-iraq-seeing-vietnam.html; Robert G. Kaiser, "Iraq Isn't Vietnam, But They Rhyme," *The Washington Post*, December 28, 2003, https://search.proquest.com/docview/2267753506/abstract/B0BE083D8B334D3CPQ/5; Thomas, "Operation Hearts and Minds."

[75] The Vietnam War was also the preponderant historical reference in the interim field manual.

[76] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 2.12.

the situation in Vietnam in the late 1960s to early 1970s. In the fifth chapter, "Executing Counterinsurgency Operations," one of the vignettes focused on the Marine Corps' Combined Action Program (CAP) as a model of interaction with local populations, stating that Marines were successful because they "earned the trust of villagers by living among them" and "learned the villagers' customs and language."[77] At the same time, the chapter also stressed the inappropriate nature of the Vietnam War's infamous "body count" as an indicator of success. Finally, two of the vignettes in the eighth chapter, dedicated to logistics, also featured examples from the Vietnam War. The degree to which the Vietnam War permeated the new field manual is a testament to the weight still carried by this defeat in the military's collective psyche thirty years later. By featuring it so prominently in the manual, the new doctrine essentially offered a way to transcend mistakes from the past and exorcize old demons.

The selection of historical vignettes by the manual's authors was deliberate, and their decisions as to which ones to exclude and what conversations to avoid are equally telling. Oddly enough, despite the significant influence of French counterinsurgency principles over the manual, the French experience in Algeria in the 1950s, was only mentioned a handful of times, mostly in the introductory chapter, and in a vignette in the seventh chapter on ethics—even though that was where counterinsurgency expert David Galula had developed his counterinsurgency tactics against nationalists, which later inspired his writings.

French authors like Bernard Fall and Galula and their writings on the French experience with counter-guerilla warfare in Indochina and Algeria significantly influenced the American approach to counterinsurgency operations during the Vietnam War and their influence was still

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[77] Department of the Army, 5.25.

felt at the turn of the 21st century. Counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen explained that for him and the rest of the group who devised the COIN doctrine detailed in the new field manual, "Galula, Thompson, Fall and other writers of the classical era were highly influential," so much so that, according to him, "the COIN renaissance of 2005-6 can be considered a Neo-Classical Revival, resting on the application and updating of classical precepts for the new campaigns."[78]

Remarkably, David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* is one of the few such works that is actually cited in the field manual, rather than simply being listed in the bibliography. The second chapter of the manual on "Unity of Effort: Integrating Civilian and Military Activities" opened with a quote from Galula on the subordination of military actions to political ones.[79] There is, however, no consensus among the various people involved in the writing of the field manual on the extent to which Galula mattered. According to John Nagl, he was one of the main influences behind the manual, yet, according to Conrad Crane, the influence of Galula on the field manual was rather limited as the authors "became aware (except for John Nagl) of Galula too late to make much difference."[80] For Crane, Galula's ideas came as a confirmation after the fact, rather than inspiration.[81] If anything, the degree of similarity between the works shows that, once again, counterinsurgents had reinvented the wheel. One thing, however, is sure: once the promotion of FM 3-24 lead to discussion of COIN in mainstream media coverage, one would have been hard-pressed to ignore Galula's existence, as the writer's theories were prominently featured in the news.[82]

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[78] Kilcullen, "Counterinsurgency: The State of a Controversial Art," 137.
[79] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 2.1.
[80] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 102; John A. Nagl, "Foreword to the University of Chicago Press Edition," in *The U.S. Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), xix.
[81] Crane, interview.
[82] Ledeen, "Victory Is Within Reach in Iraq."

According to Conrad Crane, the absence of Algeria in the manual was not an oversight or a decision on the part of the writing team, but the result of explicit instructions from their hierarchy. During the Algerian War, the French military notoriously relied on torture and other immoral (and some illegal) practices to defeat the insurgents fighting for Algeria's independence and the field manual's authors were instructed to stay away from the topic as it had become a very sensitive issue following the revelations about the Abu Ghraib scandal.[83] In addition, as the historical examples used in the manual demonstrate, insurgencies have traditionally erupted in the context of foreign occupation; the British experiences during the Malayan Emergency, for instance, or that of the French during the Algeria and Indochina wars of independence. In each of these cases, the counterinsurgent was the imperial power trying to reaffirm its hold over its colonies, while insurgents were fighting for independence. Such a configuration, in which the counterinsurgent has a long-term colonial commitment to the land in which the fighting is taking place and the corresponding governing apparatus, is often believed to be the only scenario in which counterinsurgency has historically proven successful. This is well-known by the US military—as we have seen, these conflicts are the objects of the case studies that it relies on in its teaching of counterinsurgency.

Still, the fact that in each of these cases the counterinsurgents were imperialist powers raises serious issues: having to implement counterinsurgency practices implicitly places the United States on an equal footing with colonialists. This association explains the manual's

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[83] Crane, interview. Still, FM 3-24's bibliography included Alistair Horne's *A Savage War of Peace*, described as "one of the best analyses of the approaches and problems on both sides during the war in Algeria," *The Centurions* by Jean Larteguy, and the movie *The Battle of Algiers*. The interim field manual, while only mentioning Algeria once in the text, also listed a book on the Algeria War in its bibliography, namely, *The Battle of the Casbah, Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Algeria 1955-1957*, by Paul Aussaresses. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, Annotated Bibliography.1. The Abu Ghraib scandal refers to the inhumane treatment and abuse of detainees by US and coalition forces at the Abu Ghraib prison that was revealed in the media in late 2003 and gained significant coverage by 2004.

general unease when it comes to replacing counterinsurgency in its political context since, in the post-World War II era, the United States stated its opposition to imperialism and championed people's right to self-determine. This belief is at the heart of the traditional American narrative. As historian Daniel Immerwahr pointed out in relations to the *Star Wars* franchise: the United States "even fights empires in its dreams." [84] This reluctance to acknowledge American imperialism also explains why the examples of the Indian Wars and the Philippines War did not feature prominently in conversations about COIN, despite being successful examples of US-led counterinsurgency campaigns. The Philippines are mentioned a total of five times in FM 3-24, including two in the bibliography, and Indian Wars do not make a single appearance.

This is another reason why the manual glossed over was that conducted by the French in Algeria. According to the manual's lead author, "the French campaign in Algeria was one we had to steer carefully away from after the revelations at Abu Ghraib and debates over the use of torture in GWOT."[85] But as some of the manual's critics would eventually point out, it is somewhat surprising that a manual that focused on a practice that only ever proved semi-successful in the context of brutal colonial wars chose to "steer carefully away" from such concerns rather than addressing them head on. Ralph Peters for instance bemoaned that "the doctrine writers shun any examples that contradict their politically correct biases," instead, he claimed, they kept "propping the same worn-out hookers up on the barstools."[86] Peters argued, rightfully so, that most of the successful counterinsurgencies of the past relied on ferocious killing sprees. The chapter on "Leadership and Ethics for Counterinsurgency" is a mere ten-

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[84] Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*, Paperback (New York, NY: Picador, 2020), 19.

[85] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 102.

[86] Peters referred to Malaya and CORDS. Peters, "Progress and Peril New Counterinsurgency Manual Cheats on the History Exam."

pages long and, within it, only five short paragraphs are directly dealing with ethics. Nowhere in this chapter, or the field manual more broadly, does one find a genuine acknowledgment, let alone an analysis, of the ethical issues raised by the methods employed in the so-called successful examples of counterinsurgency from the colonial era. Conrad Crane stated that the manual's authors did not consider the traditional colonial nature of counterinsurgency. Until he attended a conference on counterinsurgency at New York University in 2011, he "had not paid much attention to critics on the left who viewed American COIN as brutal and imperialist."[87]

In her introduction to the Chicago Press edition of the manual, Sarah Sewall claimed that "the doctrine raises fundamental questions about the legitimacy, purposes, and limits of US power," and yet, nowhere did the field manual actually ask the essential question: is the government that the counterinsurgents seek to prop up legitimate?[88] The word "legitimacy" appeared nearly a hundred times in the manual and the first chapter clearly states that "the primary struggle in an internal war is to mobilize people in a struggle for political control and legitimacy."[89] However, this issue was addressed in purely abstract terms, the manual simply affirmed that following the recommendations it outlined will allow the counterinsurgent to enhance the host nation government's legitimacy. The same chapter stated that "legitimacy is the main objective," and offered tools to determine the degree of legitimacy of a particular government, and clearly stated that "a COIN effort cannot achieve lasting success without the [host nation] government achieving legitimacy," and yet that begs the question: what are US troops to do when the government they are tasked with supporting is illegitimate in the eyes of

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[87] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 226.
[88] Sarah Sewall, "Introduction to the University of Chicago Press Edition: A Radical Field Manual," in *The U.S. Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), xxi.
[89] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1.8, 1.21-22.

the local population?[90] Sewall acknowledged this crucial issue when she asked "what if the [host] government isn't good or brave or wise?" [91] Yet, she only glossed over the problem. As one of the doctrine's most fervent academic advocates in the media, she preferred to emphasize the fact that the doctrine insisted on protecting local populations, treating enemy prisoners humanely—in short respecting the Geneva Convention—rather than engaging in broader questions of legitimacy. Still, when the field manual avoided the larger conversation on the imperialist context of counterinsurgency operations altogether, instead of trying to address it, it fell short of its grand objective to be more than a "how-to" guide. The intricate relationship between counterinsurgency and colonialism eventually became a central tenet of the critique of COIN and of the war in Iraq more broadly.

Beyond such classical examples of counterinsurgency, the manual's authors also drew on more recent campaigns. Contemporary examples were particularly useful because they illustrated methods acceptable for a 21st century military. The US experience in Iraq, in particular, appeared throughout the manual; it was mentioned over a hundred times and present in nearly all of the chapters. For instance, the case of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Tal Afar under H. R. McMaster, which John Nagl called "textbook counterinsurgency," had a direct impact on the manual.[92] It was used as a detailed vignette in chapter 5 to demonstrate the efficacy of the "clear-hold-build" concept, which, the manual explained, starts with the removal of all enemy forces in a given area, followed by the establishment of host nation security forces, and ends with winning the population's support.[93] The US experience in Afghanistan, on the other hand, only appears a

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[90] Department of the Army, 1.21-22.
[91] Sewall, "Introduction to the University of Chicago Press Edition: A Radical Field Manual," xxxix.
[92] "Counterinsurgency Lesson."
[93] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 5.18-23.

handful of times—which can mainly be explained by the fact that, at the time, the situation in the country had not deteriorated into a full-fledged insurgency and therefore was not a relevant example. More surprising, however, is the fact that the manual never discussed the USSR's experience fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan. While the virtual absence of references to Algeria in the manual had been the result of direct orders, it was the authors' decision to steer clear from references to the Soviet experience in Afghanistan in an effort to thwart comparisons and prevent the use of the "graveyard of empires" metaphor.[94]

This choice of examples, and the emphasis on Operation Iraqi Freedom, demonstrates that although the manual was meant to help soldiers and Marines defeat insurgencies broadly speaking, the war in Iraq was nonetheless at the heart of the endeavor. The timing of the publication, a few weeks before President Bush announced the surge led by General Petraeus, further intertwined the fate of the doctrine to that of the Iraq War.

Publication, Promotion, Fame, and Backlash

As soon as the manual was released in the winter 2006, it spread at a record speed. Following Colonel Boylan's recommendation, the field manual was made available online, and it was downloaded more than six hundred thousand times in the twenty-four hours that followed.[95] While one can assume that most of those downloads probably came from those serving in the US military, the manual also commanded attention in the civilian world—so much so that a paperback copy of the field manual was published by the University of Chicago Press in 2007. (This version of FM 3-24 had a foreword by John Nagl and an introduction by Sarah Sewall, in

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[94] Crane, interview.
[95] Boylan, interview; David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

which she called it a "radical field manual."[96]) Even considering that all the people who either downloaded or purchased the manual did not necessarily read it, FM 3-24 still found a greater audience than any other publication of the kind—a testament both to the dire need for such a manual and the relentless promotion that surrounded it.

The success of the field manual among US troops is rather self-explanatory given the situation that the armed forces faced in Iraq. Finally, there was a sense that comprehensive official guidance was provided to them from the top-down. In addition, Petraeus and COIN's supporters repeatedly presented the manual as the way to victory, making it all the more likely that soldiers and Marines would want to read it. This claim was not simply made by individuals, but was an explicit part of the overall promotion campaign that surrounded FM 3-24's publication. According to the public affairs guidance for the release of the field manual, "communication efforts should address" how the new doctrine will increase "our ability to successfully prosecute the global war on terror."[97] The message to relay, according to this guidance, was that "this manual provides the principles and guidelines needed to prepare our forces for victory."[98] Still, it is quite striking that FM 3-24 became so popular in the civilian world, finding what Sarah Sewall called a "voracious public appetite" for the manual.[99]

One of the main appeals of the manual and associated COIN doctrine for the general public, in addition to the idea that it would lead to victory in Iraq, was its apparent rejection of violence. Much of the media coverage presented the manual as a guide to a "civilized" and sanitized kind of warfare, one that avoided the violence of traditional conflicts by focusing on

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[96] Sewall, "Introduction to the University of Chicago Press Edition: A Radical Field Manual," xxi.
[97] Boylan, "Public Affairs Guidance (PAG) for Release of Field Manual 3-24 'Counterinsurgency,' Draft (Pre-Decisional)."
[98] Boylan.
[99] Sewall, "Introduction to the University of Chicago Press Edition: A Radical Field Manual," xxi.

winning the "hearts and minds" of local populations rather than on killing enemies. As a consequence, one sociologist explained, "counterinsurgency appealed to both liberal progressive idealists and neoconservatives—the two major foreign policy camps at the time."[100] Yet it is important to understand that liberals' enthusiasm for counterinsurgency was not so much the result of a naïve understanding of the military, but rather the product of the widely successful publicity campaign orchestrated under the impetus of General Petraeus.

As early as March 2006, Conrad Crane and John Nagl appeared on PBS's *Charlie Rose Show,* along with Vietnam War veteran and historian Lewis Sorely, to discuss the field manual. It is worth noting that Nagl appeared on the show in uniform, clearly signaling to the viewer his role as an official representative of the US military and casting an aura of authority—which was deliberate.[101] Crane and Nagl's participation in the show was essentially a follow up to the conference that took place at Fort Leavenworth a month prior, which the episode's host, James Fallows, had attended along with several other journalists. Setting the tone for the audience, Fallows opened the show by stating that "the new manual will emphasize restraint in the use of force, political stabilization, and the importance of understanding local cultural conditions," thereby highlighting the non-kinetic, "soft," dimension of COIN.[102] This claim was reinforced by Conrad Crane who discussed some of the so-called "paradoxes of counterinsurgency," and pointed out that "the best weapons for counterinsurgency don't shoot."[103] Here again, FM 3-24 promoters insisted on the benign aspects of counterinsurgency for a layman audience.

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[100] Amitai Etzioni, "COIN: A Study of Strategic Illusion," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 26, no. 3 (May 4, 2015): 347, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2014.982882.

[101] Boylan, interview.

[102] "Counterinsurgency Lesson."

[103] This particular paradox is one of nine listed by Conrad Crane at the end of the manual's first chapter. These were intended to illustrate the counterintuitive nature of counterinsurgency operations, like "sometimes, the more you protect your force, the less secure you may be," or "sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction." Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1.27.

This was not the last time that the manual was featured on *The Charlie Rose Show*. Two of the (very few) women involved in the writing of FM 3-24 were interviewed by Charlie Rose on an episode aired on Christmas Eve 2007. They gave the manual a glowing endorsement as a "radical and paradigm-shifting" work.[104] Both contributed to the manual's reputation as non-violent by stressing the non-kinetic aspects of the doctrine. On the one hand, anthropologist Montgomery McFate, best known for her involvement in the creation of the Human Terrain System program, explained that "what this manual holds is a particular emphasis on provision of security to civilian—indigenous civilian populations. I think it has inherent in it a very strong notion about reducing the use of force and making force more precise in its application. I think it has an emphasis on non-lethal means of developing support for a host nation government, such as psychological operations, economic development, cultural knowledge, et cetera."[105] Meanwhile, foreign policy expert Sarah Sewell claimed that the new doctrine was "completely counter" to the Weinberger-Powell doctrine "in every way," going so far as to argue that it was an inversion of the American Way of War.[106] "Instead of being about defeating the enemy," she said, COIN is "about protecting the civilian. It is primarily political in its emphasis."[107] With their interventions, both women contributed to the narrative that counterinsurgency was essentially the application of soft power, a claim that had been put forward in the media since the inception of the manual, and a notion that, we will see, eventually caused significant pushback.

The media hype around the field manual and its University of Chicago Press edition was such that John Nagl even ended up on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* on Comedy Central in

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[104] Montgomery McFate and Sarah Sewall were the only two women who came to be notoriously associated with the field manual. Before participating to the development of the new counterinsurgency doctrine, both had a long history of involvement with the government and DOD specifically.

[105] "Counterinsurgency Field Manual," *The Charlie Rose Show* (PBS, December 24, 2007), https://charlierose.com/videos/11392.

[106] "Counterinsurgency Field Manual."

[107] "Counterinsurgency Field Manual."

August 2007, just a few short weeks before Petraeus was to appear in front of Congress to report on his progress with the surge. In this interview, Nagl once again in uniform, promoted the field manual to an even broader, layman audience. He described General Mattis as "a fighting general, but also a thinking general" and counterinsurgency as the "graduate level of war," reminded the viewers of Petraeus's PhD, and stressed the involvement of cultural anthropologists, humanitarians and economists—in other words academics—in the manual's writing. In a segment that lasted less than ten minutes, Lieutenant-Colonel Nagl hit all the points that the manual's supporters had been hammering for months: COIN was a smarter, and in many ways gentler, way to wage war.

The promotion campaign that surrounded the creation of the field manual was unquestionably successful at putting the Combined Arms Center and Petraeus on the map, as the general had instructed Boylan to do.[108] In 2006, even someone with little preoccupation with military matters would have been hard-pressed to ignore the development of a 'new' military doctrine at Fort Leavenworth. Dozens of journalists traveled to the heartland to interview Petraeus and subsequently reported about CAC's various initiatives to the American public. Boylan had designed a communication strategy that required reporters to have a tour of the institutions on post before they could meet with Petraeus—a way to allow the general and his team to "leverage [reporters' visits] as an opportunity to inform the public of the numerous contributions of CAC and the MSO's relative to COIN, doctrine, lessons learned, training, leader development, and support to GWOT."[109] FM 3-24 was, at least in the public eye, a success. On the flip side, counterinsurgency's visibility also meant that a doctrine that normally would only

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[108] Boylan, interview.
[109] Boylan; Steven Boylan, "Michael Gordon Concept Slides," September 14, 2006, Personal Papers of Steven Boylan.

concern the military, instead became the target of a lot of commentary and critiques coming from the civilian world.

The Backlash

Despite the widespread enthusiasm that surrounded the manual's publication, some voices started to raise concerns with the military's seemingly wholehearted adoption of counterinsurgency. Not everyone was convinced that this 'new' doctrine would solve the array of problems the United States and its military faced in Iraq. Critiques ranged from internal concerns about military readiness to accusations of imperialism. Some people also had issues with the publicity campaign surrounding the doctrine. Anthropologist David Price described the field manual as an "artifact of hope," in the political magazine *CounterPunch*.[110] He decried the active promotion of the field manual and argued that Petraeus and the manual's writers were not offering a solution to this intractable war, but rather "had to crank out a new strategy to calm growing domestic anger at military failures in Iraq."[111]

Other critics were quick to point out that the supposedly new doctrine was little more than the latest iteration of an old approach that had never proven decisive. Or worse, of an approach that dealt with a radically different type of environment than that confronted by US troops in Iraq, even though the manual had been created with that specific conflict in mind. Even some of the individuals who wrote the manual subsequently raised concerns. According to Frank Hoffman, a retired Marine who was part of the Marine Corps writing team, the manual's focus

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[110] David Price, "Pilfered Scholarship Devastates General Petraeus's Counterinsurgency Manual * Core Chapter a Morass of 'Borrowed' Quotes * University of Chicago Press Badly Compromised * Counterinsurgency Anthropologist Montgomery McFate's Role Under Attack," *CounterPunch.Org* (blog), October 30, 2007, https://www.counterpunch.org/2007/10/30/pilfered-scholarship-devastates-general-petraeuss-counterinsurgency-manual-core-chapter-a-morass-of-borrowed-quotes-university-of-chicago-press-badly-compromised-counterinsurgency/.
[111] Price.

on the classical school of thought on COIN caused it to fall short.[112] In an article that appeared in *Parameters*, a journal published by the Army War College, he explained that "we must do more than simply relearn classical COIN, America's military needs to adapt old doctrine to the new and increasingly complex strategic environment."[113] Ralph Peters, writing in the *Armed Forces Journal*, concurred that the field manual "clings to failed Vietnam-era theories of how insurgencies must be understood and treated."[114] He further argued that the historical examples dear to the manual's authors were cherry-picked to support their point. "The most troubling indication of how difficult it's going to be to convince the officers, active duty and retired, with too much formal education and too little common sense that their beloved theories don't work lies in the treacherously selective and unscrupulous use of historical examples in the new COIN manual," Peters wrote[115] In addition, at the same time that some soldiers and Marines embraced COIN as the way forward, others were reluctant to support a nation-building mission that, they believed, was antithetic to their warrior ethos. Like Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, they thought that it was up to civilians, specifically the State Department, to deal with Iraq's reconstruction. Still others, including Peters and Gentile, thought the doctrine outlined in the field manual was too soft and did not place enough emphasis on killing. As Gentile put it in an email to the manual's lead author in December 2006: "the best weapon at least at the tactical level is when you can pi[n] an insurgent . . . and blow him off of the face of the fucking earth!!!"[116] In the end however, the main critiques of the manual came from the civilian, and mostly academic, world.

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[112] Frank G. Hoffman, "Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency?," *Parameters* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 71–87.
[113] Hoffman, 84.
[114] Peters, "Progress and Peril New Counterinsurgency Manual Cheats on the History Exam."
[115] Peters.
[116] Gentile to Crane, "Back from Iraq," December 16, 2006.

Because of its popularity, the new doctrine underwent a lot of scrutiny and one key aspect rapidly became the main target of the attacks: culture. The military's embrace of cultural training—and the difficulties it raised—was initially highlighted in the press. "In classrooms, on training bases, and even on the battlefield," one journalist wrote, "military scholars and combat veterans are struggling to teach the world's most lethal military force how to calibrate its immense firepower and avoid the kind of heavy-handed tactics and cultural insensitivity that have engendered so much ill will and helped fuel insurgencies in Afghanistan and, especially, Iraq."[117] This embrace of culture as a key element of soldier and Marines' education and of counterinsurgency operations, while logical given the importance placed on gaining the support of the local population, had unexpected consequences. As the military was scrambling to develop programs to give its troops a greater understanding of culture, it turned to experts in the field, namely social scientist and anthropologists, but, in doing so, unwittingly rekindled a thirty-year-old controversy.

The story of the Army reaching out to civilian anthropologists to staff Human Terrain Teams triggered an avalanche of articles in professional journals, both military and anthropological, as well as in mainstream newspapers and magazines. Many people, from government officials to military personnel to journalists, applauded the military's initiative and saw this move as part of the larger strategy that, they hoped, would turn the tide in Iraq. But on the other hand, large numbers of anthropologists vocally opposed the move, instead seeing "an urgent need to raise again fundamental questions about our intellectual and disciplinary endeavors."[118] Because of the overlapping timelines of the creation of the HTS and the new field

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[117] Bender, "Pentagon Studying Its War Errors; Analysts Assess Tactics in Iraq, Afghanistan."
[118] Lesley Gill, "Anthropology Goes to War, Again," *Focaal--European Journal of Anthropology* 50 (2007): 141.

manual, many academics involved in the critique of HTS created an amalgam with FM 3-24 and

the two debates fueled each other.

In the fall 2007, a few months after the first HTTs deployed to Iraq, articles started to

appear in the press under headlines such as "Army Enlists Anthropology in War Zones," in the

New York Times, "The Culture Warriors," in *U.S. News & World Report*, and "Anthropologists

on the Front Lines," in *Time* magazine. The Human Terrain System was also discussed on NPR

and was even the object of an editorial in the renowned scientific publication *Nature* the

following summer.[119] This reporting sparked the uproar of the anthropology community, as a

majority of members of its professional society saw the HTS program as an unqualified

regression in the discipline's move away from its previous involvement with the military during

the Cold War, and strongly criticized the media for endorsing it. In turn, many of the

anthropologists working for the government argued that the ethical stance was to work with the

military in order to ensure that anthropological scholarship would be used properly and provide

the military with alternatives to "kinetic actions." But the majority of academic anthropologists

thought that such a stance was jeopardizing anthropology's decades-long effort to distance itself

from the discipline's past ethical wrongdoings.[120] Anthropology became one of the military's

"most controversial weapon" as one journalist put it: "In the back of an armored Stryker vehicle

bound for one of Baghdad's more volatile neighborhoods, the U.S. military is transporting what

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[119] "'Academic Embeds': Scholars Advise Troops Abroad," NPR.org, accessed April 11, 2019, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=15124054; "A Social Contract," *Nature* 454, no. 7201 (July 2008): 138, https://doi.org/10.1038/454138a.

[120] Anthropology as we understand it today became a truly institutionalized discipline in the 1930s, and during WW2, large numbers of anthropologists along with social scientists and academia more broadly wholeheartedly contributed to the war effort—often in places like the Office of War Information, where their expertise could directly come to bear. This relationship continued into the Cold War, but in the 1960s, the Vietnam War drove a wedge between the US military and academia. While a handful of anthropologists decided to keep working for the military, infamous projects that relied on anthropology to target individuals led a vast majority to sever those ties. The American Anthropological Association subsequently enshrined that posture in its code of ethics.

is perhaps the most controversial weapon in its counterinsurgency arsenal today: civilian anthropologists."[121]

Beyond targeted critiques of anthropologists' participation in military ventures, the HTS controversy also opened the door for broader questions about the military's adoption of counterinsurgency and the war in Iraq more broadly. Even though people like Sewall argued that "counterinsurgency likes to think of itself as different from occupation," opponents of the doctrine, just like insurgents on the ground, often found it hard to see the American presence in Iraq as anything but an occupation.[122] One of the manual's critics, anthropologist Roberto González, wrote that "FM 3-24 generally reads like a manual for indirect colonial rule — though 'empire' and 'imperial' are taboo words, never used in reference to US power."[123] Another one called FM 3-24 a "deeply tarnished service manual for Empire."[124] As these scholars pointed out, even though military publications such as FM 3-24 discuss counterinsurgency purely as a doctrine, devoid of any political intent, one would be remiss to consider it without taking its colonial dimension into account.[125]

The question raised by the ties between counterinsurgency and colonialism is an ethical one that fell under a larger debate about the law of war in the age of the GWOT. Given that in order to properly implement counterinsurgency measures they have to be part of a long-term

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[121] Anna Mulrine, "The Culture Warriors," *US News & World Report*, November 30, 2007, https://www.usnews.com/news/iraq/articles/2007/11/30/the-pentagon-deploys-social-scientists-to-help-understand-iraqs-human-terrain.

[122] "Counterinsurgency Field Manual."

[123] Roberto J. González, "Towards Mercenary Anthropology? The New US Army Counterinsurgency Manual FM 3-24 and the Military-Anthropology Complex," *Anthropology Today* 23, no. 3 (June 2007): 16, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8322.2007.00511.x.

[124] Price, "Pilfered Scholarship Devastates General Petraeus's Counterinsurgency Manual * Core Chapter a Morass of 'Borrowed' Quotes * University of Chicago Press Badly Compromised * Counterinsurgency Anthropologist Montgomery McFate's Role Under Attack."

[125] Throughout the nearly 300 pages of FM 3-24 the term "colonialism" is never mentioned, while "imperialism" makes all but one appearance.

commitment of significant resources, the kind invested by an imperial power in its colonies, COIN seemingly recommends the imperialistic and, by nature, unethical subjugation of another people. Beyond that, the methods used in order to enact that control have historically been deeply immoral, and have become, more recently, contrary to international law. In his detailed study of US counterinsurgency doctrine from 1860 to 1976, historian Andrew Birtle explains that prior to WWII, the United States' methods when it came to counterinsurgency operations were extreme and included "the taking of hostages; the destruction of food and property; the arrest, trial, and possible execution of guerillas and their civilian allies; population resettlement; and a host of other restrictive steps."[126] This would evidently not be accepted by the international community in the 21st century, which makes counterinsurgency operations all the more difficult to conduct in the wake of the Geneva Convention.

Petraeus's XO acknowledged as much when he explained that "there's an environment today with globalized communications, and with a focus on human rights, that you simply cannot do some of the things that various people did before the 20th century—and even sometimes in the 20th century—to tamp down rebellions."[127] The *Counterinsurgency* field manual recognized it too in its very brief treatment of the Algeria War in its chapter on "Leadership and Ethics for Counterinsurgency," but presented the issue under a utilitarian light, stating that "in the end, failure to comply with moral and legal restrictions against torture severely undermined French efforts and contributed to their loss despite several significant military victories."[128] Thus in both cases, the reasons highlighted were not so much the unethical nature of the counterinsurgent's actions, which they failed to condemn unambiguously, but the fact that, if employed, such

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[126] Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976*, 9.
[127] Mansoor, interview, 26.
[128] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 7.9.

methods would eventually lead to a defeat as it would alienate public opinion. According to

Steven Metz, who attended the conference at Leavenworth in 2006, when the United States

developed its counterinsurgency theory, it drew heavily upon the French and British models,

without entirely taking into account their imperial dimension. Since the United States did not

seek to establish a colonial government but to support a government's counterinsurgency efforts

the European models "were not fully applicable," he said.[129]

Following the publication of FM 3-24, some academics pointed out that the manual's

authors had plagiarized significant portions of the text. Anthropologist David Price explained

that "in Chapter 3 alone I found about twenty passages showing either direct use of others'

passages without quotes, or heavy reliance on unacknowledged source materials."[130] These

observations led Price to indict the manual for lack of academic integrity and outright plagiarism,

accusations which were all the more damning that the manual's promotion hinged on the

academic credentials of its authors. According to Price, "most academics know that bad things

can happen when marginally skilled writers must produce ambitious amounts of writing in short

time periods," adding that "sometimes the only resulting calamities are grammatical

abominations, but in other instances the pressures to perform lead to shoddy academic

practices."[131]

John Nagl took it upon himself to respond to Price's critiques and defend the field

manual in *Small Wars Journal*. He wrote that field manuals "are intended for use by soldiers,"

[129] Steven Metz, "Abandoning Counterinsurgency: Toward a More Efficient Antiterrorism Strategy," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10, no. 4 (2017): 70.

[130] Price, "Pilfered Scholarship Devastates General Petraeus's Counterinsurgency Manual * Core Chapter a Morass of 'Borrowed' Quotes * University of Chicago Press Badly Compromised * Counterinsurgency Anthropologist Montgomery McFate's Role Under Attack."

[131] Price.

and that consequently "authors are not named, and those whose scholarship informs the manual are only credited if they are quoted extensively."[132] Despite having stressed the academic qualifications of the manual's authors on many occasions, Nagl there insisted on the separate nature of military and academic publications. While it is somewhat understandable that the field manual format does not allow for footnotes, and therefore prevented its authors from properly citing their material, what prevented the authors from, at the very least, keeping the quotation marks? As Gian Gentile pointed out in the commentary section of Nagl's rebuttal: "the publishers did find it in their means to use quotation marks to quote directly from TE Lawrence; So why not these other passages?"[133] The subsequent publication of the manual by a traditional academic press should certainly have led to an overhaul of the publication to include properly quoted material in accordance with academic standards. Although this is a somewhat minor concern compared to the broader questions that the manual raised, it still discredited the effort of the manual's authors in the eyes of many civilian scholars for whom intellectual propriety is sacred. In turn, these accusations made attempts to recruit civilian experts to staff Human Terrain Teams more complicated as the already tenuous bond of trust between academia and the military was seriously damaged, thus bringing the debate full circle.

The promotion surrounding the creation and subsequent publication of the new *Counterinsurgency* field manual was extremely successful. By incorporating reporters into the process from the start and making educating the public one of their primary goals, Petraeus and Boylan were able to widen the reach of the field manual well beyond its traditional military

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[132] John Nagl, "Desperate People with Limited Skills," *Small Wars Journal* (blog), November 1, 2007, https://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/desperate-people-with-limited-skills.
[133] Gian Gentile comment on November 2, 2007 in Nagl.

audience. In doing so, they made counterinsurgency popular and gave the American people reason to hope that there might, after all, be a light at the end of the Iraq War tunnel. By the time that the manual became embroiled in the HTS controversy, however, both men were deployed to Iraq and promoting—or in this case defending—FM 3-24 was no longer their main concern. Instead, the actual implementation of counterinsurgency, conducting the surge, and crafting the narrative around it were their new priorities.

After several years of *ad hoc* efforts on the part of the Army and the Marine Corps, the creation of FM 3-24 finally marked the beginning of the institutionalization of counterinsurgency and, for a moment, seemed to pave the way for a comprehensive implementation of the doctrine in Iraq. Rooted in historical analyses of past insurgencies and counterinsurgency efforts, the process involved people from within and without the military working together to chart a new way to develop military doctrine, suggesting that in the first decade of the 21st century, the association of civilians and military personnel was growing stronger. However, that same collaboration between academic and military personnel, which eventually yielded a publication of the field manual by a university press, also revealed fractures that were seemingly irreconcilable. While the general public, encouraged by the press, readily embraced the promises of COIN as a way out of Iraq, a substantial number of academics came out against the military's efforts to promote this 'new' way of war and their colleagues' participation in the doctrine's crafting and/or implementation. From the other side of the divide, a significant portion of the military establishment resisted what they saw as an institutional turn away from conventional warfare capabilities, which, they believed, was detrimental to readiness. Rather than a way to win the war in Iraq, they saw enthusiasm for COIN as a reason to remain embroiled in the

conflict instead of getting out. In the end though, counterinsurgency's supporters won the debate. Thanks to their relentless promotion, by January 2007, President Bush was able to make his case for the surge by arguing that, in addition to having more troops at his disposal, the new MNF-I commander would adopt this 'new' counterinsurgency doctrine, which would finally lead the United States to victory.

Chapter 6: Shifting the Narrative: Petraeus Brings the New Field Manual to Iraq, 2007-2008

As it turns out, the publication of the field manual in December 2006 coincided with a transition in leadership in the Pentagon, as well as in Iraq, suggesting that a window for change was opening. In November 2006, following mid-term elections in which the Democratic victory in both chambers of Congress was, at least in part, an indictment of the war in Iraq, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was asked to resign and was replaced by Robert Gates. Rumsfeld's disgrace followed months of turmoil that had been precipitated by what the media dubbed "the revolt of the generals" earlier that year. In April 2006, several retired generals had publicly expressed their disagreement with the way the Secretary of Defense was handling the war in Iraq. They believed that Rumsfeld and his advisors had helped to push the United States into an unnecessary war, and that, due to the so-called "Rumsfeld doctrine," that war had been fought with understrength and underequipped forces according to a flawed strategy. On these grounds, they called for the president to replace Rumsfeld with a new secretary of defense. When Bush replaced Rumsfeld with Gates, he was implicitly agreeing with the generals.[1]

What is more, in addition to replacing Rumsfeld, the President also decided to change military leadership in Iraq, further signaling to the American public that the war had been mismanaged. As the president put it, the change in personnel was necessary for the adoption of a new strategy "to be credible to the American people."[2] General George Casey had been in charge of the coalition forces (MNF-I) since July 2004, but in the early days of 2007 the Bush

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[1] According to his memoir, the president was well aware of the critiques raised by the rank and file against the Secretary of Defense in the press. Bush, *Decision Points*, 364.
[2] Bush, 371.

administration decided to promote him to Army Chief of Staff. Bush's secretary of state,

Condoleezza Rice, later explained that while the President and his administration "had enormous

respect" for Casey, he "was operating with a pretty limited strategy, and if you were going to go

to a broader strategy, you were going to have to change personnel."[3] Upon the recommendation

of retired Vice Chief of Staff for the Army Jack Keane, the Bush administration eventually

decided to replace Casey with none other than the commander of the US Army Combined Arms

Center at Fort Leavenworth, General David Petraeus.[4]

This decision meant that the man who had just spearheaded the creation of the Army's

new counterinsurgency doctrine was now tasked to implement what would soon be known as the

surge, giving him a golden opportunity to put the new COIN doctrine in practice. Yet this change

raises a fundamental question—was the approach taken by Petraeus during the surge

significantly different from that of Casey, or was the turn to counterinsurgency he and Bush

touted little more than an attempt to rekindle support for the war from the American people and

Congress?

The 2007 surge coincided with a significant drop in violence in Iraq and, by all accounts,

became a turning point in the war. As one journalist reported in October, even though the war

was not over, "there is relative tranquility across vast areas of Iraq, even in places that had been

all but given up for lost barely more than a year ago."[5] However, both participants and observers

strongly disagreed on the degree to which the decrease in violence was the result of changes

brought about by Petraeus. Some suggested that it was instead due to Casey's efforts to that

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[3] Condoleezza Rice, interview by Peter Feaver, Meghan O'Sullivan, and Timothy Sayle, July 20, 2015, 43, "The Surge" Collective Memory Project, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University, https://www.smu.edu/CPH/CollectiveMemoryProject/The-Surge-in-Iraq/Condoleezza-Rice.
[4] John M. "Jack" Keane, interview by Aaron Crawford and Timothy Sayle, August 18, 2015, 43, https://www.smu.edu/CPH/CollectiveMemoryProject/The-Surge-in-Iraq/Jack-Keane.
[5] Ledeen, "Victory Is Within Reach in Iraq."

point. Others pointed to external factors, such as the Sunni Awakening, which started in al-Anbar and stared in al-Anbar and saw many Sunni tribes rally against extremist factions of the insurgency like al-Qaeda in Iraq. Still others stressed the importance of the change in leadership in the Pentagon and the increased number of troops. In hindsight, the degree of partisanship in accounts of the situation makes it difficult to detach the story of the Surge from the debates that surrounded it. Even the official Army history of the war was commissioned by an Army Chief of Staff who played a prominent role in the implementation of the surge. Still, this chapter will show that while not the product of a total overhaul of strategy and sudden enlightened implementation of COIN, the decrease of violence during the surge did result from General Petraeus' ability to capitalize upon the evolving situation in al-Anbar province. However, his greatest success was in shifting the narrative around the war, thereby providing a degree of operational coherence that did not exist before. In other words, by foregrounding counterinsurgency, Petraeus ensured that virtually all forces in Iraq were working towards a common goal.

More Troops, New Leadership: Bush's Hail Mary

According to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, by 2005 the administration was having serious issues with the war in Iraq. "Not only was the strategy not working," she noted, "but we couldn't explain to anybody what it was we were trying to do."[6] This lack of a clearly articulated objective continually plagued the US effort throughout the conflict. In addition, while the situation in Iraq had never been optimal following the initial success of the invasion, the bombing of the Askari shrine in early 2006 dramatically increased sectarian violence throughout

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[6] Rice, interview, 3.

the country. Located eighty miles north of Baghdad, in Samarra, the Askari mosque is considered one of the holiest sites of Shia Islam. On February 22, 2006, it became the target of al-Qaeda in Iraq, whose bombs shattered the shrine's Golden Dome in an effort to fuel the dissent between Sunni and Shia. Their tactics unfortunately proved effective. The attack immediately sparked violent reprisals against Sunnis across the country and sent Iraq further down the path toward a total sectarian civil war.

Throughout the rest of the year, General Casey's forces were unable to quell the exponential rise of the insurgency and by the time Petraeus and his team arrived in country "the situation was actually much worse than anyone had let on," according to the general's XO.[7] It seemed the entire fabric of the country was crumbling. From food distribution to water supply, to sewage, to schools, hardly anything was functioning, and violence was increasing exponentially. Murder, kidnapping, car bombings, and IEDs were rampant. The nation's capital in particular had become the scene of atrocious ethnic cleansing. Entire neighborhoods in Baghdad were purged by Shia militia, sometimes abetted by local authorities, which in turn sparked reprisals from Sunni groups like al-Qaeda in Iraq. In the latter half of 2006, no less than 17,000 Iraqis were killed, indicating a tripling of violent deaths over the course of the year.[8]

Meanwhile, in keeping with traditional insurgent methods, attacks against coalition troops sought to inflict maximum casualties while at the same time avoiding a head-on confrontation. By 2006, a growing number of Explosively Formed Penetrators (EFPs) were hitting coalition convoys and patrols. These devices, imported from Iran, could easily "go through the armor and into the crew compartment, turning everything in their paths into flying

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[7] Peter Mansoor in Bruce Van Dusen, *The Surge: The Whole Story*, Documentary, 2009.
[8] Sudarsan Raghavan, "War's Toll on Iraqis Put at 22,950 in '06; Statistics From Health Ministry Official Show Tripling of Civilian, Police Deaths," *The Washington Post*, January 8, 2007, http://search.proquest.com/docview/410079802/7E8C843B54E24837PQ/14?accountid=14556.

pieces of shrapnel."[9] The flare-up of violence against both Iraqi civilians and US troops, three years after the beginning of the conflict, finally pushed the Bush government to look for an alternative approach to its failing strategy.

The President's decision to double-down on the war and play what Rice labeled his "last card" was the product of a months-long process in 2006.[10] Because George Bush decided to uphold the so-called "Pottery Barn rule" and stay involved in Iraq, as the situation deteriorated, the administration had to determine whether more time or, potentially, more troops would allow the present strategy to succeed, or whether a total overhaul of strategy was instead necessary for the United States to have a chance at turning the tide. Ultimately, the White House settled on what was dubbed "the surge," increasing the number of troops in theater by five Army brigades and one Marine Expeditionary Unit.[11] In total, this amounted to approximately an additional 30,000 troops.[12] However, when General David Petraeus talked about the surge, he always insisted that it "should be understood as the surge of *ideas*, not the surge of *forces*."[13] According to him, what eventually allowed the United States to gain control of the situation in Iraq was the change of strategy that accompanied the surge. Significantly, thanks to his adept communication, journalists reported as much. By the end of the year, a *Wall Street Journal* article cautioned its

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[9] Finkel, *The Good Soldiers*, 21.

[10] Rice, interview, 46. Bush's decision to stay in Iraq effectively made his a war that up until then had mostly been that of Cheney and Rumsfeld. Crane, interview.

[11] The units deployed were the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, and the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, and the Marine Corps' 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit. Schlosser, *The Surge, 2007-2008*, 17. For a detailed account of the decision process that led to the Surge see Timothy A. Sayle et al., eds., *The Last Card: Inside George W. Bush's Decision to Surge in Iraq* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Joel D. Rayburn and Frank K. Sobchak, eds., *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War: Surge and Withdrawal, 2007-2011*, vol. 2 (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College Press, 2019), 3–93.

[12] David Petraeus, "How We Won in Iraq," *Foreign Policy*, October 29, 2013, https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/10/29/how-we-won-in-iraq/.

[13] Petraeus, Collins, and White, "Reflections by General David Petraeus, USA (Ret.) on the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq," 157.

reader that "there is a tendency to treat the surge as a mere increase in numbers, but its most important component was the change in doctrine," quoting Petraeus's message almost *verbatim* and yet passing it as the journalist's own analysis of the situation.[14] In the battle to frame the narrative, Petraeus's victory was uncontested.

Throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom, coalition commanders in Iraq were confronted with what essentially amounted to a chicken and egg problem: which came first, security or political progress? The ultimate goal of both Casey and Petraeus was the same: exiting Iraq leaving behind a stable, somewhat democratic, autonomous country—the objective set out for them by the White House. Both men also agreed on the classic counterinsurgency notion that, to defeat an insurgency, the political aspect of the conflict was at least, if not more, important than the military. This same point of view was also adopted and often expressed by members of the US government, who repeatedly stated that "this is first and foremost a political problem, not a military problem."[15] Even with such agreement, the question remained: which of the two needed to be addressed first?

As we saw previously, Casey believed that political progress and reconciliation were a prerequisite to stabilize Iraq. He thought that improvement on the political front would eventually lead to a decrease in violence. Casey emphasized transferring power to the Iraqi government, armed forces, and police, for he believed that the presence of American troops only increased frictions among the Iraqi people. Therefore, throughout his tenure as MNF-I

[14] Ledeen, "Victory Is Within Reach in Iraq."

[15] Condoleezza Rice in "Roundtable With the Press" (Government Press Releases, December 19, 2006), https://infoweb-newsbank-com.www2.lib.ku.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&t=continent%3ANorth%2BAmerica%21North%2BAmerica&sort=YMD_date%3AD&page=4&maxresults=20&f=advanced&val-base-0=counterinsurgency&fld-base-0=alltext&bln-base-1=and&val-base-1=2006&fld-base-1=YMD_date&docref=news/11628929C09DBAE8.

commander, General Casey's aim had been to reduce the American footprint in Iraq by limiting troops' interaction with the population, mostly keeping them on bases, and transitioning authority to Iraqi Security Forces as fast as possible. In doing so, he was also following the course of action favored by his superiors, Abizaid and Rumsfeld.

On the other hand, Petraeus saw security as the first step towards stability, which would in turn make political progress possible. Witnessing the lack of progress achieved by the coalition forces in Iraq, a growing number of individuals in Washington started to share his perspective. For instance, Arizona Senator John McCain, in an editorial in *The Washington Post* in January 2007, wrote that following his visit to Iraq it was clear to him "that security is the precondition for political progress and economic development."[16] While President Bush had originally endorsed Rumsfeld and Casey's approach, the overall lack of progress and rise of sectarian violence eventually motivated his decision to implement the surge. This meant an overt change in strategy and leadership, supported by an increase in the number of American boots on the ground and consequently their presence in the country, in a highly visible last-ditch effort to turn the war's tide.

Promoting the New Doctrine Narrative

When President Bush appointed General Petraeus as commander of MNF-I in early 2007 to preside over the surge, it was understood that he would implement a strategy based on the new counterinsurgency doctrine published under his command at Fort Leavenworth. After all, Petraeus had been particularly vocal about the benefits of well-crafted counterinsurgency operations. Ahead of his confirmation hearing, he met one on one with every member of the

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[16] John McCain, "Send More Troops," *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2007, http://search.proquest.com/docview/410089735/abstract/E31DD6E471514F6CPQ/1.

Senate's Armed Services Committee and gave each of them a copy of the field manual, "with key portions of the critical first chapter highlighted," yet another example of the general's relentless promotion of his doctrine.[17] A direct result of his promotion efforts, Petraeus's views received so much media coverage that by the time of the hearing he had practically become a household name and was, for the most part, perceived positively. As one article suggested following Petraeus's appearance in front of Congress, "for a nation bitterly divided over Iraq, the one point of agreement seems to be that Lt. Gen. David Petraeus is the right commander for U.S. forces in Baghdad."[18] Petraeus was then under a significant amount of pressure to demonstrate, in a short period of time, the viability of the theories he had been praising. He would later say that "leading the coalition military effort during the surge . . . was the most important endeavor—and greatest challenge—of [his] 37 years in uniform."[19]

However, despite the grand claims that accompanied the surge, the military did not in fact have to make a turn to counterinsurgency, as principles of counterinsurgency had been underlying the conduct of the war for some time. The MNF-I headquarters which Petraeus took command over in 2007 was the highest echelon of the coalition's military forces in Iraq and was in charge of both devising strategy and coordinating it with the US ambassador and the Iraqi government. Meanwhile, the operational level of the Iraqi conflict was supervised by Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I), which, during Petraeus's tenure was commanded by Raymond Odierno. Before taking over MNC-I, General Odierno had already served in Iraq when he commanded the 4th Infantry Division in 2003-2004 and presided over the capture of Saddam

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[17] Mansoor, *Surge*, 57.
[18] David Ignatius, "New Face on a Tough War," *The Washington Post*, January 24, 2007, http://search.proquest.com/docview/410079510/abstract/C0FF20C522F445E9PQ/1.

Hussein.[20] He subsequently served as advisor to Secretaries of State Powell and Rice.[21] Several

years later, as Army Chief of Staff, Odierno initiated the writing of a history of the Iraq War

meant (according to his successor) to "share lessons, sharpen thinking, and promote debate."[22]

Like Petraeus, Odierno was deeply committed to counterinsurgency and played a critical part in

shaping the narrative that surrounded it.

In December 2006, before the Bush administration settled on the surge and put Petraeus

in charge, Odierno already described his mission in Iraq to *Newsweek*:

> We're now assisting the government to become capable and legitimate to
> its own people. . . What you have to be able to do is a three-pronged
> mission: One is to train Iraqi security forces to be able to conduct and
> provide security for the populace. Second, we have to fight a
> counterinsurgency against Sunni insurgents and Shiite extremists. Finally,
> we have to fight Al Qaeda, we have to make sure they're not able to make
> a foothold anywhere in the Middle East to establish what they consider to
> be their caliphate.[23]

At the time Odierno spoke to the *Newsweek* reporter, drafts of FM 3-24 had been

circulating for months, the manual had just been made available online, and COIN was becoming

ever more popular. Petraeus's arrival a couple months later simply reinforced MNC-I's emphasis

on counterinsurgency.

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[20] Michael Hastings, "'You Cannot Solve This Problem Militarily' - U.S. General on Next Steps in Iraq," *Newsweek*, December 29, 2006, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.www2.lib.ku.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&t=continent%3ANorth%2BAmerica%21North%2BAmerica&sort=YMD_date%3AD&maxresults=20&f=advanced&val-base-0=counterinsurgency&fld-base-0=alltext&bln-base-1=and&val-base-1=2006&fld-base-1=YMD_date&docref=news/1165945EC89DD750.

[21] Schlosser, *The Surge, 2007-2008*, 23.

[22] Mark A. Milley, "Foreword," in *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War: Invasion, Insurgency, Civil War, 2003-2006*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2019), xxvii.

[23] Hastings, "'You Cannot Solve This Problem Militarily' - U.S. General on Next Steps in Iraq."

Petraeus, Person of the Year

Even though counterinsurgency had been on everyone's mind for the better part of three years by the time Petraeus was put in charge of Multi-National Force-Iraq, he was the one who was finally able to use it both to provide operational coherence to the campaign and to frame the discourse surrounding US strategy in Iraq. From the moment he arrived in country in February 2007, bringing with him the newly published *Counterinsurgency* field manual, to his departure in 2008, he beat the counterinsurgency drum relentlessly. Not only was his intent communicated through the chain of command, it was also amplified by the media, sending a message to military personal and civilians alike that the United States was committed to the war in Iraq and that it would be fought with counterinsurgency. As the surge began, media reports began to depict the military's adoption of counterinsurgency as "a shift in strategy," a new approach that just might help the United States turn the tide in Iraq.[24] Someone having breakfast listening to NPR's Morning Edition on April 30, 2007 would have heard that "for much of the war in Iraq, many American units" treated "every citizen as though he were an insurgent," while simultaneously being told that the US military was now finally training its troops "how to combat insurgents in Iraq with techniques that differ greatly from conventional warfare."[25]

Petraeus had endeavored to develop personal relationships with journalists throughout his career, and he used those connections to craft a tale of success—for counterinsurgency, and for himself. According to Lieutenant-Colonel John Nagl, Petraeus had developed his relationship with the media since his time in graduate school and, "between his time at grad school in Princeton and in the Social Sciences department at West Point, he had gotten to know a large

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[24] Sennott, "The Petraeus Doctrine."
[25] Shuster, "Baghdad School Trains Troops to Combat Insurgents."

number of writers, and he worked assiduously to show them only the sides of him that he wanted revealed on the front page of *The New York Times*."[26] This effort did not stop when the war in Iraq started. During each of his deployments, according to Nagl, Petraeus continued to "[work] the media constantly, answering press e-mails at all hours of the day or night," making public relations a clear priority.[27] Award-winning journalist Rick Atkinson, one of the few dozen reporters embedded with the 101st Airborne Division during the invasion of Iraq in 2003, later wrote that "Petraeus kept me at his elbow in Iraq virtually all day, every day."[28]

Atkinson's captivating descriptions of Petraeus no doubt contributed to building his larger-than-life image in the media and eventually the minds of the American public. On many occasions, the reporter highlighted Petraeus's physical prowess, retelling, for instance, the story of a pushup contests against a nineteen-year-old private (at the time of the invasion, Petraeus was fifty) that Petraeus won "without breaking a sweat," but Atkinson also stressed the general's "ability to spot a small anomaly—in the fuel-consumption rate of a truck company, or in the number of TOW missiles available to 1st Brigade."[29] From articles on the invasion to his profile of the general before his Senate confirmation hearing in January 2007, Atkinson systematically described Petraeus as a highly intelligent, athletic, and competitive man "unaccustomed to failure."[30]

Petraeus's ability to captivate the media was not to everyone's liking, however. For instance, CPA Administrator Bremer later remarked that he did not "remember being particularly

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[26] Nagl, *Knife Fights*, 203.
[27] Nagl, 202.
[28] Atkinson, *In the Company of Soldiers*, 5.
[29] Atkinson, 70–74.
[30] Rick Atkinson, "Iraq Will Be Petraeus's Knot to Untie; General Known to See Peace as Still Possible," *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2007, http://search.proquest.com/docview/410100507/14D3D7864B34E6BPQ/2?accountid=14556.

struck by what he [Petraeus] was doing" in terms of counterinsurgency.[31] However, he added, Petraeus "was conducting a very aggressive public affairs campaign."[32] Still, Petraeus's long-term efforts paid off.

During his time as CAC commander at Fort Leavenworth, Petraeus repeatedly gave interviews to journalists traveling to Kansas to learn about the development of the new counterinsurgency doctrine. By the time he took command of MNF-I, Petraeus had become the darling of the media and counterinsurgency concepts were being profiled by journalists from a wide range of publications. The valorization of Petraeus himself further promoted belief in the transformative power of his counterinsurgency doctrine. In 2007 Petraeus was runner-up for *Time* magazine's person of the year. In an adjoining article, political columnist Joe Klein presented a glowing endorsement of the general's actions in Iraq insisting that "Petraeus has not failed, which, given the anarchy and pessimism of February, must be considered something of a triumph."[33] Though Klein acknowledged that Petraeus was lucky to benefit from the Anbar Awakening and associated support of Sunni tribes, he sided with those who saw there evidence of Petraeus's genius. In Klein's estimation, Petraeus was able to recognize and take advantage of the events that were unfolding, when another general likely would not have.

Klein did not stand out in his flattering portrayal of the general. On the contrary, his article is emblematic of the type of coverage the media gave to Petraeus throughout his time commanding MNF-I. In 2008, a *Newsweek* article described him as "the commander who has changed the way the U.S. Army fights."[34] Similarly, an account of the 2008 elections claimed

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[31] Bremer, interview, 101.
[32] Bremer, 101.
[33] Joe Klein, "Person of the Year 2007 Runners-Up: David Petraeus," *Time*, December 19, 2007, http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/personoftheyear/article/0,28804,1690753_1695388_1695379,00.html.
[34] Babak Dehghanpisheh and Evan Thomas, "Scions Of The Surge: Five Years on, the War Is Transforming the American Officer Corps.," *Newsweek; New York*, March 24, 2008.

that "John McCain and Barack Obama have been trying to outshine each other with their praise

of Gen. David Petraeus, who implemented counterinsurgency tactics in Iraq."[35] Even the

president of the United States seemed to take part in the promotion effort and helped build

Petraeus's larger-than-life image. In his memoir, George Bush stated: "Lincoln discovered

Generals Grant and Sherman. Roosevelt had Eisenhower and Bradley. I found David Petraeus

and Ray Odierno."[36] Petraeus's relentless self-promotion and upbeat discourse on

counterinsurgency helped him shift the public narrative surrounding the war. It also brought a

clear sense of direction to the theater of operation: counterinsurgency was at the heart of the

coalition's efforts.

Putting Theory into Practice: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

Petraeus took command of MNF-I on February 10, 2007, and immediately put securing

the population at the heart of the coalition's mission.[37] In doing so, he was following the

guidance of the field manual, which states that "the cornerstone of any COIN effort is

establishing security for the civilian population."[38] The approach put in place by Petraeus upon

his arrival was labeled "clear, hold, build," and was an attempt to have American troops secure

areas for the long run instead of immediately passing that task on to Iraqi troops, which had

"proved incapable of sustaining progress in the areas cleared" under Casey's strategy.[39] As the

president put it: "We could clear but not hold."[40] Instead of decreasing US troops' visibility, the

surge was meant to increase it, as means to demonstrate the United States' commitment and

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[35] Tara McKelvey, "The Cult of Counterinsurgency," The American Prospect, October 23, 2008, https://prospect.org/api/content/acd9df44-a335-50ec-84a5-9e61c0ac66c7/.
[36] Bush, *Decision Points*, 389.
[37] Rayburn and Sobchak, *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War*, 2019, 2:98.
[38] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1.23; Mansoor, *Surge*, 267.
[39] Petraeus, "How We Won in Iraq."
[40] Bush, *Decision Points*, 370.

signal to the local population that they were being protected, which, counterinsurgents hoped, would in turn deprive the insurgents of support.

Following Ray Odierno's advice, General Petraeus emphasized the capital, as he believed that securing Baghdad would help set the tone for the rest of the country. In order to ensure the population's safety from the various militias roaming Iraq, Petraeus decided that he had to move troops outside of forward operating bases and into neighborhoods. To that end, the general encouraged the creation of additional joint security stations (JSSs) and combat outposts to ensure a continuous presence among the population rather than having troops commute to the fight.[41] By the end of the year, no less than 34 JSSs had been opened in Baghdad alone.[42]

In doing so, Petraeus was adopting on a large scale the tactics that had proven successful in other parts of the country, such as the town of Tal Afar under H. R. McMaster, to bring the capital under control—including the many neighborhoods that surrounded the city center, the so-called "Baghdad Belts."[43] Instead of patrolling in their Humvees, troops were told to conduct dismounted patrols and to interact with locals in an effort to build relationships that would hopefully allow the coalition to deprive insurgents of the population's support. Immediately following Petraeus's arrival, patrols more than doubled, reportedly going from 7,400 to 20,000.[44] In addition troops also built miles of concrete walls to separate Sunni and Shia neighborhoods in order to control the flow of people and establish secured areas. As Petraeus's XO, Peter Mansoor, later put it: "Good fences make for good neighbors."[45] None of these practices were

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[41] Rayburn and Sobchak, *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War*, 2019, 2:99.
[42] Jon Lee Anderson, "Inside the Surge," *The New Yorker*, November 11, 2007, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/11/19/inside-the-surge.
[43] Schlosser, *The Surge, 2007-2008*, 32.
[44] Daniel Henninger, "Wonder Land: The Democrats' Surge," *Wall Street Journal*, April 5, 2007, http://search.proquest.com/docview/399037228/abstract/E1D1B07854450FPQ/21.
[45] Mansoor, *Surge*, 74.

new, but with the help of additional troops, Petraeus was able to generalize them to an unprecedented scale.

Still, no matter how well-intentioned, and despite the repeated assertions by the field manual and its authors that "some of the best weapons for counterinsurgents don't shoot," counterinsurgency was by no means benign.[46] Even when conducting counterinsurgency operations centered on gaining the support of the population, searching homes and disrupting the lives of ordinary Iraqis remained part of everyday operations. A reporter embedded with an infantry battalion in eastern Baghdad described the random house searches involved in "clearing" a neighborhood: "without asking permission, some of the soldiers went inside, through the first floor, up the stairs, through the second floor, into the closets, into the drawers. . . each search took a few minutes at most and constituted the entire relationship between the Americans and the Iraqis."[47] Not only was the troops' presence disruptive and likely to cause resentment despite their "businesslike feel," but even if the US presence was welcomed by some individuals, the fear of reprisals from insurgents in the long term often prevented them from overtly supporting US troops and sharing useful information.[48] The surge and associated struggle for the Iraqis' proverbial hearts and minds was an uphill battle.

At the same time that Petraeus focused on Baghdad, the situation in Al Anbar province, in the west of Iraq, was rapidly evolving. With a majority Sunni population and strong insurgent presence, Anbar had been the theater of some of the most violent confrontations between insurgents and coalition troops, such as the two battles of Fallujah in 2004. However, by the time the surge began, the various Sunni tribes of the Anbar province had started to reconsider their

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[46] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1.27.
[47] Finkel, *The Good Soldiers*, 42.
[48] Finkel, 42.

alliance with al Qaeda in Iraq and other radical Sunni militias. The increasing ruthlessness and radicalism of these groups slowly pushed the tribes to seek a rapprochement with American authorities. Colonel Sean MacFarland in particular had been able to build relationships with the tribal sheiks in his area and capitalized on their will to rid their region of radical insurgent groups. The Anbar Awakening, or Sunni Awakening, was declared in fall 2006 and when Petraeus took over MNF-I he gave his full support to the effort.[49] Some soldiers saw the "Sons of Iraq," as the tribal groups allying with the United States came to be known, as nothing more than "security gangs paid by Coalition forces."[50] Still, with the headquarters' backing, troops stationed in Anbar were able to further their efforts to build partnerships with the Anbaris against their common extremist enemy, which Petraeus described as "the most significant development in the past 6 months," during his September testimony in front of the Senate.[51]

In sum, the measures implemented by Petraeus upon his arrival in Iraq were far from a one-eighty turn from what had been done up until that point, rather, he sought to capitalize upon previous efforts and endeavored to expand local successes to the entire theater of operations. Yet his adept use of the media to frame his actions as MNF-I commander, which built up on the manual's promotion, significantly increased counterinsurgency's visibility.

Shifting the narrative that surrounded the war was made all the more crucial by two factors. Despite the surge, there were still insufficient troops available for the scope of the task at hand. In addition, the tight timeline that Congress impressed on Petraeus and the Bush administration precluded a full implementation of the recommendations outlined in FM 3-24.

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[49] Schlosser, *The Surge, 2007-2008*, 37–39.
[50] Gallagher, *Kaboom*, xiii.
[51] "Iraq: The Crocker-Petraeus Report," Pub. L. No. 110–490, § Committee on Foreign Relations (2007), 19.

The political pressure exerted on the administration by Congress was significant and the military was strained by over half a decade of war in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite the substantial increase of troops provided by the surge, the troop-to-task ratio still fell short of that indicated in FM 3-24, and so did the timeline during which they were to be employed, thereby putting into question the degree to which Petraeus could turn counterinsurgency theory into practice.[52] Even among Petraeus's allies and counterinsurgency enthusiasts, faith in the surge was far from unanimous, as many believed that the general would not have the means to implement the counterinsurgency precepts outlined in the field manual. Sarah Sewall, the co-sponsor of the FM 3-24 conference at Fort Leavenworth wrote an article for the *Washington Post* a few days after Petraeus took over MNF-I. She opened with the statement: "If anyone can save Iraq, it's David H. Petraeus."[53] Still, she noted, he might not have had the tools to do so. "The Bush plan is burdened with three main deficiencies," she wrote. It offers "too few capable U.S., allied and Iraqi counterinsurgent forces; weak U.S. efforts at promoting political and economic reform; and corrupt or feckless Iraqi institutions and leadership."[54] In short, "the administration's strategy may have changed, but the supporting components have not."[55]

Moreover, the constant lack of troops forced the military to rely on contractors, which created additional obstacles to the implementation of a cohesive counterinsurgency strategy. The lack of troops from which the war in Iraq suffered was the product of Rumsfeld's original decision to use a light footprint. It played a significant part in the US military's inability to maintain control over territory once cleared from insurgents under Casey, which allowed them to

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[52] The field manual states that "most density recommendations fall within a range of 20 to 25 counterinsurgents for every 1000 residents in an AO." Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 1.13. Even with the addition of 30,000 boots on the ground, coalition troops were still way short of the numbers outlined in the manual.
[53] Sarah Sewall, "He Wrote the Book. Can He Follow It?," *The Washington Post*, February 25, 2007, http://search.proquest.com/docview/410180172/abstract/F12918586C6A4C95PQ/2.
[54] Sewall.
[55] Sewall.

resume control of areas as soon as coalition forces moved on to another. This troops shortage

affected not only combat units, but also supply units, and was the result of the All-Volunteer

Force having to wage war in two theaters simultaneously—Iraq and Afghanistan—while

maintaining a swath of other commitments around the globe. With the military being stretched so

thin that the same units had to conduct two, sometimes three tours, the Department of Defense

increasingly chose to rely on contractors in order to sustain the war effort. This decision was

explicit in a memo from Defense Secretary Rumsfeld to General Abizaid in April 2004, in which

he instructed planners to use US forces only after maximizing "the use of ISF, international

forces, and contractors."[56]

By the beginning of the surge in 2007 contractors had come to outnumber US military

personnel in Iraq 180,000 to 160,000.[57] Contractors were initially tasked with support missions

that ranged from operating the mess hall to maintenance of the vehicle fleet, but their duties

progressively expanded beyond support missions, and soon, another category of players had

joined the battlefield: private security contractors, or in other words, mercenaries. Of the 180,000

contractors in Iraq in 2007, approximately 30,000 to 48,000 were providing "static security and

protection to convoys and personnel."[58] Their presence further muddled the distinction between

the battlefield and the rear, adding another layer of complexity to an already confusing and

volatile situation.

Because of the nature of their contracts, mercenaries were neither subject to the United

Code of Military Justice, or Federal law—technically, they were supposed to behave according

to Iraqi law, yet the country's state of affairs made such a claim highly questionable. Even if the

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[56] Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 13.
[57] Christopher Spearin, "Contracting a Counterinsurgency? Implications for US Policy in Iraq and Beyond," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 541, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310701778258.
[58] Spearin, 542.

Iraqi government had been able to legislate the actions of the mercenaries, they would not have been able to enforce their judgment. The mercenaries thus existed in a state of legislative limbo, which gave them free rein to act however they saw fit. Although the surge partially palliated the lack of troops in theater, the military continued to rely on contractors to fulfill ever-growing needs. The existence of such a rogue force in Iraq, unrestrained by any law or rules of engagement, put additional strain on the military's counterinsurgency effort. Even when the military placed restraints on its troops' use of force to facilitate interactions with locals in order to win the proverbial "hearts and minds," actions perpetrated by contractors—usually hardly differentiable from the US military by locals— often without any regard for their consequences, certainly set the military's progress back.

Beyond the shortage of troops and the problems cause by supplementing them with contractors, Petraeus's efforts to develop and implement a comprehensive approach to the war in Iraq were also hampered by considerable time constraints.

When Petraeus was appointed as commander of MNF-I, he believed that he only had a few months to demonstrate the viability of his counterinsurgency approach before Congress pulled the plug. By January 2007 support for the war had waned significantly, and the Bush administration was under a lot of pressure to bring its involvement to a conclusion. Both General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker were set to testify in front of the Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations and the House's Armed Services Committee on the situation in Iraq in September 2007. Both chambers of Congress were dominated by Democrats who opposed the President's war, and this highly anticipated hearing was going to be determinant for the next step in Iraq, specifically, how quickly troops would be withdrawing. Therefore, Petraeus "knew that

if there was no clear progress by September 2007, . . ., the limited remaining support on Capitol Hill and in the United States for the effort in Iraq would evaporate."[59] This put additional pressure on MNF-I to act quickly, despite FM 3-24's warning that "COIN campaigns are often long and difficult."[60]

When time eventually came for Petraeus and Crocker to stand in front of Congress, the two men implemented MNF-I's communication strategy, drawing a cautiously optimistic portrait of the situation in Iraq. Ambassador Crocker stated that "it is possible for the United States to see its goals realized in Iraq" and that "a secure, stable, democratic Iraq at peace with its neighbors is attainable."[61] Adding caution to his optimism, Crocker told senators that while "our current course is hard [, t]he alternatives are far worse."[62] Petraeus too declared that "it is possible for us to achieve our objectives in Iraq over time, though doing so will be neither quick nor easy."[63] The Petraeus-Crocker testimony was not without its detractors. In the days leading up to his intervention, the organization MoveOn.org took a full-page ad in the *New York Times*. "General Petraeus or General Betray Us?" accused Petraeus of being "at war with the facts" and of systematically misrepresenting the situation in Iraq.[64] According to Steve Boylan, Petraeus's public affairs officer, "you could feel the tension and expectations in the air as the time got closer to 12:30 pm for the start of the hearing."[65] Among members of Congress, statements and questions were equally hostile. Senator Dodd did not hesitate to call the surge a failure and Vietnam War-veteran Senator Kerry compared Petraeus to Westmoreland.[66] Meanwhile, in his

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[59] Petraeus, "How We Won in Iraq."
[60] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, x.
[61] Iraq: The Crocker-Petraeus Report, 7.
[62] Iraq: The Crocker-Petraeus Report, 11.
[63] Iraq: The Crocker-Petraeus Report, 17.
[64] "Display Ad: General Petraeus or General Betray Us?," *New York Times*, September 10, 2007.
[65] Steven Boylan, "Iraq Updates 2007-08" (Diary, 2008 2007), Personal Papers of Steven Boylan.
[66] Iraq: The Crocker-Petraeus Report, 46, 55.

opening statement, Senator Joe Biden declared that "the surge, whatever tactical or temporary security gains it might achieve, is at the service of a fundamentally flawed strategy . . . there is no trust within that central government in Baghdad, no trust in the government by the people, and no capacity of that government to deliver security and services."[67] In the end however, Petraeus believed that the hearings had helped him and Ambassador Crocker gain "critical additional time and support, without which it is likely that the mission in Iraq would have failed."[68]

The hearings were followed by a media frenzy. Over the course of three days, Colonel Boylan had scheduled no less than twenty-three media engagements "for General Petraeus to do nothing else than to have a chance to talk to the American public and international audiences."[69] This was an intense schedule that stemmed from the media's demand. According to Boylan, even though the general was only able to agree to a fifth of the requests, he "physically did not have the hours in the day to do any additional interviews than were conducted."[70] Once again, the Petraeus-Boylan team did not spare any effort to convey the general's story to the media, and, once again, it paid off.

A little over a week later, a Gallup Poll indicated that Petraeus's image had improved significantly. His ratings kept increasing since the beginning of August, going from 47 to 61 percent of Americans having a favorable opinion of the general after the hearings. By that point too, over 80 percent of Americans were familiar with Petraeus, yet another testament to the success of the public affairs campaign built around the general.[71]

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[67] Iraq: The Crocker-Petraeus Report, 3.
[68] Petraeus, "How We Won in Iraq."
[69] Boylan, "Iraq Updates 2007-08."
[70] Boylan.
[71] Gallup Inc, "Gen. David Petraeus Better Known, Better Liked After Last Week," Gallup.com, September 19, 2007, https://news.gallup.com/poll/28726/Gen-David-Petraeus-Better-Known-Better-Liked-After-Last-Week.aspx.

Despite Congress's skepticism, by the end of the year the surge was largely touted as a success. In August, Petraeus's public affairs officer wrote that they "had not yet defeated our enemy," but still, a week prior, "the day [had] felt comfortable enough that for the first time since my return to Baghdad in February, I did not wear my Kevlar, but wore my patrol cap instead which also seemed to make a difference to the folks that we saw."[72] By the end of the fall 2007, MNC-I commander Raymond Odierno recorded the degree of violence at its lowest point since the bombing of Al Askari mosque in February 2006.[73] Thanks to the White House and the Pentagon backing counterinsurgency and the doctrine's great popularity, Petraeus was able to change the course of the war, which, added to the Anbar Awakening, created a window of opportunity. Still, the Iraqi government had yet to show a willingness to transform security into lasting political progress.

By early 2008, political reconciliation finally appeared to be under way. Describing the situation in his memoir, Bush wrote: "just as counterinsurgency experts predicted, the security gains of 2007 translated into political progress in 2008. Free from the nightmare of sectarian violence, the Iraqis passed a flurry of major legislation, including law resolving the status of former Baath Party members, a national budget, and legislation paving the way for provincial elections."[74] When Petraeus eventually left Iraq in the summer 2008 and was succeeded by General Odierno, the *Wall Street Journal* and other news outlets described his tenure as a

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[72] Boylan, "Iraq Updates 2007-08."

[73] William H. McMichael, "Optimism in Iraq - General Touts Decreases in Violence, Coalition Deaths over 5 Months," *Air Force Times*, November 12, 2007, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.www2.lib.ku.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&t=stp%3AMagazine%7CNewspaper%7CNewswire%7CTranscript%21Multiple%2520Source%2520Types%2520%284%29/continent%3ANorth%2BAmerica%21North%2BAmerica&sort=_rank_%3AD&page=1&maxresults=20&f=advanced&val-base-0=iraq%20AND%20violence%20&fld-base-0=alltext&bln-base-1=and&val-base-1=2007&fld-base-1=YMD_date&docref=news/121F415238909F10.

[74] Bush, *Decision Points*, 387.

success: "violence of every measure has been tamped down; Sunni-Shiite political reconciliation is underway; the Iraqi Army is growing in expertise; and the U.S. and Nouri al-Maliki's government are finishing negotiations toward a long-term security agreement."[75]

For a time, the surge appeared to have brought the level of violence down in Iraq sufficiently to allow the Iraqi government to gain a foothold and move towards establishing a stable country. In light of that progress however, people argued whether Petraeus's approach had made the difference or if he had just arrived at the opportune moment—a debate which was ultimately about the future of counterinsurgency in the US military.

Petraeus and the Decrease in Violence: Causation or Correlation?

While at Leavenworth, Petraeus had been extremely successful in his promotion of the new field manual, so much so that it created an opportunity for the Bush administration to conduct the surge and cast it as a brand new strategy in addition to an increase of troops. Yet, given the controversy that initially surrounded the publication of FM 3-24 and Petraeus's popularity in the media, it should come as no surprise that once the surge went under way, he too found himself engulfed in the debate that challenged everything from the soundness of the measures outlined in the field manual to the creation of the Human Terrain System—all part of a greater critique of the administration's initial decision to invade Iraq. When it came to Petraeus specifically, the debate opposed those who praised the general for the way he handled the crisis at hand—the insurgency in Iraq—to his detractors who accused him of taking advantage of the situation and his predecessor's achievements to bolster his claims about counterinsurgency.

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[75] "Exit Petraeus, Without Fanfare," *Wall Street Journal, Europe*, August 26, 2008.

According to Petraeus, his strategy made the difference. During the twenty months of his command in Iraq, the levels of violence significantly decreased throughout the country. By the end of 2007, the number of US military fatalities had decreased from their all-time high in of 126 in May to 23 in December and monthly civilian fatalities dropped from 1,700 to 500 over the same period.[76] To those who argued that his success was nothing more than the product of good timing and additional troops, Petraeus retorted that "the surge forces clearly enabled more rapid implementation of the new strategy and accompanying operational concepts." But, he added, "without the changes in the strategy, the additional forces would not have achieved the gains in security and in other areas necessary for substantial reduction of the underlying levels of ethno-sectarian violence, without which progress would not have been sustained when responsibilities ultimately were transferred to Iraqi forces and government authorities."[77] Similarly, when it came to the Sunni Awakening, Petraeus acknowledged that he "got lucky," yet also asserted that "the spread of the Awakening beyond Ramadi was not serendipity," but "the result of a conscious decision and deliberate effort."[78]

From 2007 onward, many people came to share Petraeus's assessment. Through a variety of magazine and newspaper articles published about the general over the previous couple of years, Petraeus had become known to the American public as "an exception" in the military world and the news coverage of 2007-2008 only reinforced that portrait.[79] In a January 2007 *Newsweek* article, journalist John Barry explained that "while other generals were trying by force to crush the insurgents, Petraeus was looking to isolate them by winning the population's hearts

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[76] Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A. Friedman, and Jacob N. Shapiro, "Testing the Surge: Why Did Violence Decline in Iraq in 2007?," *International Security* 37, no. 1 (July 1, 2012): 7, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00087.
[77] Petraeus, "How We Won in Iraq."
[78] Petraeus.
[79] John Barry, "Blame For The Top Brass," Newsweek, January 21, 2007, https://www.newsweek.com/blame-top-brass-98341.

and minds." [80] In his monograph, *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq*, historian David Fitzgerald later made the by-then traditional argument that from the beginning of the Iraq War, "the emphasis was on training Iraqi forces and killing insurgents, which did not change until General David Petraeus took command in February 2007."[81] Among the military voices that shared this assessment, Lieutenant-Colonel John Nagl's was the loudest. Nagl has a PhD in international relations and served in both Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom, and, back when he was a cadet at West Point, had been taught by then-Captain David Petraeus, for whom he also worked during a summer internship.[82] The two men's paths were not done crossing and, as we saw previously, over the course of the decade that spanned the war in Iraq, Nagl became one of Petraeus's most fervent advocates. When it came to the surge, "far more important than the number of additional troops deployed," Nagl claimed, "was the mission change they were given by Petraeus."[83]

There were, however, many who disagreed. The most well-known among them is retired Colonel Gian Gentile, a history PhD who also served in Iraq in 2003 and 2006. Gentile wrote extensively on counterinsurgency and the surge after he retired, including a short book entitled *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*, to push back against the notion that Petraeus's arrival in Iraq had suddenly solved all of the coalition's issues. According to him, "the notion that the additional five brigades practicing new counterinsurgency methods under inspired leadership was the primary causative factor that lowered violence is not supported by

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[80] Barry.
[81] Fitzgerald, *Learning to Forget*, 205.
[82] Nagl, *Knife Fights*, 41–42.
[83] Nagl, 167.

the operational record."[84] Moreover, he argued, "to think that the reduction of violence was primarily the result of American military action is hubris run amuck."[85]

Instead, Gentile claimed, the notion that Petraeus's arrival in Iraq was a significant turning point in the conduct of operations and marked a drastic improvement in that of counterinsurgency operations specifically, is only the latest iteration of an old theory, with Petraeus as the last of a long line of supposed "savior generals." Gentile explained that "many people seem to have become comfortable with the idea that 'reinvented' armies doing counterinsurgency under innovative generals can rescue wars that should not have been fought in the first place," and added that it "is a seductive concept, because it takes the onus of responsibility of war—and ultimately its success and failure—away from elites and policy makers and places it solely in the hands of a field army and its generals."[86] In *Wrong Turn*, Gentile compared the situation in Iraq with those of generals Gerald Templar in Malaya and Creighton Abrams in Vietnam and argued that COIN is "a blend of some history, a lot of myth, and suppositions about roads not taken, as analysts today imagine what might have been if different strategic decisions had been made in the past."[87] In other words, according to Gentile, COIN only "works" in the minds of people revisiting a conflict *a posteriori* but never in actuality. That is because "hearts-and-minds counterinsurgency carried out by an occupying power in a foreign land doesn't work, unless it's a multigenerational effort"—something Americans would never commit to.[88] This critique goes back to the problem highlighted in the previous chapter: while the 2006 counterinsurgency field manual states that COIN operations are

[84] Gian P. Gentile, "Think Again: Counterinsurgency," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed September 23, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/01/13/think-again-counterinsurgency/.
[85] Gentile, Gian P., "A Strategy of Tactics: Population-Centric COIN and the Army," 11.
[86] Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 30.
[87] Gentile, 12.
[88] Gentile, 128.

long-term endeavors, it does not acknowledge the fact that the United States is highly unlikely to

be able to commit to such an effort. In addition, Gentile pushed back against the notion that

Petraeus's arrival in Iraq as MNF-I commander led to a turn to counterinsurgency since, as we

have shown, even before Casey's appointment and as early as the summer of 2003, many units

were already conducting counterinsurgency operations. Over a decade later, Gentile still firmly

believes that the claims that Petraeus's arrival fundamentally altered the way operations in Iraq

were conducted were exaggerated. He also acknowledges that Petraeus and FM 3-24 provided an

operational coherence that was not there before.[89]

As we saw in previous chapters, Gentile's perspective is supported by the facts. The

Center for Military History's official account of the surge states that "most of the elements of

General Petraeus' operational design . . . had been carried out by American units during General

Casey's tenure as commander in Iraq."[90] In an interview in spring 2006, even John Nagl had

emphasized Casey's counterinsurgency approach stating that "General Casey understands

counterinsurgency," Nagl said, adding that "he has implemented a very effective

counterinsurgency plan" and that "the counterinsurgency strategy is working when our soldiers

pull back and Iraqi soldiers do bear the brunt of the attacks."[91] While it would later appear that

the transfer of responsibility to Iraqi troops was premature, as they proved incapable of

preventing the country from spiraling into chaos, this statement goes to show that

counterinsurgency did not start with the arrival of Petraeus and the surge. Even Fred Kaplan, one

of Petraeus's main promoters in the press, agreed in 2013 that not only "the Anbar Awakening

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[89] Gian Gentile, interview by Marjorie Galelli, May 22, 2021.
[90] Schlosser, *The Surge, 2007-2008*, 91.
[91] "Counterinsurgency Lesson." It is worth noting that John Nagl participated to the show in uniform, and therefore in an official capacity, which could in part explain the degree of support he expressed for General Casey's counterinsurgency approach.

had preceded Petraeus and the surge, and it was initiated by Sunnis, not Americans," and, even though "the 2007 turnaround in Iraq was remarkable, . . . it was also oversold."[92] Counterinsurgency measures had been implemented in Iraq well before Petraeus took over as MNF-I commander. The changes he instigated once in command by repeatedly stressing counterinsurgency as the core element of his approach simply aimed to homogenize practices across the war theater.

The opposite critique, that Petraeus focused on protecting the population too much, and that he forgot about the enemy and relied too much on non-kinetic measures, is also a gross oversimplification. That confusion is partly Petraeus's own fault, as it stems from the emphasis on cultural and non-lethal aspects of COIN in the promotion of the field manual. Identifying and killing insurgents remained an integral part of US troops' mission under Petraeus. Despite the emphasis on the local population as the war's center of gravity, counterinsurgency practices did not exclude the targeting of enemy combatants—how else is one supposed to secure the population if not by stopping the people conducting the attacks? "Although I publicly acknowledged from the outset that we would not be able to kill or capture our way to the victory," explained Petraeus, "killing or capturing the more important of the 'irreconcilables' was an inescapable and hugely important element of our strategy."[93]

Because of COIN supporters' promotion campaign for the field manual, as well as the media's exaltation of Petraeus, the debate among two groups that disagreed fundamentally about the future of warfare became increasingly rancorous. Throughout the latter half of the war in

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[92] Fred Kaplan, "The End of the Age of Petraeus: The Rise and Fall of Counterinsurgency," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 1 (2013): 85.
[93] Petraeus, "How We Won in Iraq."

Iraq, critics of counterinsurgency often described its proponents as belonging to a cult. According to journalist Tara McKelvey, one of the journalists who looked at Petraeus with some skepticism, "Counterinsurgency, as promulgated by Nagl and other military scholars, has become the accepted answer to what had seemed to be an intractable problem, and in a short period of time, the doctrine has become such a powerful force that it is cast in near-biblical terms."[94] She went on to give a witty description of what she saw as Washington's COIN subculture: "There are rock stars (Nagl and Kilcullen, who were celebrated on a now-defunct military gossip blog for their personalities as much as the doctrine they espouse); a celebrity couple (Kilcullen and Janine Davidson, author of the forthcoming book *The Fog of Peace*); a guru (Petraeus); a cult-classic film (*Battle of Algiers*); and a magazine (*Small Wars Journal*)."[95] The same language was echoed by Gian Gentile who claimed that "elites and opinion makers have come to believe in the promise of counterinsurgency as though it were a religion, complete with its very own Bible, high priests, Messiah, and rebirth."[96] Charges that COIN had become a cult, even when offered with humor, reveals the degree of polarization in the debate. Those involved in the debate increasingly struggled to see any common ground.

In decrying zeal of COIN supporters, critics also tried to warn against their growing importance and influence on the conduct of the war in Iraq and US foreign policy more broadly. Gentile and others worried that glorifying counterinsurgency might encourage the executive power to conduct even more ill-advised foreign interventions, further taxing the country's over-stretched armed forces. In other words, they feared that if the military developed its COIN capabilities, the government would want to use it.

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[94] McKelvey, "The Cult of Counterinsurgency."
[95] McKelvey.
[96] Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 6.

Yet on the other side, COIN supporters claim that it is their opponents who try rewrite history by acting as if it were possible to walk back the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq. For them, improving the armed forces' ability to conduct counterinsurgency operations was the only way to prepare for the future. For counterinsurgency supporters, it was a matter of *when* COIN would once again become necessary, not *if*. John Nagl for instance criticized the stance of Gian Gentile "the most strident voice against modern counterinsurgency doctrine and its implementation," who, he wrote, "alternately claims that his own battalion was already implementing classic counterinsurgency principles in Baghdad in 2006 and that counterinsurgency is an inherently flawed policy in which the United States should never again engage." Nagl acknowledged that Gentile "is certainly correct that the invasion of Iraq was a mistake and that the United States has reaped a most meager return on the extraordinary investment of lives and treasure it made there," but the two men disagree on whether there could have been an alternative. As Nagl further explained:

> [Gentile] has never said what the United States should have done once the decision to invade Iraq had been so unwisely made and so poorly implemented. The counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq, once comprehensively implemented under the leadership of General Petraeus, was imperfect and left behind a deeply troubled country that remains violent and unstable, but absent the implementation of counterinsurgency best practices, it would have been far, far worse. Large-scale counterinsurgency is rarely a great option—it is in fact messy and slow and hugely expensive—but it may sometimes be the least bad option available. Critics of counterinsurgency must do better than say that they would not have invaded Iraq in March 2003.[97]

Gentile and Nagl are emblematic of the overall debate surrounding counterinsurgency in the early 2000s and are often presented as the two ends of a spectrum who oppose one another ferociously on all counterinsurgency matters. Gentile is the "anti-COIN guy," while Nagl is

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[97] Nagl, *Knife Fights*, 220.

presented as COIN's herald. Even the men themselves repeatedly defined their stance in opposition to one another. And yet in reality, and as the previous quotes attest, their positions present much more overlap than disagreement and focusing solely on their dual antagonism misses the key points on which they agree: the United States should not have intervened in Iraq in 2003 and counterinsurgency should not be used as a way to encourage such interventions in the future.

Their remaining disagreement is twofold. For one, they do not share the same perspective on what the military is likely to be tasked with. Historian Andrew Bacevich summed up the two officers' positions best, stating that "for officers like Nagl, the die appears to have been cast. . . Nagl's aim is simply to prepare for the inescapable eventuality of one, two, many Iraqs to come. Gentile resists the notions that the Army's (and by extension, the nation's) fate is unalterably predetermined."[98] But the other core disagreement between Nagl and Gentile concerns the importance of the role played by General Petraeus. While Gentile sees little more than good timing in Petraeus's involvement in turning the tide in Iraq, Nagl believes that Petraeus was instrumental. According to him, Petraeus accomplished a "Herculean feat" by putting "the counterinsurgency doctrine he had just published and the Iraqi forces he had previously raised and trained to good effect, reducing violence by more than two-thirds over the course of the 18 months after he assumed command."[99] Even so, Nagl only sees counterinsurgency as "the least bad option available."[100] This position was also embraced by another supporter of Petraeus, Peter Mansoor. Mansoor, who served as General Petraeus's executive officer during the surge, concluded that "surging U.S. forces to Iraq in an attempt to reverse the declining fortunes of the

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[98] Andrew J. Bacevich, "The Petraeus Doctrine," The Atlantic, October 1, 2008, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/10/the-petraeus-doctrine/306964/.
[99] Nagl, "COIN Fights," 380.
[100] Nagl, 380.

coalition and its Iraqi partners was the right decision, even if it was merely the best of a lot of bad options."[101] More than anything else, what the debate surrounding COIN and the respective roles played by Casey and Petraeus illustrates is the wide gap that exists between theory and practice when it comes to fighting an insurgency. And, arguably, that personal allegiances shaped officers' perspectives on counterinsurgency more than anything else. While officers like Gentile can imagine a future where the US military does not get involved in nation-building missions abroad, the likes of Mansoor and Nagl see those interventions as inevitable, which thus makes counterinsurgency indispensable.

Looking at the war in its entirety, it becomes clear that General Casey's involvement in counterinsurgency was far greater than his detractors gave him credit for. Similarly, General Petraeus's focus on COIN was neither revolutionary, nor to the detriment of all other traditional means of fighting. Looking at the evolution of the situation in Iraq over the course of the war, it becomes clear that the implementation of counterinsurgency by General Petraeus during the surge was not so much a change in direction, but the culmination of months of adaptation into one coherent approach. In addition, while the promotion campaign that surrounded the field manual made it seem like a miraculous solution, most proponents of COIN only advocated it as a last resort. One counterinsurgency scholar states that "a close reading of the theory reveals that it never encourages foolhardy campaigns to stabilize war-torn countries or to defeat insurgencies wherever they may rear their head: if anything, a note of caution regarding the requirements of such interventions can be parsed from the field manuals and main texts."[102] Even David

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[101] Mansoor, *Surge*, 262.
[102] David H. Ucko, "Wither Counterinsurgency: The Rise and Fall of a Divisive Concept," in *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* (Routledge, 2012), 71, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ku/detail.action?docID=957441.

Kilcullen, one of the main apostles of counterinsurgency wrote in the 2012 *Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* "that not only is classical COIN not the new dominant paradigm for Western intervention, but that it *should not be*."[103] In sum, the surge should not be understood as a rupture in the course of Operation Iraqi Freedom, but in continuity with the counterinsurgency efforts that began in 2003. Starting with disparate efforts led by officers in the field and concepts taught in many different schools and programs, counterinsurgency evolved into a comprehensive, large-scale strategy enabled by additional troops and framed into one coherent narrative.

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[103] Kilcullen, "Counterinsurgency: The State of a Controversial Art," 128.

Epilogue

At the turn of the 21st century, the United States discarded the Weinberger-Powell doctrine and made its way into yet another war halfway around the world that left the military with no choice but to, once again, resurrect counterinsurgency. President George W. Bush's administration's successive decisions to invade Iraq, topple Saddam Hussein's regime, and disband both the Iraqi military and the Baath party, pushed the country to the brink of a civil war. At the same time, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld insisted on going to war with the military he had sought—a light footprint, highly mobile force, supported by advanced precision weapons—instead of the tried and true overwhelming force of Operation Desert Storm. His decision in turn meant that the number of coalition troops deployed to Iraq was far too small to prevent the country from slipping into chaos when Iraqi law enforcement disbanded in the weeks that followed the initial invasion. The insurgency that ensued pitted various Iraqi factions against each other, foreign troops, and the new government the coalition was trying to stand up. The violence that then rippled across the country pushed soldiers and Marines on the ground to search for a solution and led them to resurrect, and in many cases reinvent, old counterinsurgency methods.

In the years that followed, the US military progressively adopted counterinsurgency as a core aspect of its doctrine, and eventually the nation embraced COIN as the only logical way to victory and out of Iraq. Over the course of the Iraq War, counterinsurgency thus went from old, discarded doctrine to the military's—and by extension the United States'—creed. For a moment, it appeared that, after over two centuries of back and forth, the nation had finally overcome its historical qualms and embraced counterinsurgency as a key component of its military's mission.

Writing in 2008, political journalist Tara McKelvey confidently stated that it was "clear to anyone who has spent time in military and foreign-policy circles: The debate is over. Counterinsurgency is here to stay."[1] And yet, the embrace of counterinsurgency was short-lived. We are now barely a decade after the last of the US troops exited Iraq, and one would be hard-pressed to discern traces of the COIN experiment in the fabric of the US military institution. One after the other, programs that supported counterinsurgency and its associated emphasis on cultural awareness have been dismantled, and the military has returned to preparing for conventional warfare against near-peer adversaries.

When President Barack Obama took office in January 2009, he set out to shift the country's attention from Iraq's war of choice to the war of necessity in Afghanistan.[2] Obama was thereby fulfilling one of his campaign promises and following through on a statement he had made as a senator during the Crocker-Petraeus hearing in the fall 2007: "Rather than identify the very limited tactical gains that have been made at great cost and using them to justify the maintenance of a failing strategy, I believe it is time to change course."[3] Supporters of counterinsurgency saw the new president's decision to pull out of Iraq all but "squander[ing] the hard work of the previous decade," in the words of John Nagl, but following the orders of their commander in chief, the last US troops exited Iraq by the end of December 2011.[4] As it turns out, their departure not only marked the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom but also of the enthusiasm it had sparked for counterinsurgency.

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[1] McKelvey, "The Cult of Counterinsurgency."
[2] Obama, "Remarks by the President at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention."
[3] Iraq: The Crocker-Petraeus Report, 84.
[4] Nagl, "COIN Fights," 381.

At the same time the armed forces were preparing to leave Iraq, military schools shifted

their curricula away from Iraq and to Afghanistan in accord with the new administration's

priorities. For example, in the description of the Marine Corps' Command and Staff College'

"Cultural and Interagency Operations" course for the school year 2010-2011 read:

> At present, the US military finds itself heavily engaged in irregular
> conflicts and operations other than war, in which success requires that its
> personnel understand other cultures and work with civilians and foreign
> security forces. The dangers at hand in some areas, *particularly in
> Afghanistan*, have caused most US civilian agencies and most non-
> governmental organizations to suspend operations in those areas, with the
> result that the military must now design and execute tasks that normally
> belong to these entities.[5]

From 2006 up until the previous school year, the second sentence used to read: "The

dangers at hand in some areas, *particularly in Iraq*, have caused most US civilian agencies and

most non-governmental organizations to suspend operations in those areas, with the result that

the military must now design and execute the tasks that normally belong to these entities."[6]

While this faculty guide still acknowledged the requirements of "irregular conflicts and

operations other than war," the shift in geographic focus turned out to be a precursor to a

subsequent move away from these types of missions altogether, bringing an end to what

journalist Fred Kaplan labeled "the Age of Petraeus."[7]

In addition to relegating counterinsurgency to the background in its schools' curricula,

the military shut down its various programs and centers focused on counterinsurgency and

culture. According to the former director of the Air Force's Culture and Language Center,

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[5] Emphasis added. "Marine Corps University Command and Staff College Culture and Interagency Operations Faculty Guide Volume 1 AY2010-11," 2010, 5, CSC 2010-2011 CIAO, Box 1, Marine Corps Archives.
[6] Emphasis added. "Marine Corps University Command and Staff College Culture and Interagency Operations Faculty Guide Volume 1 AY2006-07," 2006, 3, CSC 2006-2007, Culture and Interagency Operations, Box 3, Marine Corps Archives; "Marine Corps University Command and Staff College Culture and Interagency Operations Faculty Guide Volume 1 AY2009-10," 2009, 3, CSC 2009-2010, CIAO, Box 2, Marine Corps Archives.
[7] "Marine Corps University Command and Staff College Culture and Interagency Operations Faculty Guide Volume 1 AY2010-11"; Kaplan, "The End of the Age of Petraeus."

"military and civilian leaders in the Services could nod and smile in apparent agreement with the recommendations for education and professional transformation, but they never really wrapped their heads around what it would mean in terms of policy, planning, and resources," which meant that in a matter of a few years, "national priorities had changed" and "the interest of senior military leaders had waned."[8] In 2014, the Army's Counterinsurgency Center (later renamed Army Irregular Warfare Center) established by Petraeus and Mattis in 2006 closed its doors. The Marine Corps' Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL) lasted a while longer, but in 2020 it too was shut down.

Likewise, ten years after the end of the war in Iraq, counterinsurgency is no longer a priority at the doctrinal level. The last iteration of FM 3-24, now titled *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* dates back to 2014, the same year as the latest version of FM 3-07 *Stability*. In contrast, in 2021, the Army published new versions of FM 3-94 *Armies, Corps, and Division Operations*, as well as FM 3-96 *Brigade Combat Team*. Last year, updated versions FM 3-01 *U.S. Army Air and Missile Defense Operations* and FM 3-09 *Fire Support and Field Artillery Operations* were published. All these new manuals superseded previous versions dating from either 2014 or 2015, thereby clearly demonstrating the Army's dedication to conventional warfare and preparation for operations against near-peer adversaries. In contrast to the Army, the Marine Corps published a new version of MCTP 3-02B *Counterinsurgency Handbook* in 2020, once again demonstrating a greater determination to preserve counterinsurgency as one of the service's core capabilities.

These changes in the military's focus reflect broader trends in the nation's approach to foreign policy and national security. In 2018, the summary of the *National Defense Strategy*

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[8] Henk, "Foreword," x.

claimed that "we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding," and painted China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran as the primary threats to national security.[9] This is a far cry from the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, which stated that "although the U.S. military maintains considerable advantages in traditional forms of warfare, this realm is not the only, or even the most likely, one in which adversaries will challenge the United States."[10] The *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* issued by the Biden administration in 2021 described challenges to democracy at the primary danger to the United States' security, but that concern was immediately followed by China and Russia (and in a lesser measure North Korea, Iran, as well as various non-state terrorist and extremist organizations). More importantly, the document included a statement that directly echoed the Weinberger-Powell doctrine of the late 20th century: "Military force should only be used when the objectives and mission are clear and achievable, when force is matched with appropriate resources and as part of an integrated strategy, when it is consistent with our values and laws, and with the informed consent of the American people."[11] It appears that in the span of the decade that followed the end of the Iraq War, the United States has all but returned to the posture it held after the end of the Vietnam War. While that approach had proven successful—while the policy stood—the fact that it was eventually rescinded by President Bush in favor of a new foreign policy that precipitated the war in Iraq does not bode well for the current administration's decision's long-term viability.

[9] Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge," 2018, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf.
[10] Department of Defense, "Quadrennial Defense Review Report," 19.
[11] "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance" (White House, March 2021), 14, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf.

If the debate of the early 2000s crystalized around counterinsurgency, it was at its core a disagreement about the future of warfare. On the one hand, the anti-COIN movement believed that the military's focus on counterinsurgency was detrimental to the US military's readiness to conduct conventional operations against a near-peer adversary—a type of war that, they argued, more readily threatened the United States' national security than insurgents halfway around the globe. Meanwhile, the lead author of the 2006 *Counterinsurgency* field manual, Conrad Crane, declared that "there are two approaches to warfare, asymmetric and stupid."[12] General Petraeus similarly, albeit less brazenly, explained that asymmetric conflicts "are the wars we are fighting and they clearly are the kind of wars we must master," because "America's overwhelming conventional military superiority makes it unlikely that future enemies will confront us head on."[13] In sum, the two groups disagreed on whether the military should prepare for the most likely type of conflict, or the most dangerous one.

Even though counterinsurgency is never a desirable option for military leaders, given the sheer complexity of such operations, the military does not choose its wars, civilians do. Therefore, the recent move away from counterinsurgency poses a serious risk to the troops who will likely have to, once again, revive the practice as a new war unfolds. As political scientist and counterinsurgency expert David Ucko rightfully points out: "refusing to study and prepare for counterinsurgency will not reduce the need for the associated skills and capabilities and the desire to avoid counterinsurgency should not be confused with a ready ability to do so."[14] Even as the military was turning away from COIN in the early 2010s, individual members of the armed forces echoed Ucko's position. For instance, Major Fernando Luján wrote in 2012: "No

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[12] Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, 245.
[13] Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq," 2.
[14] Ucko, "Wither Counterinsurgency," 71.

matter how much the various institutions of the U.S. military may prefer wars in which the enemy wears uniforms and fights in large formations, the United States is certain to face insurgencies again. The U.S. defense establishment must be prepared to deal with them effectively, with very limited resources, or face irrelevance."[15] Many young officers who had most, or even all, of their experience of combat in the Middle East during the first decade of the 21st century share that belief that counterinsurgency should remain a key priority for the American military institution, as they were the ones who saw the consequences of a lack of such preparation firsthand. In sum, the military's preparations for the future need to account for the fast-paced nature of the election cycle. Between Congress and the White House, the country's leadership is up for change every two years, which can in turn cause the military to rapidly become out of step with its civilian leadership. Even if one administration decides that foreign interventions likely to devolved into protracted counterinsurgency operations are not in the nation's best interest, that might not be the position of the next people to get into office.

In 1961, on the dawn of the "classic age of counterinsurgency," President John F. Kennedy gave a speech to the graduating class of Annapolis. "You must know everything you can about military power, and you must also understand the limits to military power," he warned the newly minted officers, and "you must understand that few of the important problems of our time have, in the final analysis, been finally solved by military power alone."[16] As it turns out, sixty years later, this cautionary statement appears to be equally appropriate for military and civilian leaders. The fact that President Bush stood in front of a "Mission Accomplished" banner

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[15] Christopher Sims, Fernando Luján, and Bing West, "Both Sides of the COIN: Defining War After Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 1 (2012): 183.
[16] John F. Kennedy, "Remarks to the Graduating Class of the US Naval Academy," UVA Miller Center, June 7, 1961, https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/june-7-1961-remarks-graduating-class-us-naval-academy.

on the deck of the *USS Abraham Lincoln* when the war in Iraq was, in fact, barely beginning,

speaks volumes. In the decades that followed the Vietnam War—and the associated end of the

draft—it appears that policymakers have grown increasingly unable to grasp the limits of

military actions. And, on the flip side of the coin, we find uniformed personnel who oversold the

capabilities of a military tactic and ended up influencing the White House's conduct of the war.

According to John Nagl, "the right question is not whether counterinsurgency works, but

whether the enormously high cost one must pay to make it work is worth the fragile gains one

achieves." That, he noted "is a question for presidents, and it is at the level of national policy and

not military doctrine."[17] However, what happens when senior military officers work tirelessly to

sell a specific doctrine to the American people, Congress, and the president?

One of the military's responsibilities is to advise the executive branch, and military

leaders' push for COIN fell under that responsibility. However, by displaying a can-do attitude at

each stage of the war, no matter how challenging the situation had become, military officers

misled their civilian leaders in regards to what the military—and counterinsurgency—could

reasonably be expected to achieve. This can-do attitude, bred into soldiers and Marines

throughout their entire career, remained steadfast during OIF, no matter which commander was

in charge. It thus reinforced the administration's conviction that the war could be won. Even in

the face of nearly outright hostile questioning from the Senate's Committee on Foreign

Relations, Petraeus remained committed to describing the situation in optimistic terms—even

though he insisted that his "responsibility, as I see it, is not to give a good picture, it's to give an

accurate picture, as forthright a picture as I can provide."[18] This positive stance did not change

after then-Senator Obama pointed out: "I don't see, at any point, where you say, 'If this fails,' or

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[17] Nagl, "COIN Fights," 381.
[18] Iraq: The Crocker-Petraeus Report, 53.

'If that doesn't work.'"[19] Failure simply was not an option. Throughout the war, the message from the military's senior leadership was that victory was possible: it was only a matter of finding the right strategy.

The 2006 *Counterinsurgency* field manual and the promotion effort that surrounded it played a significant part in that narrative. Historian and retired Army officer Greg Daddis concurs that FM 3-24 fostered "unrealistic expectations outside the military ranks about the possibilities of counterinsurgency," which contributed to the larger issue he identifies: Americans have excessive faith in the military and in war to achieve foreign policy objectives.[20] Andrew Bacevich, another retired officer and scholar who has been a vocal opponent of the war in Iraq, went farther in his critique. According to Bacevich, Petraeus should have "capitalized on his status as man of the hour to oblige civilian leaders, both in Congress and in the executive branch, to do what they have not done since the Iraq War began—namely, their job."[21] He further argued that "a great political general doesn't tell his masters what they want to hear. He tells them what they need to hear, thereby nudging them to make decisions that must be made if the nation's interests are to be served."[22] While the scenario described by Bacevich is enticing, the military's subordination to the executive branch and the fact that generals' careers therefore hang in the balance makes it unlikely that it could ever be achieved.

Contrary to the narrative peddled by some of its supporters, counterinsurgency is not a miracle solution, nor was it ignored by military leaders for the first half of the Iraq War. It is the

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[19] Iraq: The Crocker-Petraeus Report, 86.
[20] Gregory A. Daddis, "Faith in War: The American Roots of Global Conflict," *Parameters* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 49–53.
[21] Andrew J. Bacevich, "Sycophant Savior," *The American Conservative*, October 8, 2007, https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/sycophant-savior/.
[22] Bacevich.

complexity of counterinsurgency operations and their requirements in terms of time, treasure, and manpower that made it so difficult for troops in Iraq to get a handle on the situation—not an ignorance of COIN's most basic principles. On the other hand, refusing to train for counterinsurgency on the grounds that such missions should not fall under the US military's purview, because of their political underpinnings, also misses the point. It is imperative to acknowledge that the policy decisions made by one administration at a specific point in time are no indication of what might be required of the nation's armed forces after the next election, and that the military's subordination to civilian power prevents it from choosing the wars in which it will and will not fight. Therefore, while it is crucial for the military to do a better job at advising and counseling its civilian leaders in an effort to prevent the nation's involvement in protracted irregular conflicts, it is just as important for the military to prepare for the worst-case scenario and be ready to fight an insurgency if—or rather when—it becomes once again necessary.

Abbreviations

AAR	After Action Review
AO	Area of Operations
AOR	Area Of Responsibility
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
AVF	All-Volunteer Force
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
CAC	Combined Arms Center
CAOCL	Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning
CAP	Combined Actions Platoons
CENTCOM	US Central Command
CGC	Command General College (USMC)
CGSC	Command General Staff College (Army)
COB	Contingency Operating Base
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CONUS	Continental United States
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
EUCOM	US European Command
FM 3-24	Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (December 2006 edition unless otherwise specified)
FOB	Forward Operating Base
HTS	Human Terrain System
ID	Infantry Division
IO	Information Operations
JSOTF-N	Joint Special Operations Task Force North
JSS	Joint Security Station
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MCCDC	Marine Corps Combat Development Command
MCLC	Military Coordination and Liaison Command
MNC-I	Multi-National Corps-Iraq
MNF-I	Multi-National Force-Iraq
MOOTW	Military Operations Other Than War
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NDU	National Defense University
OPLAN	Operation Plan
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PME	Professional Military Education (often used to refer to the network of US military school)
SOF	Special Operations Forces
TPFDL	Time Phased Force Deployment List
UN	United Nations
USMC	United States Marine Corps

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