

**THE IRAQ WAR:  
LEARNING FROM THE PAST,  
ADAPTING TO THE PRESENT,  
AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

**Thomas R. Mockaitis**

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## FOREWORD

The Iraq War has been the subject of heated political debate and intense academic scrutiny. Much argument has focused on the decision to invade and the size of the force tasked with the campaign. While these factors have contributed to the challenge of counterinsurgency operations, so has the American approach to unconventional war.

Taking full account of the factors beyond the control of the U.S. military and avoiding glib comparisons with Vietnam, this monograph examines how the American approach has affected operations. The author, Dr. Thomas Mockaitis, draws on the experience of other nations, particularly the United Kingdom, to identify broad lessons that might inform the conduct of this and future campaigns. He also documents the process by which soldiers and Marines in Iraq have adapted to the challenging situation and incorporated both historic and contemporary lessons into the new counterinsurgency doctrine contained in *Field Manual 3-24*.

The Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) is pleased to publish this monograph under SSI's External Research Associates Program.

  
DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.  
Director  
Strategic Studies Institute

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

THOMAS R. MOCKAITIS is Professor of History at DePaul University. As an adjunct faculty member of the Center for Civil Military Relations, he has co-taught several terrorism/counterterrorism courses and worked with a team of specialists to help the Romanian Army rewrite its civil-military cooperation doctrine. He has lectured at the U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College and the Canadian Forces Staff College, and presented papers at the Pearson Peacekeeping Center (Canada), the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (UK), and at conferences co-sponsored with the Military Science Department of the Austrian Ministry of Defense. A frequent media commentator on terrorism and security matters, Dr. Mockaitis has appeared on Public Television, National Public Radio, and various Chicago radio and TV stations. He appears regularly as a terrorism expert for WGN TV News (Channel 9). He co-edited *Grand Strategy and the War on Terrorism* (London: Frank Cass, 2003) with Paul Rich; and *The Future of Peace Operations: Old Challenges for a New Century* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), co-edited with Erwin Schmidl. He is the author of *British Counterinsurgency: 1919-1960* (London: Macmillan, 1990), *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1995), and *Peacekeeping and Intrastate Conflict: the Sword or the Olive Branch?* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999). Dr. Mockaitis earned a BA in European History from Allegheny College in Meadville, PA, and his MA and Ph.D. in Modern British and Irish History from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

## SUMMARY

Iraq confronts the U.S. military with one of the most complex internal security operations in history. It must occupy, pacify, secure, and rebuild a country of 26 million people with fewer than 150,000 troops organized and trained as a conventional force in predominantly heavy armored divisions. They occupy a land divided into two broad ethnic and three religious groups crisscrossed by hundreds of regional, local, and family loyalties. For the past 3 years, Iraq has been wracked by a Sunni insurgency augmented by foreign *mujahedeen* terrorists and complicated by general lawlessness. Growing intercommunal violence between Sunni and Shiite militias has taken the country to the brink of civil war.

Developing an effective strategy to counter such a complex insurgency would be challenging for any conventional force. However, the historical experience of the U.S. military compounds the challenge. That experience has engendered a deep dislike for all forms of unconventional war. This aversion naturally reflects American attitudes. Popular democracies have great difficulty sustaining support for protracted, open-ended conflicts like counterinsurgency. The Vietnam War strengthened this tendency and led the Pentagon to relegate counterinsurgency to Special Forces. These factors help explain both the difficulty the armed forces have had in conducting operations in Iraq and the growing impatience of the American people with the war.

Faced with a conflict they did not expect to fight and denied the resources, training, and requisite troop strength to fight it, however, the U.S. military

understandably has resented criticism of its efforts in Iraq. American troops have made the best of a difficult situation. They have adapted their methods to an evolving war, learned from their own mistakes, and even learned from the study of history. However, the counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq can benefit from further study of current operations and past campaigns. Such study may provide valuable lessons to inform the conduct of this and future campaigns.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The U.S. Military in Iraq faces the most complex internal security operation in its history. As the lead nation in a coalition whose other members, save the British, have contributed very small contingents, they must occupy, pacify, secure, and rebuild a country of 26 million people with fewer than 150,000 troops organized and trained as a conventional force in predominantly heavy armored divisions. They occupy a fractured state divided into two broad ethnic and three religious groups crisscrossed by hundreds of regional, local, and family loyalties. Historically, Iraq's diverse population has been held together first by colonial occupiers and then by a repressive dictatorship, both of which used a minority to dominate the country. The influx of foreign *mujahedeen* to fight "the infidels" further complicates the situation. Diverse insurgent and terrorist groups united by a desire to expel the coalition move through an urban landscape ideal for their operations and hide among a sullen population embittered by the failure of the occupiers to rebuild the country fast enough. In short, it is the insurgency from hell.

Crafting a strategy to counter such a threat would be challenging under any circumstances. The historical experience of the U.S. military and American culture make responding to it even more difficult. The Vietnam War soured the American military on the whole idea of counterinsurgency. Many considered

the war in Southeast Asia a wasteful episode fought under difficult circumstances with insufficient political support and far too much interference from on high. The conflict diverted valuable resources from the military's proper task of defending Western Europe and South Korea. In any case, the U.S. Army, with its preponderance of heavy divisions and commitment to maneuver warfare, seemed ill-suited to unconventional war. The Nixon Doctrine put counterinsurgency under the umbrella of "Low-intensity Conflict," which it relegated to Special Forces, who would advise and assist threatened governments as part of "foreign aid for internal defense."<sup>1</sup>

This aversion to irregular warfare naturally reflected American attitudes. Popular democracies have great difficulty sustaining support for protracted, open-ended conflicts like counterinsurgency. Indeed, they have difficulty sustaining any long, costly military effort unless the public perceives that the vital interests, perhaps even the survival of the nation, are at stake. Few low-intensity conflicts in support of allied states fit that bill, so the armed forces understandably seek to avoid them. The Vietnam War and popular reaction against it severely damaged army morale for perhaps as much as a decade.<sup>2</sup> The American public's low tolerance for protracted, unconventional conflict and the long shadow of Vietnam clearly can be seen in the initial response to the insurgency in Iraq. Strong support for the war declined soon after a swift victory and assurances of a speedy withdrawal gave way to a desultory struggle promising to last years. Comparisons with Vietnam began to appear in the popular media and academic journals, and rebuttals soon followed. One such exchange occurred in *Foreign Policy* between Andrew Krepinevich, a



leading authority on the Vietnam War; and Stephen Biddle, Senior Fellow in Defense Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations. Krepinevich argued vehemently that the United States was repeating the mistakes it had made Vietnam and could expect the same outcome unless the Department of Defense (DoD) changed its approach to the war.<sup>3</sup> Biddle argued just as passionately that the conflicts differed so fundamentally in nature that little from Vietnam could be applied to Iraq.<sup>4</sup> If American officers bristled at references to Southeast Asia, they also objected to comparisons between their counterinsurgency methods and those of other Western armies, most notably the British.

Faced with a conflict they did not expect to fight and denied the resources, training, and requisite troop strength to fight it, the U.S. military understandably has resented criticism of its efforts in Iraq. Since armed forces in a democratic society must fight the wars that they are given, not those that they would choose, American troops have made the best of a difficult situation. They have adapted their methods to an evolving war, learned from their own mistakes, and even benefited from study of historic conflicts. The conduct of counterinsurgency in Iraq can, however, continue to benefit from further study of current operations assessed in the light of past wars. Such assessment must begin with understanding the Iraq insurgency in all its complexity, proceed to an examination of the U.S. approach to countering it, and conclude with recommendations that may inform the conduct of the current campaign and guide future operations. A critique of the U.S. approach also must distinguish clearly between policy failures and military mistakes. Recommendations based upon history should distill broad principles from a range of conflicts and avoid trying to derive a template for victory from any single campaign or national approach.

## DEFINING TERMS

A public fed a steady diet of suicide bombings and general mayhem on the evening news may wonder at any ambiguity about the definition of insurgency. However, misunderstanding the nature of such conflicts has contributed considerably to mishandling them. For the first 3 months of the occupation, the U.S. Government dismissed signs of a growing insurgency as mere terrorism and/or sporadic violence by Ba'athist malcontents. Failure to recognize the true nature of the threat seriously hampered efforts to counter it and underscores the need to define clearly the type of enemy one faces.

### **Insurgency.**

Current DoD Doctrine defines insurgency as “An organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict.”<sup>5</sup> This definition covers virtually any form of political violence, fails to delineate the type of “armed conflict” employed, and omits the important fact that in addition to subversion and armed conflict, insurgents also use terror as a weapon. Insurgency develops when a significant segment of the population feels alienated from a government that neither represents it nor meets its needs. Insurgents use propaganda to persuade these disaffected people that replacing the current regime will improve their lives. When this *subversion* succeeds in eroding popular support for (or at least tolerance of) those in power, insurgents can begin to use *guerrilla warfare* against the government and its institutions. Insurgent guerrillas are the military wing of the political movement. They

operate out of uniform using hit-and-run tactics against police, administrators, and small military units. After an operation such forces melt away, disappearing back into the civilian population where most hold jobs and live normal lives. While insurgent guerrillas will attack small units and isolated outposts, they avoid confronting large forces equipped with superior fire power. Guerrilla tactics generally have two objectives. They sap the strength of a regular army (in the same way that fleas weaken a dog through the anemia caused by their bites) until they can defeat it in conventional battle.<sup>6</sup> They also aim to provoke the government into retaliating indiscriminately, harming innocent civilians in the process and so increasing popular support for the insurgents.

Although threatened states often label guerrilla warfare as *terrorism*, the label is not accurate. Guerrillas generally do not attack civilians indiscriminately, concentrating instead on the security forces of the government they oppose. Insurgents, however, will make limited use of terror to further their political goals. They employ “agitational” terror against the government and its supporters, attacking public buildings, assassinating politicians and civil servants, and damaging infrastructure. They also employ “enforcement” terror to keep their own supporters in line.<sup>7</sup> In both cases, the insurgents seek to create the impression that they can strike whenever and wherever they wish. Those killed and maimed are the props in a macabre form of theater whose real target is the audience that watches the violence.<sup>8</sup> Compared to attacks by organizations such as al-Qai’da, insurgent terror is relatively restrained. A movement seeking to win support of a population will try to avoid inflicting mass casualties.<sup>9</sup>

Insurgencies have taken many forms and in some cases followed prescribed theories of revolution. Mao Tse-Tung's primer on guerrilla warfare is the most famous. Based on the Communist takeover of China, Mao saw revolution progressing through distinct phases from subversion through mobile war. The Chinese Communists based their insurgency firmly on the country's vast rural population, leading Mao to describe insurgents as fish swimming in a sea of peasant support that eventually would drown the cities.<sup>10</sup> Mao's theory became the blueprint for Communist-led, anti-colonial "wars of national liberation." For example, Ho Chi Minh applied Mao's approach successfully in driving the French from Indochina.

In the post-colonial world few insurgencies have gained enough strength to defeat an established government. This realization has led many to pursue a somewhat different strategy. Under certain circumstances insurgents can provoke the security forces into committing atrocities on such a scale that a foreign state or an alliance of powers will intervene on the insurgents' behalf. This strategy worked brilliantly in Kosovo, where the Kosovo Liberation Army baited Serbian military and paramilitary forces into yet another round of ethnic cleansing. Horrified by similar atrocities they had witnessed in Croatia and Bosnia during the previous decade, the Western alliance had had enough. Led by the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) went to war with Serbia and forced its withdrawal from Kosovo. Final status talks indicate that the province probably will be given its independence. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) thus had succeeded even though it could never have hoped to defeat the Serbian army.

Even when insurgents fail to take over a country, they can improve the conditions of their people.

Although the Basque insurgent organization, Fatherland and Liberty (ETA in the Basque language), did not gain independence for its province, it did extract valuable concessions from the Spanish government, including a greater degree of local autonomy, official use of the Basque language in the province and consideration of Basque culture and institutions. The *Fabrundo Martí* National Liberation Front failed to topple the Salvadoran government, but it opened up the democratic process in El Salvador, forced scrutiny and, as a result, improvement of the government's human rights record, and ultimately became a legitimate political party. The Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) failed to unify Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland but succeeded in improving the living conditions for Catholics and in guaranteeing them a share in political power.

### **Counterinsurgency.**

As the prefix "counter" suggests, counterinsurgency includes all measures taken to defeat insurgency. However, as the late Sir Robert Thompson aptly noted, a state that merely reacts to an insurgent threat faces defeat. To be successful counterinsurgency must be based upon a comprehensive, pro-active strategy. Since insurgency usually derives from bad governance, a threatened state must first get its own house in order. Economic privation in the midst of grossly inequitable distribution of wealth has been a major source of discontent feeding revolution. Once it addresses economic and social issues, the government can then turn to political grievances.

While addressing the causes of unrest that fuel the insurgency, the state also must take military and police

action against the insurgents. The manner in which it conducts offensive operations can make or break the counterinsurgency campaign. Since insurgents hide within a sympathetic or at least acquiescent population, the temptation to retaliate against entire communities can be hard to resist. However, indiscriminate use of force invariably will make a bad situation worse. Civilians punished for aiding insurgents whom they have no real power to resist may be turned from reluctant participants into enthusiastic supporters. Every errant bomb or misdirected shell creates more insurgent supporters.

Focusing the right amount of force precisely on the insurgents requires accurate intelligence. As British General and counterinsurgency expert Sir Frank Kitson observed, defeating insurgents consists “very largely in finding them.”<sup>11</sup> Accurate information on the insurgents’ organization, membership, and intentions allows the security forces to operate in a focused and discriminating manner. Such information usually comes not from coerced confessions or even spies, but from disaffected members of the insurgency or its erstwhile supporters. The hearts-and-minds campaign links indirectly to offensive operations by encouraging cooperation. Persuaded that the government is addressing their needs and convinced that it will protect them, ordinary citizens may come forward with information that allows the security forces to develop an accurate picture of the insurgents’ organization, membership, and intentions. Disillusioned insurgents may even be enticed to defect, especially if they receive amnesty and perhaps modest monetary rewards.

If counterinsurgency is difficult for a threatened state, it is even more complicated for a foreign government supporting that state, a role the United States often has

played. Providing “foreign aid for internal defense,” the doctrinal category that includes counterinsurgency, historically has put American advisors and, in some cases, troops in the unenviable position of supporting some very oppressive regimes.<sup>12</sup> They have had to train, equip, and otherwise assist militaries whose behavior contributed to the insurgency in the first place. Threatened regimes often have been able to resist U.S. demands for reforms that would have eroded their privileged positions because they understood that U.S. strategic interests outweighed the American commitment to human rights. No matter how effective they may be, counterinsurgency methods will not redeem bad governance. U.S. personnel can improve the quality of the indigenous security forces, but they cannot convey legitimacy upon a regime that does not enjoy the support of its own people. If anything, they will be seen as accomplices to the illegitimate government and become targets themselves. The case of El Salvador illustrates this point. U.S. advisors viewed with alarm the human rights record of the Salvadoran military, but could do little to improve it because the Salvadoran government knew perfectly well that the Reagan administration placed a higher priority on combating Communism than it did on promoting human rights or social justice.<sup>13</sup>

The ambiguity of assisting a threatened state with internal defense plagues U.S. operations in Iraq as well. Indeed, the American presence is even more problematic than it was in El Salvador. Not only does the United States support a government struggling to gain legitimacy, but also in the eyes of many Iraqis and the larger Arab world, it actually installed that regime as an American client. Desire to expel the “occupiers” unites many insurgents who have little else in common.

## HISTORIC PATTERNS AND OUTCOMES

Insurgency has been one of the most persistent types of conflict since the end of World War II. The period 1945 to 1960 experienced a particularly intense concentration of such wars coinciding with the process of decolonization. Insurgencies broke out periodically in the post-colonial era as well, and a host of unconventional operations following the end of the Cold War challenged conventional armies in ways similar to the classic counterinsurgency campaigns. Insurgency and counterinsurgency have been studied so thoroughly that past conflicts need not be reviewed here except in the most general terms. Insurgents won most of the anti-colonial wars owing to a combination of European weaknesses and international opposition to imperialism. During the post-colonial era, victory most often went to the side that could attract external support (e.g., the Salvadoran government in the 1980s and the KLA in the late 1990s).

The approach of one nation, however, deserves closer attention because it has yielded better results. Before examining the British approach to counterinsurgency in greater detail, however, it is worth reiterating that this approach does not offer a panacea for handling internal conflict. The British suffered serious defeats in Ireland (1919-21) and Palestine (1944-47) and made serious mistakes in all their wars. The United States will not, therefore, win in Iraq by asking "GI Joe" to become more like "Johnny Brit." The accidents of history did, however, give the British army a wealth of counterinsurgency experience that, carefully analyzed, can increase understanding of the Iraq war and perhaps suggest some adjustments to conducting it.



## THE PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF BRITISH COUNTERINSURGENCY

Although the British have enjoyed considerable success in countering insurgencies from Malaya to Northern Ireland, their approach has become quite controversial in recent years. American officers have been barraged with ungenerous, over-simplified, and often glib comparisons between their supposedly ineffectual methods in Vietnam and the allegedly superior British approach employed in Malaya. Similar comparisons between the British army's handling of Basra and the U.S. military's alleged mishandling of the far more challenging Sunni triangle have made American officers understandably resistant to what they see as "more British tripe." Several misunderstandings must be addressed before considering what, if any, methods from British counterinsurgency campaigns can be applied to Iraq.

To begin with, the "British Approach" is not uniquely British. Virtually every nation that has managed an empire, formal or otherwise, has had experience with insurgency and at least some success in combating it. French General Maxim Weygand's pacification of Morocco and the U.S. Marine Corps' campaign in Nicaragua during their interwar period offer two cases in point. The Marines in particular developed extensive counterinsurgency experience in Latin America before World War II, much of it preserved in the U.S. Marine Corps' *Small Wars Manual*.<sup>14</sup> This excellent work defines an approach similar to that found in Britain's *Notes on Imperial Policing* from the same period.<sup>15</sup> Armed forces, however, are shaped by the preponderance of their historical experiences. For the French and the Americans, that experience has been conventional.

The British Army for much of its history has been more of an imperial police force tasked with maintaining order and later combating insurgency within a global empire.

Furthermore, despite their considerable success, the British have not discovered a silver bullet for defeating insurgents. Their record, though impressive, contains some stunning defeats. From 1919-21, the IRA conducted a highly successful campaign against a much larger British force that grossly mishandled the insurgency. They alienated the general public with heavy-handed tactics, had poor intelligence, and committed atrocities. The treaty under which the British withdrew from what became the Irish Free State favored London, but as one historian of the conflict observed, it could not be denied that “great power had been defied.”<sup>16</sup> The British also withdrew from the Mandate of Palestine following an unsuccessful campaign against Zionist insurgents prior to the creation of Israel (1948). In this case, the “defeat” owed less to flawed counterinsurgency methods than it did to an untenable political situation. Numerous mistakes did, however, dog the British campaign against the Greek Nationalist Organization of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA from its Greek initials, 1954-59), although it ultimately succeeded in suppressing the revolt. Finally, British forces withdrew from Aden in 1967, following a desultory and largely unsuccessful counterinsurgency campaign in South Arabia.

It also must be noted that Britain’s most successful counterinsurgency campaign in Malaya (1945-60) occurred under highly favorable circumstances that probably will never be repeated. In Malaya and elsewhere, British forces enjoyed an extraordinary degree of control over local populations and could

promulgate quite draconian Emergency Regulations with little domestic or international scrutiny. Critics of the British approach further note that its “victories” served as little more than holding actions to delay inevitable imperial withdrawal and perhaps hand over to pro-British successor governments.

These qualifications notwithstanding, few conventional militaries have had as much experience of insurgency or enjoyed as much success in countering it as the British Army. For most of the 19th and 20th centuries, the British engaged in a continuous series of border skirmishes, internal security operations, and full-scale counterinsurgency campaigns. They conducted these operations in a variety of settings throughout an empire covering a quarter of the earth’s land surface and encompassing 25 percent of its population. Out of this diverse and extensive experience, the British fashioned a flexible approach based on three broad principles: minimum force, civil-military cooperation, and decentralization of command and control.<sup>17</sup> British success has continued beyond the colonial era. One of its most spectacular successes came in Oman (1970-75), where British contract and loan officers in cooperation with Special Air Service (SAS) teams assisted the Sultan of Oman’s Armed Forces in defeating a Communist-led insurgency in Dhofar Province. Following a rather slow start characterized by serious mistakes, the British Army has performed well during the 30-year conflict in Northern Ireland. The army also adapted its counterinsurgency experience to the task of *Wider Peacekeeping*, as the new United Nations (UN) humanitarian interventions of the 1990s came to be called.<sup>18</sup> The British contingent in NATO’s Kosovo Force has performed better than most of its counterparts in the difficult task of internal security and rebuilding.<sup>19</sup>

The efficacy of British counterinsurgency also has been demonstrated in Iraq. During their initial occupation of Basra, British forces relied on excellent urban warfare tactics learned in Belfast and Londonderry and called on fire support only when they could do so with minimal risk of civilian casualties. When in doubt, the Brits walked softly. For example, they infiltrated two-man sniper teams into the city. These units targeted highly visible Ba'ath Party members, killing few people but having a profound psychological effect on the enemy.<sup>20</sup> As one analyst with extensive experience of the British Army has noted:

Thirty years of engagement with the Irish Republican Army, in the grimy streets of Northern Ireland's cities, has taught the British, down to the level of the youngest soldier, the essential skills of personal survival in the environment of urban warfare and of dominance over those who wage it.<sup>21</sup>

Once they occupied the city, United Kingdom (UK) forces took immediate steps to win the trust of local people. They removed their helmets and flak jackets to mingle with the crowd and later as the city remained quiet withdrew their armored cars as a gesture of good faith.<sup>22</sup> The British later engaged the Mahdi Army in some tough battles, but they always adjusted force protection and tactics as the situation dictated. Their approach contrasts markedly with the initial American tactic of "reconnaissance by fire," in which troops drove through hostile areas hoping to draw out the insurgents. "If we get one round of incoming fire," a U.S. soldier observed, "We will put down 3,000 before we even dismount from our vehicles."<sup>23</sup>

Building trust has been easier because of the more pragmatic approach the Brits have taken to

reconstruction. Based once again on experience garnered in maintaining an empire, the British determined that establishing and maintaining law and order should be their first priority. They then restored electricity and reopened schools and hospitals. The British also showed a willingness to work with whoever would cooperate with them, regardless of past political affiliation. This pragmatism contrasted markedly with the Americans' ideological approach characterized by a zero-tolerance policy for former Ba'athists and a commitment to building democracy above all else.<sup>24</sup>

The British do, however, occupy a smaller and far less challenging sector of Iraq than do the Americans. They also have experienced serious failures including allegations of abuse of Iraqi civilians by British troops. These reservations, however, do not diminish the value of what can be learned from the British approach. Based on broad principles applied in a flexible manner, British counterinsurgency has proven quite adaptable. A clear distinction, however, must be made between methods and principles. No single blueprint could be applied to Malaya, Oman, Northern Ireland, Kosovo, and Iraq. Copying specific tactics from one campaign and applying them slavishly to another almost certainly will result in failure. South Vietnamese efforts to create new villages based on the Malayan model led to the ineffective Strategic Hamlet program. Even British victories included colonial methods best not repeated. Unfortunately, critics latch on to past mistakes or objectionable tactics from a single campaign to dismiss the British approach entirely.<sup>25</sup> Tactics, however, change with time and circumstances while the principles from which they derive endure.

## **The British Approach.**

British counterinsurgency developed out of a unique legal framework and more than a century's experience handling civil unrest. At the core of the British approach lay the common law principle of "aid to the civil power." English common law requires anyone to aid the civil authorities when called upon to do so and makes no distinction between soldier and civilian. During a state of war, British forces do not operate in aid to the civil power and are subject to the Mutiny Act (the equivalent of the Uniform Code of Military Justice) and international agreements such as the Geneva Convention. Internal conflicts, however, occur under conditions in which civil authority still operates. This legal framework had profound implications for the conduct of internal security operations ranging from riot to full scale rebellion.

To begin with, "aid to the civil power" put the civilian authority firmly in control of handling unrest. A magistrate typically would request troops to quell a disturbance and provide general guidance for their employment. He would not exercise tactical control of the troops, but the military would be held accountable for its action under ordinary civil law. Quelling temporary disturbances such as riots proved to be relatively straitforward. Full-blown insurgencies presented a more complex challenge requiring the civil authorities to be in close partnership with the military and police. This partnership resulted in a comprehensive approach that addressed the causes of unrest while countering its violent manifestations.

"Aid to the Civil Power" also placed significant restrictions on the military. Like police and those called upon to assist them, soldiers were bound by the

Common Law principle of Minimum Force. According to this principle, soldiers could use just enough force to achieve the immediate effect of stopping violent unrest in a particular location. Following the infamous massacre at Amritsar, India, in 1919, General Reginald Dyer faced disciplinary action not because he opened fire on an illegal meeting, but because he continued firing after the crowd had begun to disperse. As long as the offenders were British subjects, soldiers had to exercise restraint when facing unrest ranging from riot to insurgency. "There is, however, one principle that must be observed in all action taken by the troops," one field manual instructed, "No more force shall be applied than the situation demands."<sup>26</sup> A legal principle, of course, could not prevent excesses from occurring, but it did have the desirable effect of subordinating use of military force to a broader political strategy aimed at addressing the causes of unrest and winning the hearts and minds of disaffected people.

Winning hearts and minds has become a much maligned, often misunderstood concept that conjures up images of soldiers building playgrounds for smiling children, diverting personnel and resources from their proper task of fighting wars. A hearts-and-minds campaign, however, consists of soberly assessing what motivates people to rebel and devising a strategy to address the underlying causes of unrest. In most cases, discontent stems from bread-and-butter issues. Lack of jobs, decent housing, electricity, running water, health care, and education can motivate people to accept or even actively support insurgents. Once their basic needs have been met, however, people may desire political freedoms, the absence of which also can fuel an insurgency.

Realization that rebellion demands a political solution, combined with the legal limits placed on

the amount of force the military could use, led the British to develop a comprehensive approach to counterinsurgency. Soldiers and police (collectively dubbed “security forces”) provided a shield behind which political, social, and economic reform took place. Improving living conditions and a growing conviction that the government would win encouraged ordinary people to provide intelligence on insurgent activity. This intelligence in turn allowed the security forces to take the offensive. Successful operations, combined with generous amnesties and even monetary rewards, enticed insurgents to surrender, producing more intelligence leading to further success.

Combining the various elements of the British approach into a coherent and effective counterinsurgency campaign required a mechanism of coordination. During the Malayan Emergency, the British developed a committee system at district, state, and federal level. At the local level, these committees consisted of the District Commissioner (a civil administrator), the Chief of Police, and the commander of troops in the area (usually a lieutenant colonel commanding a battalion). The High Commissioner and Director of Military Operations (a joint appointment), Sir Gerald Templer, insisted that committees meet at least once a day, if only for “a whiskey and soda.”<sup>27</sup> The system worked well in Malaya and could be adapted to a variety of situations right up to and including Northern Ireland and Iraq.

The British facilitated cooperation with the police and civil authorities through extended military postings. Dubbed “framework deployment,” this approach kept units in a specific local for extended periods rather than moving them around. Soldiers, like policeman on a beat, got to know an area intimately. They met the



locals, learned who belonged in their neighborhood and who did not, and developed good relations with community leaders. This prolonged contact sometimes yielded valuable intelligence on the insurgents.

The British approach to counterinsurgency did not offer a panacea. The British made serious mistakes even in successful campaigns and experienced significant failures. Some insurgencies cannot be defeated even with the best of methods, as the British learned in Palestine (1945-47) and South Arabia (1963-67).<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, the British have a better track record in counterinsurgency than any other nation. They have adapted what they learned in half a century of colonial conflicts to the post-colonial tasks of peace operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. Their approach properly understood and appropriately adapted can provide lessons applicable to Iraq, Afghanistan, and future conflicts.

## **IRAQ IN CONTEXT**

The most intransigent of colonial insurgencies, of course, pales by comparison with Iraq. It still, however, is worth considering the degree to which the lessons of past campaigns can inform the conduct of the current one. Without engaging in a now pointless argument over whether or not the invasion was justified, understanding the context in which it occurred is essential to assessing the U.S. response to the subsequent insurgency. Such an assessment in turn may lead to recommendations for refining that response and for improving the American approach to counterinsurgency in general.

Only in the broadest sense can contemporary Iraq even be considered a modern nation-state. Carved out

of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the British Mandate (under the League of Nations) of Iraq incorporated diverse ethnic groups within boundaries drawn by the European powers at Versailles. The British had strategic interests to protect and promises to keep. While they had no desire to trap a large Kurdish minority within their Mandate, they very much wanted control of the oil rich regions of Mosul and Kirkuk in the heart of Kurdistan. They also owed a considerable debt to Faisal, the Sharif of Mecca, who had supported the Arab Revolt led by T. E. Lawrence during the war. The McMahon-Hussein letters of 1915 had promised that the Sharif's son, Abdullah, would receive one emirate based in Jerusalem and his son, Faisal, would receive another in Damascus. Unfortunately for all concerned, the British also had pledged to the Zionist movement support for "a national homeland for the Jewish People in Palestine" and promised the French control of Syria and Lebanon.<sup>29</sup> Because of these irreconcilable promises, Abdullah had to settle for the newly created Emirate of Transjordan with its capital in Amman (he later became king of Jordan). His brother, Faisal, ruled briefly in Damascus before being turned out by the French and, quite naturally, turned to the British for compensation.

Faisal seemed the answer to British problems in Iraq. Following a bloody revolt in 1920-21, the colonial power sought to rule indirectly. As a leader of the Arab Revolt, a member of the Prophet's family, and a British ally, the Saudi prince seemed the ideal choice to govern Iraq.<sup>30</sup> He was, however, also a Sunni Muslim and inclined to appoint Sunnis to important posts, to the chagrin of the Shiite majority.<sup>31</sup> Working with a minority group who would depend completely upon their colonial masters was, however, a time-honored

tradition which the Turks had used previously in Iraq. Sunni dominance would persist throughout the country's troubled history. The monarchy ended in 1958 with a bloody coup, succeeded by limited democracy, which quickly degenerated into first one party rule by the Ba'athists and then into dictatorship by their strongman, Saddam Hussein. Throughout these regime changes the Sunni population maintained relative ascendancy over the other ethnic groups. They thus would have the most to lose in a truly democratic country.

The demographics of contemporary Iraq reflect the fractured nature of the state. Arabs make up 75-80 percent of the country's 26 million people; Kurds, 15-20 percent; and Turcoman, Assyrians, and "others," 5 percent. Religion further divides the population. While 97 percent of Iraqis practice Islam, the majority (60-65 percent) belong to the Shiite tradition, a minority sect in the larger Muslim world. Although Sunni Arabs and Kurds belong to the predominant Sunni branch of Islam, ethnic animosity divides them. Kurds suffered inordinately at the hands of Saddam Hussein. Other than a shared resentment of Sunni Arab domination, the more secular Kurds have little in common with their Shiite countrymen, many of whom would prefer a theocratic state under control of their religious leaders.<sup>32</sup>

Iraq's broad ethno-religious categories, however, are not monolithic. Two large and several smaller factions divide the Shiites. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is the official leader of Iraqi Shiites, but Muqtada al-Sadr commands a significant following in the South. While Sunni Arabs tend to be less observant than the Shiites, many have become radicalized through contact with foreign *mujahedeen* and their own radical

clerics. If this dizzying array of ethnic and religious affiliations were not complicated enough, the spider web of family, clan, and regional loyalties beneath it further complicates the human landscape of Iraq. A complex and variegated social network of tribes, lineages, and *khamseh*s (vengeance groups) underlies the broad religious and ethnic divisions within the country. Class distinctions, the inevitable cronyism of a one party, dictatorial regime and the hardships created by an international embargo, invasion, and the ensuing destruction of Iraqi infrastructure exacerbate these historic rifts.

In addition to being complex, Iraqi demographics have proven to be quite dynamic. The last year has seen a decided shift to broad ethnic/religious affiliations. From the outset of the occupation, the Kurds have pushed hardest for regional autonomy and would probably favor partition. Sectarian violence seems to have weakened, if not destroyed, many kinship ties that crossed the Sunni-Shiite divide. Should the Iraqi conflict escalate from insurgency to civil war and partition become a more attractive option to all parties, the country would face a situation not unlike that of India and Pakistan in 1947. Many mixed areas and enclaves would make partition difficult and bloody.

The physical geography of the country has been no less challenging to those trying to govern Iraq than its human landscape. The country occupies 437,000 square kilometers at the crossroads of Middle East politics and conflict. The arid or semi-arid nature of 80 percent of this land constricts the population to a dense band of settlement along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, a concentration which explains the overwhelmingly urban nature of the insurgency. Iraq's 3,650 kilometers of border abut two of America's

most intransigent foes in the region, Syria and Iran, through sparsely populated, difficult-to-control regions. Members of the same Bedouin tribes straddle the Syrian border adjacent to troublesome Anbar province. The Shiite south shares an equally porous frontier with neighboring Iran, and Iraqi Kurdistan borders Kurdish regions in Syria, Turkey, and Iran. Supplies for coalition forces must come to Baghdad via air or over thousands of kilometers of roads north from the port of Um Qasr in friendly Kuwait.<sup>33</sup>

### **Unfolding Conflict.**

The development and course of the insurgency stemmed in large measure from the manner in which the U.S.-led coalition planned and conducted the invasion of Iraq and subsequently occupied the country. For the purpose of analysis, the conflict to date can be divided into four phases: preinvasion planning, the invasion itself, the first year of occupation (April 2003-April 2004), the period from April 2004 to February 2006 (the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samara), and the period from that bombing to the present. During these phases, the insurgency took root and evolved according to its own internal dynamic and in response to U.S. actions.

### **Planning and Invasion.**

While the decision to invade Iraq will be the subject of considerable debate for years to come, the manner in which the invasion occurred undeniably shaped the insurgency that followed. Failure to persuade the UN, NATO, and many of its allies to join the coalition deprived the U.S.-led operation of legitimacy and,

more importantly, troops. During the first Gulf War a truly international coalition mustered half a million men and women for the more limited task of liberating Kuwait. Now the United States planned to invade and occupy Iraq with a force of 130,000 American and 25,000 British troops.<sup>34</sup> Many U.S. officers questioned Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's claim that the smaller force could, in fact, do the job. Then Chief of Staff of the Army General Eric Shinseki told Congress that many more troops would be necessary, not to defeat the Iraqi army but to stabilize Iraq following the mission. Asked to be more specific, the General responded, "I would say that what's been mobilized to this point, something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers."<sup>35</sup> The White House disputed this assessment, Shinseki retired soon after testifying, and the mission went ahead as planned. Rumsfeld and the Commander of Central Command, General Tommy Franks, planned and conducted the invasion based on two assumptions: that the Iraqi military would put up little resistance and that the U.S. military would not take the lead role in the post-hostilities Phase IV of the operation.<sup>36</sup> The first assumption proved correct, the second wildly optimistic.

These assumptions shaped planning for the post-invasion period. The possibility of a protracted insurgency received scant attention, as did the catastrophic impact of general lawlessness.<sup>37</sup> Lack of planning for an insurgency combined with the shortage of troops had immediate repercussions and long-term consequences, allowing the insurgency to take root and helping to keep it going ever since. The collapse of Saddam's regime produced not the expected rush of enthusiastic Iraqis willing to accept responsibility for self-government but an enormous power vacuum.

American forces faced pillaging, looting, settling of vendettas, and other forms of lawlessness that they were ill-equipped, untrained, and ultimately unable to prevent. The release of thousands of criminals by Saddam on the eve of the invasion contributed to the chaos. Numerous accounts document how this state of lawlessness turned a potentially supportive population into a resentful and potentially hostile one. The assessment of journalist Richard Engel, who entered Baghdad before the invasion and remained in place through its immediate aftermath, captured the prevailing situation:

There can be no doubt that most Iraqis in Baghdad were genuinely delighted that the Americans ousted Saddam Hussein . . . It's profoundly disappointing, how quickly the Iraqis' joy and appreciation turned to frustration and in some cases hatred of the Americans. I heard the first anti-American rumblings in Baghdad only 1 day after the statue [of Saddam] came down. The main problem was the shameful looting that broke out as Baghdad collapsed, and the American's utter inability to stop it. Many Iraqis have subsequently accused the U.S. forces of being unwilling to stop the looters, even of encouraging them, although this isn't true.<sup>38</sup>

The fact that U.S. forces did manage to protect the Oil Ministry no doubt encouraged the belief that they could have maintained law and order had they wished to do so, and that Washington cared more about Iraqi oil than about Iraqi people.

#### **April 2003-April 2004.**

*Nature of the Insurgency.* Not only did the United States fail to prepare for an insurgency, it took several months to even recognize that an insurgency actually

was occurring, and even longer to admit it to the American public. While soldiers on the ground had a more realistic understanding of what was developing, the administration dismissed the escalating violence as the work of regime diehards who soon would be defeated. By the summer of 2003, it became difficult to deny that something far more serious was afoot. Even then, Washington persisted in describing attacks on coalition forces and cooperative Iraqis as mere terrorism.<sup>39</sup> The delay in acknowledging the threat allowed the insurgency to take root, making it far more difficult to eradicate.

Even when U.S. forces became aware of the danger, they had great difficulty putting together a coherent picture of the insurgent order of battle. This failure stemmed in part from poor intelligence but also from the complexity of the insurgency and its continuing evolution. One observer has aptly dubbed Iraq “a compound insurgency” in recognition of the multiple organizations and movements united around the common goal of expelling the Americans.<sup>40</sup> The enemy is a hydra with numerous heads and no single center of gravity. To further complicate matters, the insurgents have changed their tactics over time, constantly adapting, usually staying one step ahead of the coalition, and frequently provoking them to behave in a fashion that broadens and deepens support for the insurgency.

During the first year following the U.S.-led invasion, the insurgency remained largely within the Sunni Arab community supported by foreign terrorists, although serious fighting between the coalition and the radical Shiite cleric, Muktada al Sadr, also occurred. The Sunni insurgents (initially at least) represented a variety of groups and interests. In a report written for the United



States Institute of Peace, Professor Amatzia Baram of the Haifa University, Israel, divided the insurgents into three broad groups: the secularists, the tribes, and the Islamists.<sup>41</sup> The secularists consist primarily of former Ba'athist regime members and their supporters. Contrary to popular belief, these disaffected people had little love of Saddam Hussein, but do resent the loss of lucrative jobs and worry about their place in a Shiite dominated Iraq. Some 30,000 of them have been removed from positions and/or forbidden from entering public service. Family members and associates who benefited from these sinecures magnified the size of the disgruntled population several times over. To make matters worse, many of the former Ba'athists had been dismissed from the army and so possessed military training and even weapons.<sup>42</sup>

Although the word "tribe" has become politically incorrect, in Iraq it aptly describes networks of people interrelated through kinship and patronage-client relationships. Some tribes resent not only loss of government jobs but also the lucrative smuggling trade the United States interrupted in its efforts to secure Iraq's borders against terrorist infiltrators.<sup>43</sup> Tribal norms make an offense against one family member an attack upon all, particularly if the aggrieved party is a tribal leader. The repercussions of slights, real and imagined, have an enormous ripple effect through time and space.

"Islamism" is a broad reform movement committed to returning Islam to its roots. Its most radical proponents call for the removal of the secular, "apostate," regimes that govern many Muslim countries. Islamists also would rid their world of immorality as most clearly manifested in a popular Western culture that seems to condone promiscuity, drugs, and alcohol. They would

return the Muslim world to their vision of the *uma* or community of the 7th century, the time of the Prophet Mohammed and his immediate successors. Although Islamism is not inherently violent, its more extreme practitioners do advocate violence against infidels and apostates, non-Muslims and Muslims not following the teachings of the *Quran*. Foreigners occupying Muslim lands and Muslims who support them have been primary targets of Islamist terror.

Baram divided Iraqi Islamists into moderates and radicals. Moderates found in Iraq's Mosques one of the few havens from Hussein's regime. Renewed faith in Islam provided what pan-Arabism and the Ba'ath Party could not, a sense of purpose and direction in a threatening world. While moderates fought the American-led occupation, they had little interest in conducting a global jihad. Although they feared Shiite domination, they did not oppose the Shiite sect of Islam per se. Radical Islamists, on the other hand, consider Shiites as idol worshipers and perpetrated the brutal murder of Shiite pilgrims journeying to the Holy City of Karbala in March 2003. Radicals of various theological persuasions cooperate with other insurgents to drive the Americans from Iraq but remain committed to global *jihad*. While moderates may be enticed to give up the struggle so long as their religious sensibilities are respected and their other needs met, radicals refuse to compromise.<sup>44</sup>

Native Iraqi insurgents received support, training, weapons, and funding from *mujahedeen*. These "holy warriors" flocked to Iraq to fight the American invaders just as their predecessors had flocked to Afghanistan in the 1980s to expel the Soviets. Thanks to the small size of the coalition force (relative to terrain and population) and the country's long, porous borders, these foreign

fighters have little difficulty getting into Iraq. Their leader, the Jordanian Abu Mu'sab al-Zarqawi, was a thorn in Washington's side from the outbreak of the insurgency until his death in June 2006. Whether or not Iraq was a haven for international terrorists before the war, it has certainly become one since.

Finding *mujahedeen* to fight and die for the Iraqi cause has proven very easy. Until the July 2006 Israeli incursion, southern Lebanon in particular was a fertile ground for recruitment. Hezbollah recruited young zealots, provided them with false passports at the cost of \$1,000 each, and sent them to Damascus from which they infiltrate into Iraq. The recruits received \$800 a month, three times the salary of an Iraqi policeman.<sup>45</sup> These recruits provided many of the suicide bombers the insurgents used with deadly effect. These *mujahedeen* would consider Christian occupation of any Muslim country illegitimate, but the manner in which the United States entered Iraq (without a UN mandate) made their cause more legitimate among many people in the region who might not otherwise have supported them.

Cooperation between radical Shiite Hezbollah and radical Sunni insurgents in Iraq, groups with seemingly antithetical worldviews, illustrate the depth of anger towards the United States in the Muslim world. Such cooperation, once deemed impossible, has been occurring for quite some time. Considerable evidence suggests that Lebanese Hezbollah cooperated with al-Qai'da to conduct the 1995 attack on the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia. The Shiite group also cooperates with Sunni Hamas in the struggle against Israel.<sup>46</sup>

Trying to determine the exact number of insurgents in any conflict is usually an exercise in futility. The number more often than not reflects the optimal number

of fighters for a given environment at a moment in time rather than real strength of the movement. Far more important than the number of active combatants is the degree of support they enjoy among the general population. The Provisional IRA tied down 12 British infantry battalions and a large police force for over 30 years with fewer than 500 insurgents at any one time. While they could never hope to defeat the security forces, they could persist indefinitely.<sup>47</sup> As long as they enjoyed the support of a sizeable proportion of the Catholic population and the tacit acceptance of the rest, they would have an inexhaustible source of new recruits. The solution to the conflict lies not in killing insurgents but in eroding their base of support.

Estimates on insurgent strength have varied widely and been constantly revised upward. Initial estimates put their number at 5,000; more recent assessments suggest as many as 20,000.<sup>48</sup> The range can be explained by two factors. First, the number of insurgents probably has increased over time. Insurgencies, like fires, often start small but spread rapidly. The longer they burn, the harder it is to put them out. Second, in the absence of good intelligence, estimates of insurgent strength often represent little more than educated guesses.

The diversity of insurgent groups makes generalizing about their intentions difficult. Sunni moderates focused on bread and butter issues and some guarantee that their rights as a minority community would be preserved. Former Ba'ath Party members initially wanted a return to power, but most came to realize the impossibility of that goal and seek to ensure the best political deal possible for themselves and their followers. Islamists wanted a state governed by *Sharia*, an outcome opposed by secular Sunnis and Kurds. Foreign *mujahedeen* fighting al-Qai'da's jihad

against the West seemed content to kill Americans and keep Iraq unstable. Because at the outset the U.S.-led coalition had no coherent counterinsurgency strategy to separate moderates from extremists, all insurgents united around the simple goal of expelling the invaders.

The insurgency, of course, has not remained static. Considerable evidence suggests that the distinctions Baram makes between various types of Sunni insurgents have become less important than the broader conflict between Sunni and Shiite Iraqis. Since 2006, violence has been increasingly sectarian. Foreign *mujahedeen* committed to global jihad appear to be giving way to local insurgents struggling to control Iraq. These local combatants may even have provided intelligence that led to the killing of al-Zarqawi, whom many considered to be liability in the new conflict.

*Insurgent Strategy and Tactics.* The various insurgent groups have a clear goal and a simple, effective strategy for achieving it. Whatever their differences, they all want the United States and its allies to leave Iraq. They know full well that they can never defeat coalition forces. They do not, however, need to do so to succeed. They need only undercut the political will to continue to the struggle. In a democratic society, support for a costly protracted war can only be maintained if a majority of people believe that the nation's vital interests, perhaps even its survival, are at stake. As fewer and fewer Americans see any point in continuing the occupation of Iraq, political pressure for withdrawal will increase. The insurgents thus can win if they can force a withdrawal before the Iraqi security forces become strong enough to maintain order. To accomplish this goal, the insurgents need only persist in their struggle. The decisive battle may take place,

not in the streets of Baghdad, but in the living rooms of America.

The insurgents have employed tactics eminently suited to achieving their political objective and adapted them as the insurgency has progressed. Initially they relied heavily on sniping, ambushes, and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). IEDs consist of conventional explosives detonated along convoy or patrol routes. The insurgents targeted American soldiers, particularly the more vulnerable Reserve and National Guard units. Their attacks had two objectives: to produce casualties and so erode domestic support for the war, and to provoke U.S. forces into overreacting to attacks. The insurgents deliberately operate within populated areas, knowing full well that the Americans will be blamed for the inevitable collateral damage caused by attacking them. Although U.S. forces have exercised considerable restraint in trying circumstances, the temptation of conventionally trained soldiers with little experience of irregular warfare to rely on overwhelming, sometimes indiscriminate firepower often proves irresistible. Commenting on the practice of shooting anyone who gets too close to his troops, one lieutenant observed, "It's kind of a shame, because it means we've killed a lot of innocent people."<sup>49</sup>

During the summer of 2003, the insurgents adjusted their tactics and their targeting. While they continued to go after U.S. military personnel, they also attacked foreign contractors, journalists, international organizations, and Iraqis who collaborated with the occupiers. They also made increasing use of suicide bombers. One devastating attack on the UN mission building in Baghdad in August killed the Chief of Mission and several of his staff, causing the UN to pull out of Iraq, just as the insurgents hoped it would.

Another car bomb destroyed the embassy of Jordan, a close American ally in the region. The insurgents also captured and beheaded American contract workers. As new recruits to Iraq's fledgling police force and army come on line, they too suffer devastating attacks. Iraqi employees of Western companies and their families risked death unless they resigned their positions.

In conducting these attacks, the insurgents were pursuing a very effective strategy, but one that carried with it certain risks. They hoped to make Iraq ungovernable, delay rebuilding of critical infrastructure, and prevent the emergence of democratic government. They calculated quite reasonably that most Iraqis would blame the United States for the abysmal living conditions into which they had sunk. However, in pursuing this strategy, they were the ones denying their own people better times. If the violence shifted from Iraqi on American to Iraqi on Iraqi, they might still lose the war. Initially, the gamble paid off. Americans remained the bad guys in no small measure because of how they handled the insurgency during its first phase.

*Initial U.S. Response.* The U.S. military response to the insurgency in Iraq has been profoundly shaped by preinvasion policy decisions, its own historical experience, and American culture. Despite some very promising initiatives and a genuine effort to make the best of an extremely difficult situation, these factors limited the effectiveness of the counterinsurgency campaign during its first year.

More than any other factor, the shortage of troops in Iraq has hampered the U.S. response. The decision to disband the Iraqi army and police and to ban former Ba'ath Party members above a certain rank from serving in the new Iraqi security forces and police,

which would have to be rebuilt from scratch, made an already difficult situation worse. It not only deprived the coalition of badly needed troops but also alienated Iraqis who had been guaranteed that they would be taken care of if they did not resist the invasion. General John Abizaid, Commander of U.S. Central Command; General David McKiernan, Coalition Land Forces Commander during the invasion of Iraq; and General Jay Garner, Bremer's predecessor, maintained that Iraqi soldiers could have been recalled to duty and argued vehemently for reconstituting elements of the army.<sup>50</sup>

The decision to disband the Iraqi security forces has become so controversial that Bremer has gone to great length to justify it. In his memoir, *My Year in Iraq*, Bremer argues vehemently that since the Iraqi armed forces simply had melted away, disbanding them was little more than a formality. He also claims that to have maintained Saddam's security forces in any shape would have been unacceptable politically.<sup>51</sup> Considerable evidence challenges the accuracy of Bremer's conclusion. Even if military units indeed had melted away, they could have been recalled as was done during the effort to retake Fallujah.<sup>52</sup> One panelist at a recent Strategic Studies Institute colloquium explained that a recall had been intended: "CENTCOM successfully encouraged soldiers to leave, but expected to recall them within 2 weeks. However, that never happened."<sup>53</sup> Certainly top commanders had to be removed, but at least some officers and many rank-and-file soldiers could have been recalled. Many of the recruits for the new Iraqi Army in fact had served in the old one. U.S. officers in the field further maintain that attacks on coalition forces increased significantly in the immediate aftermath of the dissolution order. They also reported considerable anger and frustration



among former Ba'athists with whom they had been working, actual friends turned into potential enemies by the decision. A tacit admission that the dismissal of former Ba'ath Party members indeed had been too sweeping came in April 2004 when the administration announced that it indeed would employ some of the very people Bremer had let go. While the debate over the disbandment order will continue for years to come, the preponderance of indirect evidence supports the contention of the soldiers that Iraqi forces could have been recalled and used to help maintain law and order during the early stages of the insurgency.

Along with removal of other civil servants from the Saddam era, the dissolution order laid off almost 500,000 Iraqis. To the soldiers who had heeded the call of U.S. commanders not to resist the invasion, this action seemed especially unjust.<sup>54</sup> At least some of these disillusioned veterans took their skills (and in some cases, even their weapons) into the ranks of the insurgents or the various militias. Bremer's decision contradicted the wisdom gained in rebuilding Japan and Germany after World War II. Although the allies removed prominent Nazis, they left the police force largely intact and even used former *Wehrmacht* officers to rebuild the *Bundeswehr* in the 1950s. The United States took a similar approach in occupied Japan. Ordinary Germans and Japanese did not, of course, perceive their security forces as representatives of a hostile ethnic minority actively oppressing them, as was the case in Iraq. Even so, had the Sunni-dominated police and military been restricted to the Sunni triangle, their presence might have helped reduce the general lawlessness that wracked the country. Disbanding the entire Iraqi state security apparatus in one fell swoop deprived the coalition of badly needed troops and police who spoke the language and knew the local people at a

critical juncture of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. This expertise could not be replaced easily or quickly.

Numbers matter in counterinsurgency even more than they do in a conventional war, in which technology can offset a troop deficit. A harsh arithmetic seems to correlate with success or failure in internal security operations. In Malaya and Northern Ireland, the British deployed approximately 20 members of the security force per 1,000 inhabitants of the threatened country. The same ratio applied to NATO deployments in Kosovo and Bosnia. In Somalia, which ended in failure, the coalition deployed only 4.6 troops per 1,000. In Iraq the ratio has been approximately 7 per 1,000.<sup>55</sup> Maintaining this 20 per 1,000 ratio in Iraq would have required the sustained deployment of over 500,000 troops, which critics have maintained could not have been done and might not have produced victory anyway.<sup>56</sup> Accepting the validity of this argument, however, further underscores the error in not securing the support of more allies before the invasion and of not reconstituting at least some security forces afterwards. The paucity of boots on the ground forced the Army and Marines to take a fire brigade approach to the insurgency during its first phase. Lacking the numbers to pacify and occupy all trouble spots, they moved troops around to quell disturbances. This approach displaces rather than defeats the insurgents, who simply move from the threatened area to a safer one. Al-Zarqawi and most of his followers slipped the noose in Fallujah only to pop up elsewhere. The inevitable collateral damage and civilian casualties caused by such operations increase rather than diminish support for the insurgency.

The troop shortage, combined with an historic overemphasis on force protection, had an additional adverse effect. American soldiers lived in fortified

camps or outposts, sallying forth only in armored vehicles or on heavily armed foot patrols. The emphasis on force protection developed out of the experience of Vietnam, where the Viet Cong used hugging tactics, staying close to U.S. forces to neutralize their air and artillery support. An overemphasis on force protection, however, can have the adverse effect of putting both physical and psychological distance between soldiers and the population whose trust they are trying to win. Men and women clad in flak jackets, helmets, and goggles driving around in armored humvees with fifty caliber machine guns reinforce the widely held belief that they are an alien presence in a hostile land.

Keenly aware of the enormous firepower that they possess, American commanders no doubt believed that they exercised considerable restraint during the first year of the insurgency. In relative terms, they certainly did. Forward air controllers made every effort to deliver bombs and missiles with pinpoint accuracy. Nonetheless, serious mistakes occurred, such as a missile aimed at a house supposedly occupied by insurgents that killed a prominent tribal leader, turning his followers against the United States. The insurgents repeatedly fired at Americans from the homes of innocent civilians, baiting them into indiscriminate retaliation. "The residents of the targeted neighborhoods understand the insurgents' trick," observed one reporter, "but it is the Americans they blame, as they blame them for drawing the insurgents' fire in the first place."<sup>57</sup> GIs also employed unhelpful tactics such as shooting at people holding cell phones (which can be used to detonate bombs), tossing grenades into houses to clear them, and shooting anyone coming to collect the body of a slain insurgent.<sup>58</sup>

Even when American soldiers did not kill, they often created ill will through heavy handedness and cultural

insensitivity. In one incident, a U.S. convoy driving up the wrong side of an Iraqi main street, horns blaring, encountered an Iraqi taxi driver. A soldier pointed an assault rifle at the terrified man and ordered him to back out of the street.<sup>59</sup> As one correspondent aptly described the situation:

We have broken down their doors, run them off the roads, swiveled our guns at them, shouted profanities at them, and disrespected their women--all this hundreds or thousands of times every day. We have dishonored them publicly, and within a society that places public honor above life itself. These are the roots of the fight we are in.<sup>60</sup>

Arab journalists corroborate the observations of Westerners: "When the average Iraqi sees American soldiers violating basic Iraqi values and norms of behavior on a daily basis, it creates a lot of resentment."<sup>61</sup> The numerous private firms who provide security for contractors sometimes behave with even less restraint and answer to no one except the companies that hire them.<sup>62</sup>

The accidental killing of innocent civilians should be understood not as malicious acts but as the inevitable behavior of over-extended and frustrated conventional war soldiers who lack the training, language skills, or cultural understanding to conduct counterinsurgency operations in Iraq. The same, unfortunately, cannot be said for the atrocities committed at Abhu Grab Prison. Neither the certain knowledge that very few Americans engaged in such behavior nor the punishment meted out to those who did could offset the adverse publicity caused by photographs of smiling GIs abusing prisoners.

Use of excessive force and cultural insensitivity alone do not explain support for the insurgency. They

certainly are not its primary cause. Like most disaffected people, those who support the insurgents do so for a variety of reasons. While some Iraqis back specific insurgent groups for ideological reasons, frustration and bitterness over the general climate of insecurity and their poor quality of life motivate many others. Sunnis in particular have experienced a significant change of fortune. While some relative decline in the standard of living inevitably would have followed the removal of Saddam and his henchman from power, at least some hardship has stemmed from U.S. occupation policies. Initial failure to mount an effective hearts-and-minds campaign has alienated people unnecessarily. Although this failure was primarily political, the remark of one senior officer suggests that the military bears at least some responsibility for this short-coming: “[I] don’t think we will put much energy into trying the old saying, ‘win the hearts and minds.’ I don’t look at it as one of the metrics of success.”<sup>63</sup>

Unemployment skyrocketed after the invasion, reaching 67 percent, due in large measure to deliberate U.S. policy.<sup>64</sup> In addition to the nearly 500,000 people laid off because of their connection to the previous regime, Bremer let go another 150,000 as an austerity measure.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, reconstruction efforts have not come close to absorbing the unemployed. Lucrative contracts almost exclusively have gone to Americans, while Iraqi firms have received little of the reconstruction capital flowing into their country.<sup>66</sup> While American firms do hire local workers, Iraqis who work for them face intimidation and threats against themselves and their families from the insurgents. Those who fail to heed insurgent warnings not to work with the Americans are murdered. The U.S. policy on issuing contracts created further problems because it precluded Russian

contractors familiar with Iraq's Soviet era energy grid from participating in the reconstruction effort.<sup>67</sup>

The reconstruction effort suffered not only from mistakes that might have been prevented but also from expectations that it unwittingly created. Keenly aware of America's impressive technology, vast resources, and awesome military power, Iraqis could not understand or accept the slow pace of reconstruction. Surely, they reasoned, the occupation forces could restore electricity, water, and services if they so desired. Clearly they must have some ulterior motive for not doing so.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to the absence of a coherent hearts-and-minds strategy, the U.S. counterinsurgency campaign also suffered from the perennial problem of micromanagement. While American forces can be quite flexible in conventional operations, the uncertainties of unconventional conflict combined with political aversion to casualties encourages an American cultural tendency for those in the upper ranks to provide precise instructions to their subordinates.<sup>69</sup> Since insurgent guerrillas and terrorists operate in small units as part of a flat organization, those who oppose them must operate in correspondingly small units to be effective. These units, usually led by a lieutenant or senior noncommissioned officer (NCO), must be free to take the initiative based on sound judgment and according to a broad strategy without constantly asking for instructions up the chain of command.

The tendency to adopt rigid, hierarchical systems is a deep-rooted American issue by no means unique to the military. However, the U.S. military's commitment to a fire-power maneuver-warfare conventional army coupled with its historical experience probably exaggerated this tendency, at least during the first phase of the insurgency. The sheer complexity of

a modern high-tech battlefield upon which over a hundred killing systems can be brought to bear requires significant coordination and considerable control from above. An advancing column of armor out of place by even a small distance risks friendly-fire casualties.<sup>70</sup> Useful as it may be in large-scale conventional battles, however, such tight control of operational units does not work well in counterinsurgency.

### **April 2004-February 2006.**

Perhaps as early as the fall of 2003 and certainly by the spring of 2004, the United States had come to recognize the nature of the insurgency and to develop a plan for dealing with it. The United States also advanced its political objectives for the country. An agreement among the members of Iraq's interim Governing Council on how to administer the country led the Bush administration to turn sovereignty of Iraq over to them on June 28, 2004. In October the Iraqis approved a new Constitution for the country, and in December they elected members of Parliament.

Political progress did not necessarily improve the security situation, but it did change the pattern of violence. U.S. forces continued to be targeted and even engaged in full-scale conventional operations against al-Sadr's Mahdi Army in August and to recapture Fallujah in November. The core U.S. strategy focused on rebuilding Iraqi security forces and gradually deploying them, first in support of, and ultimately to replace, coalition troops. Sensing the danger posed by this approach, the insurgents concentrated their efforts on disrupting the emerging political and security institutions. They focused more and more on killing Iraqis who volunteered to serve in the police or the army.

While the new Iraqi units were being trained, U.S. forces retained primary responsibility for internal security. In carrying out this mission, they developed or relearned effective counterinsurgency tactics and corrected many mistakes made during the first year of occupation. Given the opportunity, training, and support, American soldiers have proven themselves as effective as those of any other nation at counterinsurgency and better than most. Small unit operations and “framework,” deployment, and assigning units to Iraqi villages for long periods have proven effective. Troops had to be reassigned from conventional duties, and although those forming heavy armored units had the most difficulty adjusting, they too learned effective tactics.

A U.S. company deployed to the village of Salaam to protect Baghdad airport illustrates the new approach. “I know this village like the back of my hand,” the Company Commander observed. He chats with locals about prices in the local market and watches for signs of inflation. He secured a water pump for the village, dines with locals, and exchanges kisses with the son of the local Sheik. He also attests to how easily his efforts can be undermined by heavy handed tactics. When a C130 dropped flares to counter heat-seeking rockets and inadvertently set fire to crops, the Captain complained, “He’s burning my fields. I do not know why they do that.” He compensated villagers for their monetary loss, but they no doubt harbor lasting resentment as well.<sup>71</sup>

Elsewhere in Iraq, American units have received smaller, more lightly armored vehicles better suited to the urban environment. Experts also have called for a revival of the Combined Action Platoons (CAPs) used with considerable success in Vietnam. The CAPs



program stationed a squad of 12 marines in a village to train and support local militia to defend their homes. By living among the villagers for an extended period of time, the Marines won their trust. Hastily conscripted levies who receive limited training and serve alongside of, but separate, from U.S. forces do not perform as well as those in which Americans become a regular part of the unit, acting as a kind of leaven. While some effort has been made to deploy U.S. soldiers to mentor their Iraqi counterparts, too few have been deployed on this important duty. Only 4,000 American troops have been assigned to military transition teams to work alongside Iraqi units, and most of these operate at battalion level or higher instead of with company, platoon, or squad level where most counterinsurgency operations take place.<sup>72</sup>

This tactic closely approximates what the British have done for over a century. In Oman, for example, the British SAS units enjoyed considerable success raising, training, and leading local defense forces known as *Firqats*. These units defended their local villages, gathered intelligence on the insurgents, and even engaged in offensive operations. The key to success lay in demonstrating a long-term commitment to live with the local people until the war could be brought to a successful conclusion.<sup>73</sup>

### **February 2006-Present.**

The insurgency may have entered a third phase beginning in late 2005 when intercommunal violence between Shiites and Sunnis increased significantly. On November 18, suicide bombers attacked two Shiite mosques in the Kurdish town of Khanaqin, killing some 70 people. The situation escalated dramatically

with the February 23 bomb attack on the Golden Mosque in Samarra, one of Shiite Islam's holiest sites. Over a thousand people died in the wave of sectarian killings that followed. Since that attack, tit-for-tat murders have been an almost daily occurrence. Some of the murders clearly have been the work of Sunni and Shiite militias. In other cases, Iraqi police officers appear to have been involved. Implication of Iraqi security force members in sectarian violence brings to the fore a question looming in the background since the training of Iraqi units began: with whom does the loyalty of these new soldiers and police ultimately lie, the central government or their own faction leaders?

The U.S. approach to combating the insurgency continued to evolve, with troops applying improved tactics developed over the previous 2 years. In relatively calm areas, the Americans pulled back and handed over control to Iraqi units as these came on line. In the most contested areas, U.S. forces continue to bear the brunt of the internal security duties and to take casualties. Small unit tactics, constant patrolling, vigilance, and good fire discipline have become the norm, replacing less effective methods employed during the first year. Battalion and company commanders have made a concerted effort to learn from past counterinsurgency campaigns as well as from their own contemporary experience. Password-secured websites such as Army Knowledge on Line and *Companycommand.mil* provide forums for information-sharing. Officers who have served in Iraq share what they have learned with those about to deploy. They circulate briefings and recommended reading lists, which include works by Vietnam-era scholars such as British Counterinsurgency guru Sir Robert Thompson. Those who have served in Iraq stress the importance of understanding Islam,

being sensitive to local culture, and knowing at least some basic Arabic.

Despite marked improvements in counterinsurgency tactics, operations continue to suffer from the same shortage of personnel that has plagued the campaign from the outset. The coalition still lacks the requisite number of boots on the ground necessary to clear and hold insurgent-controlled areas. The frustrating, and at times enervating, task of incessantly patrolling the same troubled streets, taking casualties without seeing any visible improvement in the security situation, inevitably takes its toll on the soldiers. While the vast majority of them have maintained admirable discipline and shown considerable restraint under trying circumstances, a few have not.

On November 19, 2005, a Marine patrol on duty in Haditha lost one of its members to an IED. The troops were young, tired, and over extended, part of a company of 160 asked to keep order in a town of 90,000 with a strong insurgent presence. The death of a beloved corporal provided the proverbial last straw. The unit allegedly returned to the town that night, and in the morning delivered the bodies of 24 Iraqis, some of them women and children, to the local hospital.<sup>74</sup> An investigation is currently underway, but there can be little doubt that an atrocity of some kind occurred. Evidence that the Marines may have tried to cover up the incident has further undermined U.S. credibility. Another unit has been charged with summarily executing an Iraqi civilian, and a third group will stand trial for the rape of an Iraqi woman and the murder of her family for covering it up. These incidents probably are isolated, a handful of excesses that inevitably accompany counterinsurgency. Other evidence, however, suggests that they may be symptomatic of

more serious problems. As units prepare for their third rotation to Iraq, other strains are beginning to show. In August 2006, the Army recalled 300 members of the 172nd Striker Brigade home to Alaska from a year's tour of duty in Iraq and sent them back for another 4 months to deal with escalating violence in Baghdad. The soldiers had gotten to spend between 3 and 5 weeks with their families.<sup>75</sup> In 2005, more than one-third of West Point Graduates from the class of 2000 left the army after fulfilling their mandatory 5-year term, the second year in a row to see such declining retention rates.<sup>76</sup> And the divorce rate among army personnel doubled between 2001 and 2004.<sup>77</sup> Even the Marines have had to resort to mandatory recalls of inactive reservists because of an anticipated shortfall of 2,500 volunteers for Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>78</sup>

In the midst of these difficulties, however, U.S. forces experienced one of their most dramatic successes. On June 7, 2006, they conducted a precision air strike against a safe house Northeast of Baghdad, killing Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of al-Qai'da in Iraq. A series of raids on other locations accompanied this action, netting a wealth of intelligence on the insurgents. The Jordanian terrorist leader had been the most ruthless opponent of the United States and moderate Iraqis. Although the details of the operation that killed al-Zarqawi remain classified, a great deal can be surmised from official reports and public statements. Clearly, the United States got very precise intelligence on the al-Qai'da leader and his whereabouts, probably with the help of the Jordanians and quite possibly from other insurgents. This intelligence coup may have been the product of the new American approach to countering the Iraqi insurgency, or it may reflect the new phase into which the insurgency has entered.

Persuaded that their future lay with the government, ordinary Iraqis willingly may have provided the vital information on al-Zarqawi's whereabouts. On the other hand, indigenous insurgents may have decided that the foreign terrorist leader, whose indiscriminate killing alienated everyone, had become a liability in the internal sectarian power struggle and turned him in. These insurgents would be far more interested in gaining control of Iraq than in supporting the world Islamist revolution to which al-Zarqawi belonged.

### **An Effective Strategy?**

In November 2005, the White House published a *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, its first effort to articulate a comprehensive approach to countering the 2 1/2-year-old insurgency. The long delay in drafting such a statement testifies to an inability or unwillingness to recognize the nature of the conflict during its initial phase. Although the document represents a significant improvement over the initial approach to the insurgency, it still contains serious weaknesses that need to be addressed.

The *Strategy* clearly articulates a comprehensive, long-haul approach to counterinsurgency based on three broad tracks. The political track calls for *isolating* extremists from the general population who can be persuaded to support the new Iraq; *engaging* people outside the political process "through ever-expanding avenues of peaceful participation"; and *building* "stable, pluralistic, and effective national institutions." The security track calls for *clearing* areas held by the insurgents; *holding* these areas so that the insurgents cannot return; and *building* "Iraqi Security Forces and the capacity of local institutions to deliver services,

advance the rule of law, and nurture civil society." The economic track seeks to "restore Iraq's neglected infrastructure"; reform the country's economy "so that it can be self-sustaining in the future"; and "build the capacity of Iraqi institutions to maintain infrastructure, rejoin the international economic community, and improve the general welfare of all Iraqis."<sup>79</sup> Finally, the *Strategy* acknowledges that "victory will take time," although it does not even estimate how long the campaign will last.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to its obvious strengths, the *Strategy* has some glaring weaknesses. The document doggedly insists on seeing Iraq as the "central front in the global war on terrorism," even though few independent analysts understand the conflict in these terms.<sup>81</sup> In fact, treating Iraqi insurgents as synonymous with al-Qai'da terrorists makes it difficult to separate moderates from extremists, a stated objective of the *Strategy*. In addition, the document grossly oversimplifies the nature of the insurgency. Other than a reference to the "continued existence and influence of militias and armed groups, often affiliated with political parties," it does not even address these militias who often serve clan and religious leaders rather than political parties.<sup>82</sup> The strategy also fails to address growing sectarian violence and the prospect of a civil war along religious lines. Finally, while the document insists that the United States has no intention of imposing any particular form of government on Iraqis, many within the country and the wider Middle East believe that the Americans do seek to import their own version of secular democracy on Iraq.

These weaknesses notwithstanding, the *Strategy* offers a viable approach to countering the Iraqi insurgency. It includes key elements also found in

the British approach, though most notably omits any reference to minimum force. The major problem lies not with methods but with means. The stated objective to clear and hold territory can be little more than a platitude without the requisite number of troops to carry it out. U.S. forces understand what needs to be done but still lack the resources to do it.

### **Prospects and Outcomes.**

Predicting the outcome of an ongoing conflict is always tricky, but never more so than in a counterinsurgency campaign. The United States clearly has an effective strategy to defeat the insurgents and probably can produce the resources to implement it *if* the political will to stay the course in Iraq can be maintained. Actual operations and the trajectory of the conflict offer much encouragement. Outside the Sunni triangle and Anbar Province, the security situation has been improving, and much rebuilding of critical infrastructure has taken place. The political situation also has gotten better with the country's first democratically elected government in decades taking office. Growing sectarian violence that threatens to erupt into civil war combined with the increasing stress on U.S. forces could, however, undermine these accomplishments.

Recent operations in Baghdad reveal both the possibilities and problems of countering the Iraqi insurgency. In late July 2006, Iraqi and U.S. forces launched Operation TOGETHER FORWARD to clear and hold neighborhoods dominated by insurgents and militias. The operation calls for military units to establish order, restore vital services, set up advisory councils, and hand over control to Iraqi military and

police units.<sup>83</sup> This approach duplicates the oil-spot strategy employed during classic counterinsurgency campaigns in which forces secured areas and expanded control outward from them.<sup>84</sup> In theory, the plan should work *if* Iraqi forces can hold what U.S. troops have cleared. On paper at least, they have the numbers to do so. The Iraqi military now fields 133,160 and the police 165,200. However, the quality of these forces remains very uneven and their ultimate loyalty suspect. Observers continue to worry that more U.S. troops are “still being employed in offensive combat operations than in classic counterinsurgency tasks of protecting the population and denying its use to the armed opposition.” They continue to see too many “massive security operations . . . most notably the Fallujah offensive, [which] wreak indiscriminate damage, as opposed to the precision, intelligence-driven raids on specific buildings where insurgents have been found.”<sup>85</sup> These conclusions do not bode well for a successful outcome to the campaign. On a more positive note, Operation TOGETHER FORWARD has led to the capture of a top-tier al-Qai’da leader responsible for the February 22 bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra, creating a “serious leadership crisis” in the terrorist organization.<sup>86</sup>

Another encouraging development lies in the concerted effort the U.S. military has made to incorporate mistakes made and lessons learned from 3 years of very difficult counterinsurgency campaigning in Iraq. The Army’s new field manual, *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency*, contains an impressive compendium of theoretical wisdom, historical example, and practical advice. The manual emphasizes the primacy of a political as opposed to a military solution to the conflict and stresses unity of effort in combating the insurgents.



It also embraces decentralization of command and control (dubbed “Empower the Lowest Levels”) and asserts the need to keep the use of force “measured.” These lessons could have been derived from analysis of past campaigns, but others clearly derive from Iraq. In particular, the new doctrine highlights the importance of “Managing Information and Expectations.” Finally, *FM 3-24* warns the American soldier to “Prepare for a Long-Term Commitment.”<sup>87</sup>

This long-term commitment may be the decisive issue in the conflict. The real struggle for control of Iraq in fact may occur not in Baghdad, but in American living rooms. As mid-term elections approach and the American public grows less and less supportive of the war, pressure to withdraw probably will increase. Iraq will be an important issue in the November 2006 mid-term elections and may be the decisive factor in the 2008 presidential race. If calls to bring the troops home continue to mount, the insurgents may have cause to believe that they can win merely by persevering.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

No matter what its outcome, the counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq offers plenty of lessons that may inform the conduct of this campaign and can certainly improve the conduct of future ones.

### **Policy and Strategy.**

The obvious and most consequential mistake in Iraq has been the failure to anticipate the insurgency in the first place. The assumption that military victory would be followed by a quick restoration of order and a smooth transition to democracy precluded any

serious consideration of other contingencies. For the first year of the insurgency, the U.S. response was overwhelmingly reactive and ad hoc. In the future, any invasion plan should include preparation for a protracted internal security operation. Preparations should include not only a military strategy, but also a plan to prepare the American people for a protracted conflict. The experience of Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq clearly demonstrates that stability and support operations, nation-building, promoting democracy, and counterinsurgency take a very long time and significant resources to achieve. No administration should undertake such operations unless it can commit the resources and maintain the political will to support such a protracted mission.

### **Troop Strength.**

The unforgiving arithmetic derived from past campaigns and borne out in current ones makes clear that it takes tens of thousands of soldiers to defeat thousands or even hundreds of insurgents. Although not a hard and fast rule, the ratio of at least 20 members of the security forces per 1,000 inhabitants of a threatened state provides a sobering guideline. Even with the increasing availability of newly trained Iraqi units, the coalition has too few troops for the task of pacifying a country the size of Iraq. The decreased size of the post-Cold War U.S. military, its global commitments, and the difficulty of maintaining popular support for lengthy, repeated deployments argue strongly against American unilateralism. As the case of Kosovo clearly illustrates, coalitions (even with all of their problems) can be more effective than single nations at post conflict peace building. The United States has the best

conventional forces in the world, but several of its NATO allies have been far more effective at operations other than war. Their presence in Iraq has been sorely missed. The need for large numbers of boots on the ground also suggests the desirability of keeping indigenous security forces in being when occupying a country no matter what some of its members may have done in the past. At times pragmatism must trump ideology.

### **Hearts and Minds.**

The case of Iraq reinforces the wisdom of past campaigns. Counterinsurgency depends upon winning the trust and support of disaffected people. A threatened government and its allies must consider what those people actually want as opposed to what it prefers to give them. More often than not, people desire the basic necessities of life for today and at least the hope of an improved standard of living tomorrow. Lack of electricity, running water, adequate health care, schools, and jobs have turned many Iraqis first against the occupation and then against the new Iraqi government. Overemphasis on building political institutions, perhaps at the expense of rebuilding critical infrastructure during the first phase of the occupation hurt rather than helped the coalition cause. No election can take the place of basic necessities.

While the Army's brand new field manual espouses a much better approach to counterinsurgency than its predecessor does, it still elevates political goals above economic and social ones. Recognizing that preserving legitimacy lies at the core of an effective counterinsurgency strategy, *FM 3-24* defines legitimacy in terms of a functioning democracy that people accept

and in which they participate.<sup>88</sup> Equally important (and during a period of rebuilding, perhaps more so) is government's ability to deliver the vital services upon which civil society depends.

Soldiers, of course, do not make policy decisions or set reconstruction priorities. However, they do have to implement them. In working with locals to rebuild a war-torn country, military and civilian personnel should follow the same precept that guides doctors: at the very least, do no harm. During the first phase of the Iraqi campaign, the cultural insensitivity of some ordinary soldiers and even officers contributed to anti-American sentiment. Given valuable experience gained by the U.S. military in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, this behavior suggests that little effort has been made to learn from these earlier missions. Officers, NCOs, and enlisted personnel are now making a concerted effort to remedy this problem by learning as much as they can about local language and customs. However, overcoming damage done during the first year of the war will be difficult.

This ad hoc approach to learning about a country and its people should be replaced with formalized predeployment intercultural education and training, which most businesses provide employees relocating overseas. Basic knowledge of local norms and customs can prevent a lot of ill will in an occupied country.<sup>89</sup> Ironically, Special Forces and Foreign Area Officers have long placed great emphasis on cultural understanding. Regular units could benefit from the same education.

### **Civil Affairs.**

Civil Affairs (CA) units have been the most heavily taxed of all U.S. forces in Iraq. Tasked with spearheading rebuilding and community-relations efforts at

the local level, they need both excellent infantry training and a host of practical skills. The Army has chosen to house almost all of its CA capability within the Reserve component based on the reasonable assumption that these part-time soldiers often hold regular civilian jobs (police, fire, civil engineering) that give them valuable CA skills. Sound as this reasoning may be, it reinforces the notion that CA is a specialist field instead of the task of every soldier in a counterinsurgency campaign. Keeping the Army's only active CA battalion within the Special Forces Community reinforces that notion. Serious consideration should be given to expanding the number of regular CA units.

### **Use of Force.**

American troops in Iraq have tried to use force discriminately. During the first months of the insurgency, however, soldiers lacking experience and training for internal security operations too often fell back on their conventional war-fighting skills. Not being able to distinguish friend from foe amidst a sullen population and the feeling that they could not trust even the Iraqi security forces they were helping have tested the patience of many good soldiers with predictable and sometimes tragic results. Greater emphasis on training for urban counterinsurgency warfare with less reliance on heavy fire support could improve the conduct of counterinsurgency operations.

A healthier balance between force protection and mission goals also could improve relations with the local population. Appropriate force protection measures should not be decided by politicians or academics living in relative comfort far from the battlefield. Neither should they be a one-size-fits-all mandate dictated

from military headquarters. Unit commanders should be allowed some discretion in determining the level of force protection within their individual areas of responsibility. Flak jackets, helmets, and goggles offer some protection, but they can impede building good community relations, which may offer even greater security.

### **Decentralization of Command and Control.**

Force protection is not the only area in which officers and senior NCOs should be allowed to exercise personal judgment. Counterinsurgency consists largely of small unit operations in which critical decisions must be made at the tactical level with no time to ask back up the chain of command for instructions. These decisions involve everything from employing deadly force to accepting local hospitality. Such decisions cannot be micromanaged or scripted from a rigid doctrine or dictated in an operational memo. Considerable evidence suggests that U.S. forces have learned and are applying this valuable lesson, but the learning needs to be institutionalized. However, an over-bureaucratized command structure continues to create command and control problems and tie down badly needed troops in administrative duties. As one correspondent observed,

Even worse, in terms of wasted manpower, are the huge layers of military bureaucracy that have built up here. There is a four-star strategic command in downtown Baghdad, led by General George Casey, the ranking General in Iraq. Under Casey, there's a three-star command led by [Gen.] Chiarelli. Yet another three-star general, Lieutenant General Martin Dempsey, is in charge of Iraqi forces. There are thousands of soldiers in command staffs who labor over daily briefings and endless PowerPoint presentations.<sup>90</sup>

## **Doctrine.**

As already noted, U.S. military doctrine already has incorporated most of the recommendations discussed above. The degree to which this significant change in outlook can impact institutional culture and practice remains to be seen. "Ideas," wrote one prominent historian, "fight a grinding battle with circumstances."<sup>91</sup> In this case, the battle may be long and arduous, fought in the arenas of organization and training.

## **Organization and Training.**

Decentralization of command and control will only work if soldiers are trained adequately and educated in advance to use good judgment based on broad principles. Asking conventionally trained leaders to learn counterinsurgency on the ground will produce modest results at best and can lead to incidents like Haditha at worst.

Counterinsurgency education and training need not detract from preparations for conventional war. Indeed, many soldiers would argue that the same decentralization that is vital for counterinsurgency is highly desirable for conventional operations. In addition, training for small-unit tactics and urban guerrilla war, junior officers and NCOs should also receive cross-cultural education and perhaps even anti-bias training. Such preparation should not be viewed as an exercise in trite political correctness but as an opportunity to garner valuable, potentially life-saving information. When and wherever possible, the military might make better use of area expertise from the academic world.

Organization goes hand in hand with training. The U.S. military has been in a state of transition since the

end of the Cold War and is in the process of adopting an all-brigade structure. Whether this will make for a lighter, more mobile, more flexible force remains to be seen. Whatever force structure finally emerges from this transition, a greater percentage of the active units need to develop the capability to handle a range of unconventional operations up to and including counterinsurgency. Ideally, all soldiers should receive at least some training in these areas.

The army also would benefit from some adjustment of the prevailing culture under which one serious mistake can end a career. In such an environment, officers and enlisted personnel will tend to play it safe, ask up the chain of command for advice, and do everything by the book--especially when given difficult tasks in an ambiguous environment, which always occurs in counterinsurgency. Men and women should be evaluated based on the quality of their judgment, but they should not be punished merely for exercising it.

## CONCLUSION

Iraq has presented the U.S. military with its most serious challenge since the Vietnam War: a complex insurgency in which diverse organizations have cooperated to expel the invaders. Lack of a counterinsurgency strategy combined with inadequate troop levels compounded by an ill-advised decision to disband Iraqi forces allowed the insurgency to take root and spread. Following what many officers have described as a "wasted year" of ad hoc responses and serious mistakes, American troops have developed effective counterinsurgency tactics based on their own historical experience and that of other nations.



The British experience in particular provides useful guidance in shaping an effective approach. Despite improved tactics, U.S. forces continue to be hampered by a shortage of troops and the evolving nature of the insurgency. While they have the means and determination to win in Iraq, American troops still need the political backing for a protracted conflict. How long this political will can be sustained remains to be seen. Whatever the mission's outcome, Iraq can yield valuable lessons that may improve the conduct of future campaigns.

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