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# ORGANIZING TO COMPETE IN THE POLITICAL TERRAIN

**Nadia Schadlow**

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## FOREWORD

Since the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq began, analysts have engaged in a rich, often heated, and always lively debate about the degree to which the United States Army should be restructured to meet threats posed by this era of “persistent conflict.” Much of these debates has centered on the degree to which the Army should specialize for counterinsurgencies and how much would be lost in terms of traditional warfighting functions by doing so. In many respects, the Army’s new *Capstone Concept* (December 2009) rights this debate by pointing out that the Army “must prepare for a broad range of missions and remain ready to conduct full spectrum operations (i.e., simultaneous offensive, defensive, and stability or support operations) to contribute to the attainment of national policy aims.”<sup>1</sup>

That concept also recognizes that one important part of achieving this aim will involve cooperation with nonmilitary personnel on the ground. Indeed, regarding this issue, a large discourse on civil-military integration has arisen—with much discussion over how to best organize to achieve “unity of effort” among various actors, so that security and stabilization can unfold and allow for the withdrawal of American personnel and the shift to local agencies. In this monograph, Dr. Schadlow aims to take a closer look at this issue of civil-military integration. She argues that much of these debates about how to best organize for unity of effort revolve, essentially, around the question of who should shape the political landscape during war—that is, who rules contested territory. It is an issue that is central to striking the appropriate balance between civilian and military assets in stabilization

and reconstruction operations. And it is key to determining how much to shift the Army toward so-called irregular war as opposed to so-called conventional capabilities. Decisions about the military's appropriate role in shaping political outcomes in war are fundamental to resolving these debates and will determine the degree of organizational and educational changes that the United States Army must make to meet current and future security threats.



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## ENDNOTE

1. *Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet (TRADOC) 525-3-0, The Army Capstone Concept: Operational Adaptability – Operating Under Conditions of Uncertainty and Complexity in an Era of Persistent Conflict 2016-2028*, Fort Monroe, VA: Department of the Army, Headquarters, U.S. Training and Doctrine Command, December 21, 2009, p. 9, available from [www.tradoc.army.mil/ubs/pams/tp525-3-0.pdf](http://www.tradoc.army.mil/ubs/pams/tp525-3-0.pdf).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NADIA SCHADLOW is a senior program officer at the Smith Richardson Foundation, where she identifies strategic issues that warrant further attention from the U.S. policy community and manages and develops programs and projects related to these issues. She has helped to create grant portfolios on key topics, including improving the U.S. military's approach to stability and reconstruction operations; building and strengthening networks of moderates in key Muslim-majority countries; understanding the challenges posed by Islamist radicalization; and challenging traditional approaches to foreign aid and development by emphasizing models that recognize the importance of local actors. She served on the Defense Policy Board from September 2006-June 2009; and is a full member of the Council on Foreign Relations. Dr. Schadlow's dissertation, "War and the Art of Governance: The U.S. Army's Role in Military Government from the Mexican War to Operation Just Cause," examined 13 cases of the U.S. Army's experiences with political and economic reconstruction. She continues to write on issues related to defense policy and the Army – particularly its role in governance and stability and reconstruction operations. Her articles have appeared in *Parameters*, *The American Interest*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Philanthropy*, and several edited volumes. Dr. Schadlow holds a B.A. degree in government and Soviet studies from Cornell University and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the John Hopkins Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

## SUMMARY

The degree to which military forces can and should shape the political landscape during war — that is, who rules contested territory — is at the root of several ongoing debates about how to restructure the U.S. Army. It is an issue that is central to striking the appropriate balance between civilian and military assets in stabilization and reconstruction operations, and it is key to determining how much to shift the Army toward so-called irregular war as opposed to so-called conventional capabilities. Decisions about the military's appropriate role in shaping political outcomes in war are fundamental to resolving these debates and will determine the degree of organizational and educational changes that the United States Army must make to meet current and future security threats.

This monograph first explains that the character of future armed conflict will require an Army that is capable of shaping political outcomes in war. Second, it highlights how current debates over organizing civilian and military assets in a wartime theater are linked, fundamentally, to the question of who should shape politics in a war. Third, the monograph argues that, partly due to inherent limitations in civilian capacities — but also due to the nature of war — the Army must embrace and prepare for governance-related missions through changes in organization and education.

## **Organizing to Compete in the Political Terrain**

Peace may or may not be a “modern invention” but it is certainly a far more complex affair than war.

Michael Howard<sup>1</sup>

The degree to which military forces can and should shape the political landscape during war – that is, who rules over contested territory – is at the root of several ongoing debates about how to restructure the U.S. Army. It is an issue central to striking the appropriate balance between civilian and military assets in stabilization and reconstruction operations. It is also a key factor in determining how much to shift the Army toward so-called irregular war capabilities, as opposed to conventional capabilities. Decisions about the military’s appropriate role in shaping political outcomes during war are fundamental to resolving these debates, and will determine the degree of organizational and educational changes that the U.S. Army must make to meet current and future security threats.

This monograph first explains that the character of future armed conflict will require an Army that is capable of shaping political outcomes in war; second, it highlights how current debates over organizing civilian and military assets in a wartime theater are linked, fundamentally, to the question of who should shape politics in a war; and third, the paper argues that partly due to inherent limitations in civilian capacities, but also due to the nature of war, the Army must embrace and prepare for governance-related missions through changes in organization and education.



## THE CURRENT AND FUTURE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, and the Army have all identified a current and future environment in which the U.S. military must be prepared to deal with a range of uncertainties. In this environment, evolving political, economic, and security problems will generate instability, which will in turn place a range of demands—from combat, security, engagement, and relief to reconstruction—on U.S. military forces around the world.<sup>2</sup>

Conflict in the near and medium term will involve violence between states, as regional actors compete for military and economic power, prestige, and influence. It will involve wars fought within states, among tribes, and between sectarian and ethnic groups, and will be fueled by nonstate armed groups such as terrorists, insurgents, militias, and criminal enterprises.<sup>3</sup> Traditional competitions among great powers such as China and Russia will also continue as these states seek to reassert their power in key domains and regions around the world. Moreover, technological trends and advancements will increase the intensity and potential dangers stemming from even localized conflicts. Globalization and its attendant instruments—access to information, networks, news media, and money—lead to actors within and across regions being linked with relative ease. They can exchange messages rapidly and, as a result, with greater effects; they have many opportunities to learn and adapt quickly.

Given this environment, U.S. military forces will need to prepare for a combination of regular and irregular wars between states, many of which are remote

from, and inhospitable to, the United States. Army forces in particular must be prepared to defeat what some have described as hybrid enemies: hostile states and nonstate enemies who combine a broad range of weapons capabilities including regular, irregular, and terrorist tactics. Enemies will continuously adapt to effectively avoid U.S. strengths and attack what they perceive as weaknesses.<sup>4</sup> As the principal land force, the Army will need to engage in relief and reconstruction in crisis zones and may need to intervene to prevent or mitigate the outbreak of conflict.

It does not matter whether these threats and conflicts are characterized as small wars, irregular wars, or hybrid wars; what is common to virtually all such contingencies is that the political landscape will drive the character of these conflicts. Indeed, in virtually any scenario in which the U.S. Army might be involved, the politics of the situation on the ground will shape the context of the intervention and how the conflict will unfold. In war, politics is as contested as territory. Moreover, in key parts of the world, from the Middle East to South Asia, the political terrain will be shaped greatly by a potent mix of deeply held religious, cultural, and ideological beliefs.

This political dimension of war is not new to the U.S. Army. Throughout its history, the Army has engaged in politics on the ground. Virtually all of the wars in which it has fought have involved the problem of managing local actors in order to restore stability and basic order. U.S. Army officers directly supervised the creation of new governments in a range of wars. These include the well-known success stories of Germany and Japan following World War II, and the lesser known cases of Italy and Korea. In addition, cases that have traditionally garnered less attention

include reconstruction after the Mexican War of the 1840s, during the Civil War, and in Puerto Rico and Cuba during the Spanish American War. Governance operations took place during the Cold War period as well in the Dominican Republic in 1965, Grenada in 1983, and Panama in 1989. Army personnel under the theater commander's operational control supervised and implemented political and economic reconstruction in all cases except those that took place during the Cold War. In virtually all of the Army's major contingencies, Army personnel who remained on the ground overseeing the political transitions were essential to the consolidation of victory. Nonetheless, up until recently, a consistent feature of the political and bureaucratic landscape in Washington and the Army has been the failure to institutionalize the lessons learned from these arenas of competition and to create an organization expert in engaging in governance-related tasks.

## **TODAY'S DEBATES**

Military historians, strategists, and soldiers have analyzed the political dimension of war at the strategic level. The Army's publication of *Field Manual (FM) 3-24, Counterinsurgency Operations*, marked an important step toward affirming the intensely political character of war. Most recently, the Army's Capstone Concept (ACC) emphasizes the importance of continuously assessing and reassessing the strategic and political contexts in order to defeat enemies.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there is a burgeoning literature, mostly from recent practitioners in Iraq and Afghanistan, which describes the tactical requirements related to the restoration of basic security and order in counterinsur-

gency (COIN) operations and related stabilization efforts.<sup>6</sup> Yet there remains a gap, both historically and in the more recent literature, related to the operational achievement of these political goals—a gap regarding the organization in the field necessary to match and build upon local successes to achieve political objectives. Good doctrine does not guarantee the effective execution of governance-related tasks; sound operational approaches are required as well.

Both historically and in the current wars, military and civilian actors have faltered over the problem of how to create an organization that can effectively employ the economic, diplomatic, and security instruments necessary to shape desired political outcomes. The enemy has not been so hampered. As Kim Kagan has observed about the insurgency in Iraq: “The enemy had developed a system of allocating resources; command and control; financing; logistics; recruitment; training capabilities; information operations; force projection capacities; and methods for reinforcing priorities—not just in local areas, but hierarchically within the theater.”<sup>7</sup> A central problem in Iraq and Afghanistan has been how to organize U.S. resources to shape the political dimensions of these wars. American political and military leaders can solve this problem, but they are hampered by the recurring concern in American political culture over placing the military in charge of achieving **political** goals in war. As a result, the operational approach has favored unity of effort among civilian and military actors. Unity of effort, however, is not an operational model, but an amalgam of ad-hoc resources and approaches designed to manage political sensitivities.

An early success in Afghanistan occurred in 2003, when two key actors—a U.S. ambassador, Zalmay

Khalilzhad, and a three-star general, Lieutenant General David Barno – created an integrated civil-military strategic planning cell to ensure the concerted use of all instruments of U.S. power to accelerate the defeat of the Taliban and to begin the reconstruction of Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Lieutenant General Barno (now retired), the then-newly installed commander of Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A), placed his personal office adjacent to Ambassador Khalilzad's inside the embassy. More than a symbolic move, this decision fostered a level of coordination and communication among civilian and military staffs, which in turn had a ripple effect in the field, helping to jumpstart the operational civil-military teams known as Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Moreover, CFC-A personnel were posted to fill empty civilian spots inside the embassy, allowing for improved communication among military and civilian experts as they organized for reconstruction efforts.<sup>9</sup> This example was an ad-hoc solution driven by two extraordinary individuals who happened to be in the right place and the right time. Clearly, operational adaptability is a key strength of the American military, but what deserves further exploration is why, at the operational level, these sorts of examples are perhaps **too** plentiful. It is important to note that the relationship today between the commanding general and the ambassador in Afghanistan is markedly different.

There remain several weaknesses at the operational level with how to organize command relationships and resources to achieve political outcomes. First and foremost, there remains a persistent resistance to the creation of unified management/command structures in a theater to control civil and military resources related to stabilization and reconstruction tasks despite

the fact that such structures have been created and used effectively in the past. Almost a decade of war now has reaffirmed the depth of this resistance. There is also a need to improve the development of integrated civil-military campaign plans, which describe how to achieve political outcomes during the course of war (How are political considerations reflected in a campaign plan? What resources are needed to build upon local successes and ensure that they form a foundation for continuing success?). Third, there are still weaknesses in building and sustaining an organizational apparatus that would train, support, and essentially grow cadres of people, both military and civilian, to implement such a plan. However, improvements in the latter two areas will not be of any significant use unless they can be integrated into a unified command structure.

There have been several recent efforts to balance the military's role in governance related tasks with improvements in civilian capabilities. A key initiative as the Bush administration left office, which was also endorsed by the Obama administration, was the Reconstruction and Stabilization Civilian Management Act. This allowed the necessary authorities to create a civilian corps to respond to crises abroad and perform governance related tasks in conflict situations.<sup>10</sup> There have also been efforts by the Department of Defense (DoD) to transfer spending authorities for reconstruction related tasks to the State Department.<sup>11</sup> These initiatives, though important steps toward improving overall U.S. Government (USG) capabilities related to stabilization and reconstruction tasks, do not resolve the fundamental disagreement about how to manage or organize for political transitions in a conflict zone.

The current range of solutions adds to the menu of ad-hoc capabilities but avoids the need to make

political decisions in Washington. Under the existing unity of effort approach, an increase in the number of deployable civilians adds valuable expertise to the in-theater effort, but does little to improve the critical “unity” side of the equation. The failure to agree on a unified command arrangement is due to a reluctance to see the military take the lead in shaping political outcomes on the ground, combined with a reluctance to place civilians—even those in a line of fire—under military authority. By the same token, there is also resistance to placing military assets under civilian control in a wartime theater.

This reluctance is rooted in American political and military history and culture. Although much attention has been paid to current parallels (or lack thereof) between Vietnam and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the lessons learned (or not) from that conflict, much **less** attention has been paid to the enormous effort that went into creating the integrated civil-military structure in Vietnam known as civil operations and revolutionary development support (CORDS). That structure provided the critical organization for civilian experts and military personnel to work side by side to implement the country-wide pacification strategy adopted in 1967. Until then, “civilian agencies steered clear of the military’s business,” and the military “long eschewed involvement in police and pacification matters.”<sup>12</sup> The PRTs in Iraq and Afghanistan did not duplicate the level of integration achieved under CORDS. A full explanation of why this was the case has yet to be written, though one should be. Unfortunately, the CORDS model’s utility and importance were not fully appreciated, partially, it seems, due to the deeply divided interpretations of the Vietnam War.

Even with a greater absolute number of deployable civilians, problems remain in shifting more reconstruction efforts to civilian agencies. First, the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) community have not gone through the organizational catharsis equivalent to the one generated by FM 3-07 and other recent defense-led efforts. Certainly, there is a range of experts, both inside and outside the government, exploring new approaches to development. There is substantial support among many constituencies for greater USAID and State Department funding. Yet even experienced diplomats concede that “no wealth of doctrine or counsel exists for DoD’s civilian counterparts.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, even with an increase in the absolute number of deployable civilians, it will take considerable time to improve the expeditionary mindset and approaches of the State Department. Even excluding embassy posts in war zones, a recent U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found a twice greater vacancy rate at hardship posts compared to nonhardship posts.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the Department continues to lag in providing proper support to those Foreign Service Officers who do serve in the more difficult or dangerous posts. An implicit recognition of the problem is found in the 2010 House Foreign Relations Authorization Act, which calls for a “more modern and expeditionary Foreign Service.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, there is still significant debate within the USAID community about the extent to which aid should be used to shape or influence U.S. foreign policy goals, clearly a constraint in any competition over the political landscape in war.

Despite the current emphasis on unity of effort and on the contributions of nondefense agencies to reconstruction in war, limitations in civilian capacity will



continue to impact the Army in several ways. First, governance tasks are central to the competition inherent in war and the Army, as the principal land force, and will need to play a central role in any such competition. They have in the past, and will continue to do so in the future. It is hard to imagine giving up a key element of war that is so essential to sustaining control over territory. The Army will need to continue to develop expertise in governance-related areas, building upon the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan. Such lessons and expertise must be reflected in Army organizations and units or it will be lost. Army culture is linked to, and derived from, its branches and units, their expertise, and their shared experiences. A cultural shift in the Army, which values and rewards the skills required to manage the political dimension of war, will require a concomitant reflection in Army organizations.

The ACC is a step in the right direction. It explains the importance of the ability to fight as a combined arms team, whereby the integration of different skills compensates for the weakness of any one arm. It is significant that the ACC also highlights the fact that “seizing and retaining the initiative in complex environments will require the **expansion of the concept of combined arms to include the integration of efforts critical to consolidating gains and ensuring progress toward accomplishing strategic objectives.**”<sup>16</sup> This will be important for fully realizing the ACC’s emphasis on operational adaptability – changes made in order to adjust midcourse to the evolving demands of a war. Operational adaptability is more likely to be successful against the backdrop of an organization with “depth” in a particular area. As the ACC explains, “competency in combined arms operations, based on effective unit organizations, training, and leadership,

is an essential element of operational adaptability.”<sup>17</sup> Successful operational adaptability in the face of governance-related problems is much more likely if the Army achieves effective unit organization, training, and leadership in governance-related skill sets. This type of adaptability is likely to take place in the political domain of the competition **if** there is a culture that values the kinds of adaptations being sought.

Second, given the limitations in civilian capacity noted earlier, the Army’s leadership should focus on identifying how to create a unified command structure in a wartime theater and how to best integrate civilian and military expertise. The Army can take into account the complicated political landscape of Washington, while nonetheless taking a page from General Eisenhower’s position during World War II when, due to his responsibility for “the success of the operations,” he believed that it was “essential that final authority in all matters in the theater rest in me.”<sup>18</sup> In the aftermath of Vietnam, one of the most cogent observers of and participants in the war, Robert Komer, described how the American bureaucracy was a critical part of the failure there. Komer later asked,

Why did the U.S . . . settle for such conventional, diffuse, and fragmented management structures . . . ? It is surprising that when we saw its need so clearly, and so many advocated at various times management changes to help generate better GVN and U.S. performance, we did so little to create the necessary machinery. Senior officials did recurrently focus on this problem. However, we didn’t ever do enough about it.<sup>19</sup>

Obviously, decisions about a unified command arrangement are larger than the Army alone can resolve, but the Army has an important voice at the table.

The Army's continuing central involvement in shaping political outcomes in war does not mean that its presence in a country is indeterminate, nor does it mean that the Army should transform itself into a long-term development agency. As security is established, circumstances will dictate a need for a shift from shorter-term to longer-term goals, a corresponding shift from military toward civilian actors, and a full transition to indigenous entities. But getting to the desired end state is more likely to occur if the operational level is working most effectively.

Moreover, any lasting transition and consolidation of political objectives will require a commitment by Congress to fund desired objectives. Unless Congress fully understands the political objectives and concomitant resource requirements, serious pause should be given to involvement at the outset of a conflict. During the Vietnam years, Komer commented on the simple fact that most of the war effort was financed by "relatively un fungible" U.S. defense appropriations, with civilians needing to find ingenious ways to get DoD funds to do double duty by also supporting pacification and anti-inflation efforts.<sup>20</sup> Sadly, the similarities today are striking.

An important strength of the new ACC is its refusal to endorse the false dichotomy, which has emerged over the past few years, regarding how to balance resources between a so-called conventionally focused Army versus a COIN-centric one. The new Concept describes how "Army forces must be capable of conducting simultaneous actions – of both a military and a political nature – across the spectrum of conflict."<sup>21</sup> It recognizes that the political dimensions of war will permeate the full spectrum of conflict. It does not let labels (i.e. "hybrid," "irregular," "small") trump the

fundamental nature of war. It recognizes that, in order to win, Army personnel will be called upon to actively and persistently shape the political competition inherent to war.

## ENDNOTES

1. Michael Howard, *The Invention of Peace*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 1-2.

2. These four categories of military activity are identified in the Joint Capstone Concept.

3. See Richard Schultz and Andrea Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias: The Warriors of Contemporary Combat*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

4. *Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-0, The Army Capstone Concept: Operational Adaptability – Operating Under Conditions of Uncertainty and Complexity in an Era of Persistent Conflict, 2016-2028*, Fort Monroe, VA: Headquarters, Department of the Army, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, December 21, 2009, p. 15, available from [www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/pams/tp525-3-0.pdf](http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/pams/tp525-3-0.pdf). (Hereafter ACC.)

5. *Ibid.*

6. For example, see Colonel William Ostlund, "Tactical Leader Lessons Learned in Afghanistan: Operation Enduring Freedom VII," *Military Review*, July-August 2009.

7. Kimberly Kagan, unpublished paper, "III Corps AAR," May 5, 2008, cited in *Army Capstone Concept*, Draft, Washington, DC: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, September 21, 2009, p. 51.

8. Quote by Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, in Christopher Griffin, "A Working Plan: Hope Isn't the Only Strategy For Afghanistan," *Armed Forces Journal*, April 2007, available from [www.afji.com/2007/04/2587549/](http://www.afji.com/2007/04/2587549/).

9. *Ibid.*

10. To put the resources behind this civilian initiative in perspective, in 2009 the Civilian Stabilization Initiative requested some \$250 million to strengthen civilian capacity to manage and implement reconstruction and stabilization related tasks (which included the funding for the active, standby, and reserve Civilian Response Corps across eight different agencies). The entire Corps however, is envisioned to be about 250 active members (who would be deployed within 2-3 days), a standby component of 2,000 additional members, and a 2,000-member reserve.

11. See Nina M. Serafino, *Department of Defense, "Section 1207," Security and Stabilization Assistance: Background and Congressional Concerns*, Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, June 3, 2009, available from [www.roa.org/site/DocServer/CRS\\_DoD\\_Security\\_and\\_Stabilization\\_4\\_Jun\\_09.pdf?docID=17541](http://www.roa.org/site/DocServer/CRS_DoD_Security_and_Stabilization_4_Jun_09.pdf?docID=17541); and DoD *Authorities for Foreign and Security Assistance Program: A Comparison of the FY 2010 House and Senate Armed Services Defense Authorization Bills*, Washington, DC: The Henry L. Stimson Center, Stimson Budgeting for Foreign Affairs and Defense, July 20, 2009, p. 2, available from [www.stimson.org/budgeting/pdf/FY2010\\_House\\_and\\_Senate\\_Armed\\_Services\\_Defense\\_Authorization\\_Bills.pdf](http://www.stimson.org/budgeting/pdf/FY2010_House_and_Senate_Armed_Services_Defense_Authorization_Bills.pdf).

12. Robert Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict*, Boulder, CO, and London, UK: Westview Press, 1986, p. 149.

13. See Kurt Amend, "The Diplomat as Counterinsurgent," *Foreign Service Journal*, September 2009, p. 22.

14. See Susan R. Johnson, "President's Views: Mind the Gap: Addressing FS Readiness," *Foreign Service Journal*, December 2009, p. 5.

15. Available from [frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111\\_cong\\_bills&docid=f:h2410rfs.txt.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_bills&docid=f:h2410rfs.txt.pdf).

16. ACC, p. 20.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

18. EISENHOWER CONCERNED OVER HIS CIVIL ADMINISTRATOR'S DIVIDED RESPONSIBILITY (Msg, Eisenhower to Marshall, 19 Sep 42, OPD Msg files, CM-IN 8213), in Harry L. Coles and Albert K. Weinberg, *U.S. Army in World War II, Special Studies. Civil Affairs: When Soldiers Become Governors*, Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1992, available from [history.army.mil/books/wwii/civaff/ch02.htm#b5](http://history.army.mil/books/wwii/civaff/ch02.htm#b5).

19. Komer, p. 94.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

21. ACC, p. 27.

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