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Special Report

## U.S. Military Doctrine After the Long War



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**COIN in Iraq**

**COIN in Afghanistan**

**U.S. Military Doctrine  
and Strategy**

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# COIN IN IRAQ

- INSTITUTIONALIZING ADAPTATION: U.S. COUNTERINSURGENCY  
CAPABILITIES MUST IMPROVE 5  
BY JOHN A. NAGL AND BRIAN M. BURTON  
05 AUG 2008
- COUNTERINSURGENCY IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN: AN INTERVIEW WITH  
JOHN NAGL 7  
BY URS GEHRIGER  
18 SEP 2008
- MALAYA AND ALGERIA: LESSONS IN COUNTERINSURGENCY 12  
BY STEPHEN D. SKLENKA  
02 MAR 2007
- IRAQI FORCES WILL BOAST COUNTERINSURGENCY CAPABILITIES THE U.S.  
LACKS 15  
BY DAVID AXE  
19 SEP 2007
- ‘SENATOR’S SON’ A GOOD WINDOW INTO COIN 17  
BY THOMAS P.M. BARNETT  
08 MAR 2010
- MISREADING THE SURGE THREATENS U.S. ARMY’S CONVENTIONAL  
CAPABILITIES 19  
BY GIAN P. GENTILE  
04 MAR 2008
- THE LIMITS OF THE SURGE: AN INTERVIEW WITH GIAN GENTILE 21  
BY JUDAH GRUNSTEIN  
11 APR 2008

# COIN IN AFGHANISTAN

- KAPISA PROVINCE: A COIN CASE STUDY IN AFGHANISTAN 26  
BY JOSHUA FOUST  
31 MAR 2009
- ABU MUQAWAMA ON AFGHANISTAN: AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW EXUM 32  
BY JUDAH GRUNSTEIN  
29 JUL 2009

BEEFING UP COIN-LITE IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN 36  
BY HAIDER MULLICK  
11 DEC 2009

KNOWING WHEN TO WALK AWAY FROM AFGHANISTAN 38  
BY NIKOLAS GVOSDEV  
25 JUN 2010

## U.S. MILITARY DOCTRINE AND STRATEGY

COUNTERINSURGENTS IN THE HALLS OF POWER 41  
BY SPENCER ACKERMAN  
31 MAR 2009

THE U.S. ARMY'S DOCTRINAL RENAISSANCE 47  
BY JACK KEM  
14 OCT 2008

AIRPOWER AND SAVAGE WARS 53  
BY ROBERT FARLEY  
05 JAN 2011

THE RE-ENCHANTMENT OF NETWORK-CENTRIC WARFARE 56  
BY ADAM ELKUS  
22 JUN 2011

U.S. ARMY MUST DEFINE ROLE IN A FUTURE WITH NO ENEMIES 58  
BY ROBERT FARLEY  
28 SEP 2011

MILITARY POWER IN A DISORDERLY WORLD 60  
BY DAVID W. BARNO  
22 MAR 2011

ABOUT THE AUTHORS 63

ABOUT WPR 65

# **COIN in Iraq**



# INSTITUTIONALIZING ADAPTATION: U.S. COUNTERINSURGENCY CAPABILITIES MUST IMPROVE

BY JOHN A. NAGL AND BRIAN M. BURTON  
05 AUG 2008

The recent clashes in eastern Afghanistan thrust the “forgotten war” back into the public eye. At a time when admittedly fragile stability is taking hold in Iraq, it is also an important reminder that the need for improved counterinsurgency capabilities neither began nor will end there. The international effort to stabilize Afghanistan is in peril, and the United States and its NATO allies lack many of the resources required to effectively secure and reconstruct that war-torn country.

Against this backdrop, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s inauguration of the [Civilian Response Corps](#) is a very welcome development. The demands of large-scale counterinsurgency and reconstruction in Afghanistan and Iraq are increasingly clear: The United States must integrate civilian reconstruction expertise with military force in conflict zones. Ad hoc measures, like the establishment of the civil-military Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and Iraq, were an important step towards creating this capability but are an incomplete solution. Recent State Department-led initiatives, which include the establishment of the Civilian Response Corps as well as the [Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization \(CRS\)](#) and the [Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative](#), represent an effort to establish effective civilian control of the political, economic, and social dimensions of nation-building operations.

The military have taken major strides in adapting to counterinsurgency, offering lessons for the State Department and interagency community. The military assesses its capacity based on a framework known as “DOTMLPF”: Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership, Personnel, and Facilities. CRS and the Civilian Response Corps are key organizational frameworks for building the interagency’s capacity, but they must be supported and empowered by inputs to the D, T, M, L, P, and F of DOTMLPF. A few critical next steps bear mentioning.

The [Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual](#), published in late 2006, provides the military with an effective operational concept for its role in counterinsurgency and nation-building. Now other agencies must follow suit. As Harvard scholar Sarah Sewall has noted, the military’s counterinsurgency doctrine is like a “moon without a planet to orbit” because the rest of the US government has not developed clear operational-level interagency guidance for these missions. The State Department is leading the development of an interagency counterinsurgency doctrine, but the current document is a self-described “work in progress” and too thin on operational prescriptions. Building this a national counterinsurgency capability requires the expertise of other agencies, such as the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Transportation and Justice; these agencies will have to develop their own doctrines for how to best employ their unique expertise in conflict environments.

Military training has been revamped in response to the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, with units rotating through training centers featuring role-playing to simulate actual conditions. Civilian agencies deploying personnel to Iraq, Afghanistan, or other conflict zones must be put

through similar types of training, as well as courses to ensure survivability and interoperability with military personnel in areas where combat may still be fairly intense.

Clearly, a minimum number of personnel is required to be effective, and the 250 who comprise the “active component” of the Civilian Response Corps is probably insufficient for major nation-building operations. The State Department as a whole lacks the manpower to deal with large-scale nation-building operations, requiring more funding and more outreach for recruiting. At the same time, these personnel must be the right people for the job. The State Department has made a tremendous effort to staff its embassies and PRTs in Afghanistan and Iraq, but having a core group of trained individuals who are specifically selected and trained to work in non-permissive environments would make those efforts much easier and more effective.

The military has invested a lot into its bases and training centers to prepare its personnel for their missions. The civilian agencies should cooperate among themselves and with the military to share and create new facilities to train personnel for nation-building and counterinsurgency operations. A combined civil-military academy to train and educate advisors to develop the capacity and capabilities of host nations to defeat insurgencies by themselves is an urgent need.

The intensified struggle in Afghanistan demonstrates the need not just for more troops, but for more money and more training to provide greater stabilization and reconstruction assistance. The Civilian Response Corps represents an important organizational step forward, but the United States government must fill out the rest of its “DOTMLPF” checklist before it can claim to have a national counterinsurgency capability. □

# COUNTERINSURGENCY IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN: AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN NAGL

BY URS GEHRIGER  
18 SEP 2008

John A. Nagl, 42, is a senior fellow at the [Center for a New American Security](#). He is a retired Army lieutenant colonel, a veteran of both Operation Desert Storm and the current conflict in Iraq, and was one of the writers of the [Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual](#). He is also the author of “[Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife](#),” published in 2005. In that book he uses archival sources and interviews to compare the development of counterinsurgency doctrine and practice in the 1948-1960 Malayan Emergency with the strategy used in the Vietnam War. Urs Gehrigier of the Swiss weekly Die Weltwoche recently spoke with Nagl about the success of Gen. David Petraeus’ counterinsurgency tactics in Iraq, and what needs to be done to successfully implement them in Afghanistan.

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**It is now widely recognized that the surge in Iraq was a success. Even Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, originally a staunch opponent of the surge, recently said it “. . . succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.” You have visited Iraq recently. What is your impression?**

I also would have to say the surge succeeded far beyond my wildest imagination. I am thrilled. Gen. Petraeus sent me to Iraq for a 10-day visit in July and August. The progress was remarkable, incontrovertible and some of it may be irreversible. There is a huge and very positive change.

**What are the reasons for this change?**

Victory has a thousand fathers, and the success of the surge has a thousand causes. Certainly the new counterinsurgency strategy Gen. Petraeus implemented by focusing first on providing security to the population, the additional troops he had with which to implement that strategy, the tribal outreach we both took advantage of and encouraged, the Sunni awakening, and the “Sons of Iraq” flipping from fighting with al-Qaida to fighting against al-Qaida, and the subsequent decision by Sadr and the Shia militias to renounce armed violence and take political action to achieve their objectives -- all of those things factor in to the success of the surge. I would say that the mental construct that Gen. Petraeus had of how to counter an insurgency was the single most important factor. He understood what he was trying to accomplish in a different way than his predecessors did and he took advantage of opportunities as they became available to him.

**Victory has a thousand fathers, you say. You are certainly one of them. You co-authored the Counterinsurgency Field Manual in 2006. For almost two years this strategy has been implemented on the ground in Iraq. What are the most important lessons to be learned?**

I would contest your claim that I was one of the fathers; I would say that I was an uncle twice

removed. The lessons learned are: You have to protect the population first. And learn and adapt. What Gen. Petraeus and his team did in Iraq over the past two years was those two things. They focused first on protecting the population. But they also had a flexible and agile mindset that constantly evaluated where they were and what they wanted to accomplish and tried to figure out the best way forward based on the continually evolving situation on the ground. And it was that mindset that allowed Petraeus' team to take advantage of things like the Sunni Awakening through outreach to the tribes.

**There is growing evidence that the Sunni tribes reached out first. Why were Gen. Petraeus' predecessors not ready to take advantage of tribes' willingness to cooperate?**

It appears that Gen. Casey actually changed his position on tribal engagement. He started some tribal engagement late in 2006 with the Sunnis. In particular Col. Sean McFarland did so in Ramadi. What Petraeus did was take advantage of the work that had been done by a number of people including Gen. Casey to flip the Sunni tribes. And that is probably the single most important factor. Once the Shia no longer needed any militias to protect themselves against the Sunni insurgents, violence dropped dramatically. And that's where we are now.

**Some back in the U.S. have been using the word "victory." Do you expect the war in Iraq soon to be over?**

No happy dancing in the end zone. There is still very much a fight going on in Mosul. The remnants of al-Qaida in Iraq are fighting us in Mosul. The two battalion commanders on the ground there, Lt. Col. Chris Johnson with 1-8 Infantry, Lt. Col. Keith Barclay with 3/3 Armored Cavalry Regiment, still have a fight on their hands. I am confident that they will succeed. The critical fight now is for political progress from the Iraqi government, particularly in terms of reconciliation with the Sunnis, that matches the military success we've had on the ground. I'm reasonably confident that we will see that political progress over the next year as long as we continue to provide security guarantees in Iraq.

**The focus now is shifting back to Afghanistan, where security has been deteriorating for a number of years. What has to be done?**

The good news is: We are now winning in Iraq. The bad news is: We are not winning in Afghanistan. The fact is that we have not had the level of thinking about the Afghan campaign that we have about the fight in Iraq. And we need that desperately. It's time to encourage good hard thinking and doing about the war in Afghanistan.

**Are there lessons from Iraq you can apply in Afghanistan?**

History doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes. The principles of counterinsurgency that we put in the first chapter of the Counterinsurgency Field Manual can also be applied to the fight in Afghanistan. The lessons don't transfer directly, but the principles continue to apply. The first thing we have to do is secure the population in Afghanistan. To do this we need more troops on the ground. Now we are standing in front of the dike and we got 10 fingers and 10 toes and one nose and we have been trying to fill 30 holes. The first thing you got to do is get enough people to fill the holes and then you can start building the dike up stronger.

**Both candidates for the White House speak of a troop reinforcement of two to three brigades. Can more American boots on the ground alone turn the tide and stabilize the country?**

In the short term they have to be American troops. But in the long term to succeed in this fight they have to be Afghan troops. Secretary of Defense Gates made an incredibly important decision a few weeks back when he decided to double the size of the Afghan National Army. We need to put lots and lots of resources into training and equipping and recruiting and organizing and growing



the Afghan National Army because this is our exit strategy.

**The war in Afghanistan is set in a totally different arena than the one in Iraq. Where do you see the biggest challenges?**

Afghanistan is a much harder problem than Iraq was. First the world needs to understand this. And it has to understand how important it is that we all succeed in creating a stable Afghanistan. We have a bunch of things that are not going well there. The chain of command is convoluted. National caveats on what forces can do are not helpful. I understand that NATO signed up for a different level of responsibility in Afghanistan. It didn't look like it was going to be an active counterinsurgency campaign, but it is. Afghanistan is an important testing ground for NATO and its member states. NATO is not passing that test right now.

**Compared with Iraq, two major differences stand out: geography and opium. How can an effective counterinsurgency best address these problems?**

One has to bear in mind that Afghanistan has never in its history had a strong central control of the country. It has never had the infrastructure that is required to reach out from Kabul into the whole country. The challenge in Afghanistan is extraordinary. When the Romans faced an insurgency in a distant province the first thing they did was build a road. And a key part of our counterinsurgency in Afghanistan is building roads so the government is able to reach the people. Then it is important to defeat corruption and create a government that is responsive to the needs of the people. The opium problem finances the insurgency and incites corruption from government agents. The road answer also helps that: We can't convince farmers to grow wheat rather than opium unless they can ship the wheat to the market. In that terrain if you have to feed a family you can ship a whole lot more opium out on the back of a mule than you can wheat.

**Then there is the long border to Pakistan and the tribal wilderness behind it where insurgents group, train and launch their attacks into Afghanistan. What is the best way to deal with this problem?**

We really have to think of Afghanistan not as a problem in itself but in conjunction with Pakistan. The Pakistan problem is huge and growing. The combination of the two is perhaps the greatest midterm national security threat the world faces today. The next U.S. president is absolutely going to devote significant time and resources to that challenge. What we need is a combined strategy for both countries. And this strategy has also got to include India. I believe the United States and NATO should play a key role establishing confidence-building measures between India and Pakistan because Afghanistan is in some way a proxy war between those two countries. And establishing good governance, expanding the reach of the Pakistani government into the tribal areas of Pakistan is a challenge just as great as expanding the reach of the government in Afghanistan, but we are much less able to control it.

**President Bush signed an order in July authorizing new rules of engagement that allow U.S. troops to pursue insurgent targets across Afghanistan's 1,500-mile long border with Pakistan. Do you consider such cross-border missions as an indispensable part of a counterinsurgency strategy?**

It is impossible to kill or capture your way out of an insurgency. Although cross-border raids can be tactically effective, they come with significant political costs that must be weighed carefully. In general, except against the highest-value targets, they should only be conducted in conjunction with forces of the country in which the operation happens.

**The recent spate of U.S. strikes under the new rules has provoked sharp condemnation from top Pakistani government and military officials. Do you see other effective ways to solve the cross-border insurgent problem?**

Ultimately, defeating any insurgency requires the support of a capable host nation government and its own security forces. This is the long term answer in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, as well as in Iraq. Efforts to build the capacity and capability of the Afghan and Pakistani governments are the first order of business.

**The Taliban recruit generally from local Pashtun tribes. The Pashtun fighters have a reputation as proud and extremely determined fighters who have never in hundreds of years surrendered to a foreign power. How can you either defeat them or win them over to your side?**

Insurgents vary in degree of commitment to their cause. I like to think of an insurgency as an onion, with many different layers. It took us a long time in Iraq to understand that we could peel away the top layers of the insurgency, which were not as committed to the cause as those further inside, through negotiations and accommodations. It's only the very core of the insurgents who will not negotiate and must be captured or killed. In Afghanistan, we are fighting Pashtun nationalists, members of the Taliban, and terrorists from al-Qaida. We need a different strategy for each group, as each wants different things and will accept different inducements. There are a lot of similarities in my eyes between the Pashtuns in Afghanistan and the Sunnis in Iraq: fierce fighters who we were able to flip by exploiting fissures between them and their nominal al-Qaida allies.

**The Taliban have had some important victories on the propaganda front. Their attacks are broadcast on the Internet and via Al-Jazeera. Recently the French weekly "Paris Match" shocked the nation by publishing photos in which the murderers of a French commando parade in the uniforms they stripped off the dead soldiers. How does a counterinsurgency strategy plan to deal on the propaganda front?**

In the new Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, we discuss six different logical lines of operation that must be pursued simultaneously to defeat an insurgency: conducting combat operations to provide civil security; building host nation security forces; establishing essential services for the population; providing good governance; and encouraging economic development are five of those lines of operation. But the most important, the line of operation that encompasses all of them and is ultimately decisive, is conducting effective information operations. This is the most important of all tools in defeating an insurgency, and it is the area we currently do least well. There is enormous room for improvement in information operations -- and a real opportunity to dramatically change the situation on the ground when we begin conducting them more effectively. Any counterinsurgency operation is ultimately a war over support of the population. We can win that war if we fight both harder and smarter, using all of the tools at our disposal.

**You have repeatedly emphasized both in public and in meetings with military leaders that in counterinsurgency the key to success is largely with small groups of U.S. military advisers. You called for an advisory strategy with a total of 20,000 combat advisers. What makes the role of an adviser so important?**

I spent the last 18 months at Fort Riley, Kansas training what we call military transition teams, small groups of 11 to 16 American soldiers who embed inside Iraq or Afghan battalions, brigades, and divisions. These advisory teams are a wonderful resource. They bring with them access to some of things that America has an abundance of and that other countries don't have as much of: access to intelligence, the ability to analyze intelligence and use it effectively to target enemy forces in a counterinsurgency campaign, access to reconstruction funds, access to artillery, air support and medical evacuation, and perhaps most importantly the culture of training and discipline that are the hallmarks of American forces. These small teams of Americans have an influence out of all proportion to their numbers. This mission, known as "Foreign Internal Defense," is traditionally done by Special Forces. Unfortunately, demand for Special Forces exceeds supply, so we have to convert American conventional forces to do this mission. We have done this to date in a rather ad hoc fashion. I have recommended professionalizing the selection, the training and the employment of these forces.

**The idea behind this advisory strategy is T.E. Lawrence’s dictum: “Do not try to do too much with your own hands.” Do the old lessons of the legendary “Lawrence of Arabia” still apply?**

T.E. Lawrence is a role model for how to conduct the foreign internal defense mission. He had an appreciation for the cultures and the customs of the host nations, the Arab tribes, he worked with. Those lessons matter as we think about how to select, train and deploy our advisers. Those advisers have to have a real affinity for the forces they are working with. Based on hard experience, I have called it “Diarrhea Diplomacy.” You have to live with them. You have to eat their food to truly make them listen to your advice and for them to model themselves after you.

**A doctrine for an advisory mission is still not in effect. Why is that?**

Recently I have talked to a number of senior generals about this and asked this very question: “Why don’t you have any doctrine to this mission now that you have done it for almost seven years?” We are making progress, but it is not as fast as I would like it to be. Secretary of Defense Gates also believes that this is a very extraordinarily important mission, and he also believes that we can do it better.

**The coordination among NATO allies in Afghanistan has been difficult for a long time. Why?**

Winston Churchill said: “There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies and that is fighting without them.” This is not a new problem. But in Afghanistan it is grave. There is no common understanding in NATO what counterinsurgency is. The Dutch are writing the NATO counterinsurgency manual now. This is a good thing, but it’s a little late. It was Gen. Petraeus’ advantage in Iraq that he had this *fingerspitzengefühl* [intuitive sense], he understood the problem intellectually and instinctively. We are not at that point with all the countries in NATO. The U.S., too, didn’t have a very good understanding of counterinsurgency for a number of years. It’s a hard challenge and it takes a long time to figure out, but we can do more as an alliance and can put more emphasis behind building a common understanding of this problem. This will help to remove some of the national caveats, make it clear to all the nations involved what’s at stake and what it is going to take to win this fight. Counterinsurgency is a very hard kind of warfare. It isn’t peacekeeping. There is no peace to keep. You have to be willing to fight for the security of the population. And not all countries in NATO understand the problem and what we have to do to fix it.

**What are the next steps the U.S. plans to make in order to counter the growing insurgency?**

The United States is reconfiguring its command structure to increase unity of command, at least over American forces. U.S. Gen. David McKiernan is the new ISAF and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan commander. The key question is political will. Are the countries of NATO willing to give the commander support to the extent of being willing to conduct operations with far reduced national caveats and put their forces more directly into the line of fire to defeat a strong and growing insurgency?

**A number of NATO states are not willing to expose their troops on the front line. Do you see other opportunities for them to contribute more in this war?**

Absolutely. Afghanistan is the fifth poorest nation in the world. Dollars and euros are bullets in this fight. There is a whole lot more that we can do with economic development. Some of the countries that are not willing or not as able to fight on the front lines may be able to help. There is huge potential and a number of ways that they can contribute. They can help with information operations. They can build roads. They can train Afghan security forces. These are things countries like Germany could do more of. That would make a huge difference. But the key question, again, is political will and leadership. □

# MALAYA AND ALGERIA: LESSONS IN COUNTERINSURGENCY

BY STEPHEN D. SKLENKA

02 MAR 2007

As the U.S.-led coalition force enters its fifth year in Iraq, a look back at two pivotal insurgencies from the mid-20th Century provides crucial lessons for our future actions in Iraq. Both the British experience in Malaya and the French experience in Algeria contain exceptional insights that are worthy of reconsideration as we refine our counterinsurgency actions. Though they differed in some important ways, those two counterinsurgencies show how the basic aims of most insurgencies, and therefore the strategies needed to defeat them, are fundamentally the same. These similarities remain despite the technological modernization and profound advances in warfighting that have occurred since.

Both the British and the French recognized the indigenous populace as the center of gravity in their respective counterinsurgencies. The British commander, Gen. Gerald Templer, and the French commander, Col. David Galula, were both enlightened military leaders who eschewed the popular thought of the time that mandated the application of martial power to subjugate insurgents. Instead, both embraced a far more holistic attitude that acknowledged the necessity of having the indigenous populace achieve victory rather than relying exclusively on the interventional forces to accomplish that objective. What's more, both encouraged innovation from subordinates in pursuit of that goal.

"I am convinced that an essential prerequisite to the grant of independence of Malaya is the formation of an adequate Malayan Army to support the civil authority," Templer said.

He sought to create Malayan security forces that were truly representative of the people they were designed to serve. Among his most innovative -- and initially most controversial -- approaches was his insistence that native Malayan-Chinese be included among the local security forces. This deft maneuver not only gave a sizable minority within the Malayan population a stake in the success of the counterinsurgency and Malayan government, it also denied insurgent leader Chin Peng a critical base of support for his Malayan-Chinese Communist forces. In another brilliant and no less controversial move, he developed a plan that would bestow citizenship upon the hundreds of thousands of Chinese for whom Malaya was home. By providing local citizenry with a reason to accept his plans, he made them feel part of the process of national reconciliation rather than making them feel like the process was thrust upon them.

The French likewise attempted to deplete the ranks of the Algerian insurgent Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) loyalists by creating local projects that encouraged Algerian participation -- and paid them for their services. As with the British in Malaya, the French used this technique in Algeria to engender a sense of community among the citizenry, and payments to the locals fostered a subtle dependence that the people realized could not be replicated by the FLN. Galula was able to successfully isolate his village from the insurgents using this method, as well as a census to gain information about the locals, the establishment of schools and medical facilities, and other efforts

to develop the infrastructure of civil society.

Both the British and the French also recognized the importance of legitimizing government throughout each country. While buttressing central authority was always a priority for both, they appreciated the importance of simultaneously developing local government. Local government would not be merely “a useful tool” for the French, but would also serve “as the population’s lawyer and representative vis-à-vis the French authorities,” Galula wrote in “Pacification in Algeria: 1956-1958.”

Certainly, however, there were differences in the British and French strategies. The British recognized that military power had to complement and even be subordinated to the broader economic and political instruments required to defeat the Malayan-Chinese Communist forces. The French viewed the situation similarly, but did not subordinate military power to the degree the British did. In addition, the French struggled with translating their recognition of proper strategy and tactics into execution, demonstrating that the former is only half the battle in counterinsurgency. The British, on the other hand, successfully translated their problem identification into execution.

The British employed a more decentralized approach to the execution of their counterinsurgency strategy, benefiting them in ways that eluded the French in their efforts. First and foremost, the British approach enabled Templer to assume the role of strategic “unifier.” Parliament’s demonstrated faith in Templer, and the freedom it gave him, ensured that British forces in Malaya operated with a unified strategy. The French government, on the other hand, attempted to control the counterinsurgency from Paris. Ironically, the government’s attempt to exact stricter control of strategic, operational, and even tactical actions, resulted in a lack of control where it was most required. Accordingly, proponents of the heavy-handed approach, which tended to alienate the very indigenes the French were courting, operated unhindered alongside those Galula termed “psychologists,” who preferred to embrace more subtle and nuanced techniques that solicited the locals’ support.

The environment in which each counterinsurgency was fought also differed dramatically. Perhaps no two more disparate environments existed than those in which the British and French operated.

Algerian insurgents employed an urban terrorist strategy. The tremendous psychological effects created by such a strategy taught the insurgents that urban insurgency and terrorism represented their best attempts at achieving what conventional theorists refer to as “economy of force.” Galula said the concrete infrastructure endemic to the urban environment provided “natural amplifiers” for the effects of terrorism. His rationale for this belief was simple: “A grenade or a bomb in a café there would produce far more noise than an obscure ambush against French soldiers in the Ouarsenis Mountains.” While Galula meant “noise” in the literal sense, the Algerian insurgents recognized that urban terrorism creates a significant amount of figurative noise as well. In fact, one can make the case that the FLN was among the first to recognize the tremendous impact created by the effects of media coverage of urban terrorism, which enabled the corrosive consequences of FLN attacks to be felt far beyond the physical locations of the explosions.

The British contended with a phenomenon based more closely on the Maoist model of insurgency. The British environment ostensibly was more placid, but it was no less lethal. While the French had to contend with an enemy who blended with the populace they were trying to protect in a concrete jungle, the British dealt with an enemy who blended into an actual jungle.

However, the attacks of the Malayan-Chinese Communists, while not as spectacular as those associated with urban terrorism, were often just as effective in achieving the principal aim of any insurgency: psychological dislocation of the populace. Peng’s insurgents used the jungle to hide and then spring ambushes against unsuspecting victims. The attacks instilled a pervasive fear among the populace, who never knew when or where the next attack would occur. Like the FLN, the Malayan-Chinese Communists aimed to frighten the populace and simultaneously de-legitimize the



ruling national government. Similar insurgency tactics beget similar counterinsurgency tactics.

Thus, the British and French experiences reveal a deeper commonality among counterinsurgencies that eclipses even the most profound environmental differences. The similarities inherent in the nature of counterinsurgency mandated that the British and French focus on the same tasks: allaying the fears of the public and reestablishing the legitimacy of the central government. These lessons are applicable for contemporary counterinsurgencies. □

# IRAQI FORCES WILL BOAST COUNTERINSURGENCY CAPABILITIES THE U.S. LACKS

BY DAVID AXE  
19 SEP 2007

The Iraqi armed forces are struggling to become self-sufficient in the face of constant insurgent attacks, a dearth of experienced leaders and in a divisive political environment. Several years after the establishment of Baghdad's new army and air force, U.S. and British forces still take the lead in most combat operations in Iraq. But in two key areas -- armored trucks and counterinsurgency aircraft -- the Iraqi military is actually more advanced than its American partner, reflecting key differences in the two nations' overall military strategies.

## ARMORED TRUCKS

In April 2006, the U.S. Department of Defense solicited bids from American firms to build as many as 1,000 light armored vehicles for the Iraqi army. The winning company was Force Protection, Inc., based in Ladson, S.C. Their design, the \$400,000-per-vehicle Badger, was based on the Cougar armored truck that Force Protection had been hand-building in small numbers for U.S. bomb squads. At the time, Badger represented the largest-ever purchase of this type of vehicle.

The first batch of 400 Badgers began flowing into Iraq in August 2006. "The Iraqis are starting to get trained on them," Brig. Gen. Terry Wolff, a senior trainer in Iraq, said in March. "Kind of a big, tall-looking vehicle," with a "v-shaped hull" is how he described the type. "Seats eight -- got eight crewmen in the back of it or eight soldiers can easily ride in the back. It's got real thick windows. It gives you a pretty phenomenal protection or very good protection against IEDs."

"This vehicle can take us into the red zone," Iraqi Army Sgt. Mohammed, a Badger driver, told a U.S. Navy reporter in April.

This was old news to U.S. Marines fighting a brutal counter-insurgency campaign in western Iraq. In 2005, Marines filed "urgent universal needs statements" pleading with the Pentagon to purchase hundreds of Cougars for the ground troops, not just for the bomb squads. It took more than a year for the military to approve the purchases, and the resulting \$14-billion "Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected" truck program is now Defense Secretary Robert Gates' No. 1 weapons priority. Despite this new urgency, fewer than 300 MRAPs had been fielded by August 2007.

"The Iraqi army is currently structured for counterinsurgency operations," reads a September report directed by retired Marine Gen. James Jones on behalf of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "The army as well as the nation's police forces are currently emphasizing internal security." And that means different equipment priorities than the U.S. military. The American armed services must be prepared to fight large-scale conventional wars in addition to counterinsurgencies, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Peter Pace, a Marine, said at a rally at a U.S. air base in South Korea in August.

## COUNTERINSURGENCY AIRCRAFT

Iraq's narrow focus on fighting insurgents has also allowed it to field an air force specifically tailored for the purpose. The small but rapidly expanding force is dominated by transport and surveillance aircraft, rather than by the expensive fighter jets that are most numerous in the U.S. Air Force.

"There isn't a lot of, you know, air-to-air combat in a counterinsurgency," David Kilcullen, an advisor to U.S. Army Gen. David Petraeus, explained in a May press conference. "But, actually, airpower has got a critical role in surveillance, transport, targeting of precise targets, interdicting or isolating areas of the battlefield. It's got a whole range of functions."

The "targeting of precise targets" that Kilcullen describes requires relatively low-tech aircraft that are slow enough for their pilots to actually see targets and that can "loiter" over the battlefield for hours at a time. In August, Baghdad expressed interest in acquiring a propeller-drive attack plane for this purpose.

"The capability from a fixed-wing perspective to deliver a kinetic kill capability, we're in the middle of those discussions right now," Air Force Brig. Gen. Robert Allardice, senior trainer for the Iraqi air force, said in a Sept. 6 press conference. He added that it would be more than year before the aircraft entered combat.

The U.S. military, for its part, abandoned fixed-wing counterinsurgency aircraft in the early 1990s in favor of fast jets designed during the Cold War for high-speed attacks on Soviet tank formations. This decision was taken against the advice of a widely hailed 1989 Air Force study authored by Maj. Richard Newton that advocated a mix of high- and low-tech to better meet a broad range of security challenges, including insurgencies.

"There is always the danger that technology will make one's doctrine obsolete," Newton wrote, quoting historian Richard Hallion. "Although maintaining our place on the leading edge of technology is critically important, we should not ignore an appropriate mix of older and leading-edge technology for the insurgency environment."

"The prevalent attitude among Air Force leaders and planners seems to be that preparations for and successful deterrence of World War III mean we will have no trouble 'stepping down' to combat at the low end of the spectrum. . . . The problem is that shifting to [counterinsurgency] is not a matter of 'stepping down'; it is a matter of sidestepping to a new environment."

The Air Force took a tentative step towards "side-stepping" to the counterinsurgency mindset when it released a much-maligned "irregular warfare manual" in August. "Irregular warfare is sufficiently different from traditional conflict to warrant a separate keystone doctrine document," the manual posited. But nowhere in the manual did the service advocate re-equipping with airplanes specifically designed for defeating insurgent fighters.

So when Iraq's propeller-driven attack planes enter service sometime in 2008 or 2009, the nation will boast a capability that even the mighty U.S. military lacks. □

# 'SENATOR'S SON' A GOOD WINDOW INTO COIN

BY THOMAS P.M. BARNETT

08 MAR 2010

National security types have long noted -- and complained about -- the relative lack of military veterans in Congress, which results in too few experienced votes being cast when the prospect of overseas interventions is raised. I have long noted -- and complained about -- the fact that Congress' most prominent military vets hail from the Vietnam era, which has led many to instinctively reject the necessity and utility of conducting nation-building and counterinsurgency. Clearly, our lengthy interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan will alter this generational equation, but how will the experiences of today's veterans impact their votes in tomorrow's Congress?

Luke S. Larson's new book, "[Senator's Son: An Iraq War Novel](#)," attempts to answer that question. Forget the weak crisis scenario he offers in the flash-forwards that dot this here-and-now novel. (No great powers will be clashing over oil reserves in 2047, because oil just won't be that important come mid-century.) Instead, concentrate on the terrific way in which this former Marine infantry officer captures the day-to-day challenges facing platoon leaders in Ramadi just prior to and then during the "surge" period in which [counterinsurgency logic](#) was finally -- and seriously -- re-embraced by the U.S. military.

Whether we're talking about the Marines or the Senate, the future scenarios matter much less than the institutional confidence factor, and in many ways will be determined by them. An America with no illusions about -- and plenty of real-world experience in -- nation-building will be a military power whose word is taken seriously during crises in the decades ahead. When faced with rhetoric and threats from fellow great powers concerning potential interventions in smaller, weaker and/or failing states, we'll not only know what we're talking about, we'll also have the institutional capabilities to back it up -- while they most likely will not.

American national security literature is awash with bold predictions of future "resource wars" between the U.S. and rising economic powers (read: China). True to that community's myopic vision of the future, these scenarios focus on national motivations (reduced to thirst for resources) and the sexy imagery of future weapon technologies (armies of Chinese hackers). What these hyperbolic academics rarely address is the follow-on reality -- namely, Which side will actually know how to manage the local environment post-conflict? A trifling detail, I know, but one that will separate the real-deal superpowers from the great-power wannabes in the decades ahead.

And if you think that it's all about which great power is willing to spend like mad to rebuild the place, check out Larson's engaging novel. What it makes clear -- with an immediacy that mentally screens like "The Hurt Locker" meets "Lawrence of Arabia" -- is that it isn't about the firepower you bring to bear, nor the money you pour into projects. Instead, it's all about the "strategic corporals" you've trained and their ability to translate national security goals into real-world actions -- literally neighborhood-by-neighborhood and village-by-village. This is the opposite of the big-base, force-protection approach that got us nowhere in Iraq. So absent these soldiers' buy-in,

which sustains their personal courage in exposing themselves to heightened danger, all the hardware and funding in the world can't buy you squat in these fiercely hostile landscapes.

This is where Larson's novel shines, and why it makes compelling reading for any soldier heading over to Afghanistan right now. (Just substitute Marja for Ramadi and you will locate many of the same dynamics on the same, steep learning curve.) Larson knows what he's talking about, having served two tours in Ramadi -- one well before the surge and one during it. Since then, he's studied non-lethal weapons at Penn State and then moved on to an MBA at the Thunderbird School of Global Management. Frankly, Larson should consider running for the Senate someday, or at least working as a civilian in the Pentagon, because that's a wonderful mix of experience for a future national leader.

As for Larson's tale, it embodies the "paradoxes of counterinsurgency" listed in the U.S. Army and Marine Corps' "[Counterinsurgency Field Manual](#)" (.pdf):

- **Focusing too much on protecting the force can make it less secure.** The novel opens with our three platoon-leading Marine lieutenants unable to protect their personnel from increasingly sophisticated IED attacks, even as they limit their exposure by reducing patrols to lightning runs through neighborhoods.

- **Using greater force can make it less effective.** Following strict rules of engagement, one platoon shoots up a speeding Iraqi ambulance that lacks proper visible markings, killing a pregnant woman inside -- and potentially making insurgents out of her entire family.

- **As it gradually succeeds, counterinsurgency requires the use of even less force and the acceptance of even greater risk.** As one lieutenant comes to realize after the Marines get out of their armored Humvees and begin working among the people, the locals -- once their trust is truly won -- do a better job of keeping his personnel safe than the "add more gear, add more technology" mindset of his superiors back in Washington.

- **Tolerable results achieved by the host nation are usually more effective than good results achieved by us.** Once COIN tactics are truly embraced, the tide turns when one of Larson's lieutenants allies his unit with the local police chief, who demands little support for his tribe's crude, but highly successful efforts to drive out al-Qaida elements -- beyond finally having his officers paid.

- **Many important decisions are not made by generals.** Yes, FM 3-24's primary sponsors, Army Gen. David Petraeus and Marine Gen. Jim Mattis, make brief cameos, with Mattis pleading that he's working the salary issue from on high. But in the end, it's a lowly lieutenant who figures out how to game the regulations to actually get the local police chief's men paid.

One of the reasons why I remain optimistic about our nation's future is that our military services, after decades of remaining oddly detached from society -- both our own and the ones they frequently intervened in overseas -- have [come back in from the cold](#) . . . war, that is. This is a very welcome development that will leave our nation far stronger to face the real security challenges that will arise from globalization's inexorable expansion into fragile states. □



# MISREADING THE SURGE THREATENS U.S. ARMY'S CONVENTIONAL CAPABILITIES

BY GIAN P. GENTILE  
04 MAR 2008

The Israeli experience in Lebanon in the summer of 2006 should warn Americans against having an Army that has become so focused on irregular and counterinsurgency warfare that it can no longer fight large battles against a conventional enemy. In an important essay in the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Israeli scholar Avi Kober recently noted that years of policing by the Israeli Army in its territories had degraded its ability to fight the Hezbollah enemy that used conventional tactics. The result was a significant battlefield defeat for the Israeli Army.

The American Army is in a similar condition today, and we should be worried.

A misleading current narrative contends that the recent lowering of violence in Iraq is primarily due to the American “surge” and the application of so-called “new” counterinsurgency methods. Because these new counterinsurgency methods have worked in Iraq, the thinking goes, why not try them in other places, such as Afghanistan? This hyper-emphasis on counterinsurgency puts the American Army in a perilous condition. Its ability to fight wars consisting of head-on battles using tanks and mechanized infantry is in danger of atrophy.

The truth is that American combat forces in Iraq have been conducting counterinsurgency operations successfully and pretty much by the book since about the middle of 2004. By that time, U.S. commanders had identified the mistakes of the first few months of the occupation, had absorbed a significant number of lessons learned from previous counterinsurgencies, and had started to train units on correct counterinsurgency methods prior to their deployments.

Recent proclamations by American political leaders, neoconservative writers, and some serving Army officers who have taken part in the surge, however, fly in the face of this reality.

They say that it took almost five years of fumbling and slow learning for the American Army to finally begin to get it right in February 2007 under Gen. David Petraeus, at the outset of the surge. In this telling, the dramatic lowering of violence in Iraq in the summer of 2007 was caused primarily by the Army doing counterinsurgency operations “right” and by the increased number of troops.

The presumptive Republican presidential candidate Sen. John McCain said in a recent speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars that the surge’s “new battle plan is succeeding where our previous tactics failed.” A senior Army officer who was a member of Gen. Petraeus’s “brain trust” characterized American operations prior to the surge as consisting of hunkering down on large bases, unable to protect the Iraqi people.

Neoconservative writer Clifford May noted that, prior to the surge, American combat forces had pretty much quit the country while an Iraq Civil War raged around them.

This commentary is simplistic and unfair. It does not accurately represent what was happening prior to the surge at the small unit level, where platoons, companies, and battalions were successfully employing counterinsurgency tactics before the surge had even been conceived.

At that level, there has been no significant change since the middle of 2004. Those who have observed the war firsthand know this. A reporter for a major national newspaper who has spent the last few years embedded with American Army combat outfits observed to me that by and large American combat units have conducted operations in the same way since prior to the surge: conducting reconnaissance to gain information on the enemy; meeting with Iraqi locals to help improve security, governance and services; conducting combined patrols and operations with the Iraqi Security Forces; cleaning up garbage and opening schools; capturing and killing the enemy; and talking to locals to assess their needs and problems. At the small unit level, the primary mission of platoons, companies, and battalions has been the protection of the Iraqi people.

There has been one notable difference between surge and pre-surge operating methods: the use of combat outposts. Since the surge, such outposts have been increasingly used by small numbers of American combat soldiers to camp in Iraqi neighborhoods. Baghdad has seen a particularly substantial increase in the use of combat outposts. Proponents of the surge credit them and the troops occupying them with the drastic downturn in violence that began in the summer of 2007.

History shows that the use of combat outposts against insurgents can prove successful. The French officer David Galula, who fought insurgents in French Algeria from 1956 to 1958, used combat outposts in small villages to isolate the insurgents from the people. Galula's area of responsibility was very small and was located deep inside the north Algerian mountains. The local population totaled about 15,000, and they were isolated from the few major urban areas in Algeria. With his infantry company of about 150 men, Galula could easily isolate and control the few villages in his area by placing platoons in these outposts.

Still, in this relatively straightforward environment, it took Galula close to a year and a half to pacify the area by separating the insurgents from the people. Galula later wrote a short book about his experiences, which has heavily influenced the American Army's current approach to counterinsurgency.

If Galula needed almost 18 months to succeed in northern Algeria, where conditions were much more suitable to a classic counterinsurgency campaign than today's Iraq (a multi-sectarian landscape with many sides fighting each other), it is naïve to believe the American surge in Iraq could succeed in a matter of months.

The reduction in violence has had more to do with the Iraqis than the Americans. First, senior American leaders began paying our former enemies -- non-al-Qaida Sunni insurgents -- large amounts of money to become U.S. allies in fighting al-Qaida. Second, the Shiite militia leader Moqtada al-Sadr announced a six-month ceasefire and stood down his attacks against Iraqi Sunnis and coalition forces; recently, he extended the cease-fire for another six months. Absent those two necessary conditions, there would have been no let up in the level of violence despite the surge.

If U.S. commanders and policymakers believe that the surge lowered violence by applying "new" counterinsurgency methods at the small unit level, then the U.S. military might be tempted to travel down the counterinsurgency path many times again, placing further strain on an already heavily strained American Army, and dangerously damaging its ability to fight the sort of battles that the Israelis tried, and failed, to win against Hezbollah in Lebanon in summer 2006.

Getting the truth right about the surge, so-called new counterinsurgency methods, and the causes for reduced violence in Iraq, is essential for the future for the American Army and its continued ability to fulfill its constitutional duty to provide for the common defense. □

# THE LIMITS OF THE SURGE: AN INTERVIEW WITH GIAN GENTILE

BY JUDAH GRUNSTEIN

11 APR 2008

Gian P. Gentile is an active duty Army lieutenant colonel who has served two tours in Iraq, most recently as a combat battalion commander in west Baghdad in 2006. Last month, his World Politics Review article, “[Misreading the Surge](#),” brought a fierce internal debate over the Army’s new emphasis on counterinsurgency operations and its potential impact on conventional capabilities to the attention of the general public. In the context of this week’s congressional hearings on the Surge, WPR asked Gentile for a follow up email interview, to which he graciously agreed.

*Describe the kinds of “classical” counterinsurgency methods you were applying in Iraq in 2006. Have any operational differences been introduced by the new COIN tactics? If so, why do you discount their impact on improving the security situation in Iraq?*

**Gian Gentile:** In 2006 our primary purpose at the tactical level of platoons, companies, battalions, and brigades was, as it still is today in Iraq, the protection of the people. The cavalry squadron that I commanded, along with the sister battalions in the brigade that I was part of in 4th Infantry Division, did the same, too. We used what the Army calls “lines of operations” (or “loos”), that were focused on things like establishing local governance, improving essential services like garbage pick up, information operations designed to show that our interests were the same as those of the Iraqis, and we were killing and capturing insurgents -- both Shia and Sunni -- who were causing the violence and instability.

The only significant difference between what we did in 2006 (and before) as compared to 2007 onward is the use of combat outposts. We did not use them to the extent that they were being used in 2007. But their role in bringing about the lowered levels of violence in 2007 is vastly overstated. There is not a combat outpost in every Iraqi neighborhood in Baghdad; far from it. One needs to turn, therefore, to other explanations for the recent lowering of violence.

*How do you explain the improved security situation in Iraq from July 2007 until now?*

**Gian Gentile:** In my opinion, the two necessary and controlling reasons for lowering the violence in Baghdad in the second half of 2007 had little to do with the increased number of U.S. combat brigades practicing so-called new counterinsurgency tactics. Instead, the two necessary conditions were the decision by senior Americans to pay large amounts of money to our former enemies -- the non-al-Qaida Sunni insurgents -- to ally themselves with us to defeat al-Qaida and, as a by-product of this alliance, to stop killing Coalition Forces. That and Moqtada al-Sadr’s decision to stand down attacks against American and coalition forces and against civilian Sunnis were the main causes. If those two conditions were not in place, I can not imagine how more American combat brigades using so called new methods would have lowered violence.

Recent increases in violence over the past two weeks between different Shia militias and between

Sadr's militia and Coalition Forces indicate that at least one of these necessary conditions might be changing. It also suggests how critical these conditions are, and the amount of control that they have relative to what impact we think the additional American brigades practicing so-called new counterinsurgency methods have had. A question to consider is this: If the Surge was the primary cause for the reduction in violence in the second half of 2007, and if the majority of the Surge brigades are still in place, and if they are continuing to practice these so-called new counterinsurgency methods, then why has violence increased?

*Do you believe the security gains, whether due to the Surge or not, are stable?*

**Gian Gentile:** My assessment when I commanded a combat battalion in 2006 was that Iraq was in a complex, multifaceted civil war. My current assessment is that that fundamental condition has not changed. The basic issues in Iraq have yet to be resolved, namely, who will ultimately hold power: Shia (and as recent weeks have shown a battle is occurring within Shia Iraq over who will hold power over that sect) or Sunni. Sometimes, as fatalistic as this may sound, these kinds of deep-rooted social issues are only solved through fighting and war. The issue of slavery and the American Civil War provides a good historical analogy to think of when considering Iraq today. That issue in American history was not ultimately resolved until a bloody civil war was fought between the North and South.

There are definite limits to what American military power, even when applied by good American combat units executing best practices in counterinsurgency operations, can accomplish in a place like Iraq.

*What success claims made by proponents of the Surge do you take particular issue with?*

**Gian Gentile:** I have made known through postings on the [Small Wars Journal](#) and [Abu Muqawama](#) blogs and in published op-ed pieces that I disagree with assertions that prior to 2007 and the increased number of combat brigades, American forces in 2006 had pretty much quit the country and were standing by passively as the Iraq Civil War raged around us. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I am also often bothered by statements that fall within this flawed conception that we were “hunkered down on forward operating bases,” which in my mind implies cowardice, or that we “commuted to the fight,” which in my mind implies both poor counterinsurgency tactics and operations and an unwillingness to face dangers. We did counterinsurgency operations prior to the Surge pretty much by the book as far back as early 2004.

*You've also argued that as a result of the Surge's triumphant narrative, the Army is at risk of relying too heavily on COIN tactics to the detriment of conventional warfighting capacity. How exactly do you feel that impact will be felt? To what extent is it already being felt?*

**Gian Gentile:** There is much to be proud of in American soldiers serving in outfits in Iraq (and Afghanistan). They face dangers every day and continue to serve. Their families go through a lot, too, and are critical to the well being of the army. Nothing of what I have said in terms of my assessment of the security situation in Iraq and understanding the causes for the recent lowering of violence should take away from the credit American military forces fighting in Iraq deserve for their hard work and commitment in the service of the nation.

However, I have argued in other places that misreading the Surge threatens the U.S. Army's conventional capabilities because it reinforces the idea that good units using best counterinsurgency practices can win in any counterinsurgency environment. If we believe that as an Army, then we might be tempted to further our focus on counterinsurgency to the detriment of preparing for other more intense types of war.

Moreover, misreading the Surge and claiming success for so-called new counterinsurgency methods might suggest to policy makers that any problem in another country is solvable through the use of American military power. There are definite limits to what the American military can accomplish, as Iraq and Afghanistan seem to be suggesting.

*You argued that the COIN doctrine was being embraced without adequate internal debate. Recently, though, it seems like more of the Army's top leadership has been echoing the idea of imbalance (Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Richard Cody, for instance, [last week in congressional testimony](#)). Do you feel like your message is getting through?*

**Gian Gentile:** From 1976 to 1982 there were over 110 articles published in the Army's Military Review that fundamentally challenged the emerging doctrine that would become known as "Air-land Battle." This in my mind is an example of a wide-ranging debate about an Army's operational doctrine. We have had nothing like that in today's Army for either the new counterinsurgency doctrine, [FM 3-24 \(.pdf\)](#), or the new Operational doctrine, [FM 3-0 \(.pdf\)](#). There are, of course, good reasons why we have not. Unlike the early 1980's, our Army is now at war and has been for the past 6 years, and has not had the luxury of relative peace to think deeply about these matters. But we should at least acknowledge where we are at now with our Army, the actual conditions that we are in, and start thinking hard about where we are headed.

Gens. Casey and Cody know the overall condition of the American Army better than anyone else, so I must defer to them for specifics on the condition of the Army caused by over 6 years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq. They both have commented that the Army is under great strain and is out of balance. And these concerns are not just held by the Army chief of staff and his vice chief. The senior military commander in Iraq, Gen. Petraeus, also understands, as he testified to Congress about the strain that the war in Iraq is placing on the American Army.

I personally believe that the American Army is not just out of balance but is actually close to breaking, if not already broken. History has shown what happens to armies when they are stretched to the limit. In World War I, against the German Army in the trenches of the western front, the French Army in 1917 saw a few of its frontline units mutiny against senior military authorities and refuse to fight after a series of disastrous offensives. The American army will not mutiny like some French Army units did in 1917. Indeed the American Army's professionalism and commitment to duty will cause it to continue to persevere as long as it is ordered to do so in Iraq and Afghanistan. But through its perseverance it will be ground down to a shell of the American Army that existed before to 2001.

I certainly don't see myself in any way as the driving force for this "message." What I have done, I think, through published writings is highlight concerns that many other soldiers hold in the Army today.

*Finally, where would you situate this debate in the context of the program to "transform the Army" set into motion by former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld? Does COIN and the emphasis on stabilization operations represent a repudiation of the "Rumsfeld Doctrine"?*

**Gian Gentile:** In COIN, a precondition for success is the existence of a legitimate government. The United States has one success in the history of counterinsurgency since WW II to its credit: it succeeded in assisting the legitimate government of El Salvador defeat an internal communist insurgency. However, it was not the U.S. military that defeated the FMLN guerrillas, but the Salvadoran military under the control of its own government, with U.S. encouragement and no more than 50 or so U.S. military advisors. Moreover, El Salvador was not simply a sovereign state: El Salvadoran society was and is a single identity -- an essential prerequisite for successful internal defense of a government struggling for survival and legitimacy.

None of these conditions apply to Iraq, where the Iraqi government does not appear to be legiti-



mate in the eyes of its people -- whether Shia, Sunni or Kurd -- and it seems that one Iraqi society does not exist.

In the end, the real question that must be answered before any transformation can occur is: What is the strategic purpose for which a transformed armed force will fight? □

# **COIN in Afghanistan**

# KAPISA PROVINCE: A COIN CASE STUDY IN AFGHANISTAN

BY JOSHUA FOUST  
31 MAR 2009

KAPISA PROVINCE, Afghanistan -- Standing on the HESCO barriers that ring Forward Operating Base Morales-Frazier in Kapisa Province, just north of Kabul, one can see three enormous, beautiful valleys. To the north lies the Nijrab, whose “fingers” are home to a mainly Tajik population, with some Pashtun areas. To the east sits Afghanya Valley, which hosts Pashtuns in its lower half and Pashai in its upper half. And to the south is Tagab Valley, an almost entirely Pashtun area that has become famous for its entrenched insurgency.

FOB Morales-Frazier, the soldiers it hosts, and the area it stands watch over represent a microcosm of the war in Afghanistan -- its complexities, its successes and failures, and its challenges ahead. The French, as “battlespace owners,” operate the base, but an American Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) has responsibility for development efforts. Two detachments of special operations forces, one from the United States and one from Romania, call FOB Kutschbach, just south of Morales-Frazier, home. Split between both bases is an Afghan National Army battalion, and several embedded training elements that mentor and train the Afghan army and police.

Since 2005, Kapisa Province has been the site of several waves of U.S. and coalition operations. Without fail, each one has been lauded as a success by the media and the military command. Yet the problems facing Kapisa remain, and in some cases are worse than before the operations began: strong militancy in the south, and complaints of ethnic favoritism, underdevelopment, and a general lack of government attention in the middle areas. Stable areas have remained stable, and the north enjoys relative prosperity. But areas in the center of the province once patrolled regularly by U.S. forces now feature RPG-armed greeting parties. Clearly, something needs fixing in the way the U.S. military measures and maintains its successes.

## STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF PRE-INVASION PERIOD

In strategic terms, Kapisa is one of the most vitally important yet understudied areas of the country. As U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. William Andersen, the commander of the Kapisa PRT in 2008, explained, Kapisa’s significance lies not in the presence of militants, who are not especially concentrated there, but in its role as a staging ground for attacks on Kabul. Since the 1980s, mujahideen commanders have considered the area to be of vital strategic importance, as it guards the entrance to the Panjshir Valley.

The West is almost painfully ignorant of the area’s demographics: the last (and quite possibly only) significant study of the area -- a doctoral dissertation in anthropology -- was written in 1977. It examined a single ethnic group in the area -- the Safi Pashtuns. They and many of the other groups in Kapisa -- such as the Pashai, as well as lesser-known groups like the Parachi and Kuchi -- are also found in other insurgency-ridden areas across eastern Afghanistan. What role they may play in fueling or undermining the insurgency is unclear precisely because the area and people within it are so understudied.

The map of identity in Kapisa is complex. There is the predominantly Tajik and fairly peaceful north; the ethnically mixed and politically unstable middle section; and the province's Pashtun south, which is generally considered dangerous. The Pashtuns are just one of the "three P's of ethnicity" -- the Parachi and Pashai being the other two. Then there are various subtribes of the Safi Pashtuns and competing groups of Pashai communities.

But in addition to these ethnic identities, one's *tanzim* affiliation also plays a role in determining political behavior and collective action. The *tanzims* were legendary religious-political parties based mostly in Peshawar during the 1980s, and the two principle *tanzims* in Kapisa -- Jamiat-i Islami (Jamiat) and Hizb-i Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) -- either traded or sparred over control of the province throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Jamiat's luminaries include current Afghan MP and former President Burhannudin Rabbani and the legendary Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was assassinated by al-Qaida operatives on the eve of 9/11 attacks. HIG, meanwhile, is the party of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, an American ally in the 1980s. In 2001, the two parties' fortunes reversed: Hekmatyar's opposition to the 2001 U.S. invasion led the United States to sponsor Jamiat, making it one of the primary recipients of money and arms during the Northern Alliance's campaign against the Taliban.

Since 1973, these two political factions have violently fought for control of Kapisa, while a third, Harakat, has dominated areas in the province's southern Tagab district, near Sarobi. More recently, both HIG and Taliban insurgents have used areas within the Tagab Valley to launch attacks on Kabul -- including, most famously, the mortar attack on the Mujahideen Day parade in April 2008, and the assault on the luxurious Hotel Serena in January 2008.

Although Jamiat is mostly Tajik, many of its members in Kapisa are Pashtun. Under the command of one of Jamiat's prominent Pashtun commanders in Kapisa during the 1990s, Pashtuns and Tajiks banded together in the mountain passes between Nijrab and Mahmood Raqi to block an attempted Taliban advance up the Panjshir River. Since that effort, though, Jamiat in Kapisa has become increasingly fractured. Mutual recriminations, distrust and intra-Jamiat attacks by Tajiks against Pashtuns increased as the 1990s wore on. By early 2001, the attacks and a subsequent arms embargo on Pashtun areas caused the Pashtun members of Jamiat in Kapisa to switch their allegiance to the Taliban in return for protection, effectively ceding the entire province to Taliban control.

After the Twin Towers fell, a U.S.-supported Tajik member of Jamiat swept through the province. For a couple of years after the invasion, Kapisa was a beautiful backwater and generally considered safe. (At least one provincial official maintains that the first suicide bomb didn't explode there until 2006, though that information cannot be confirmed.) As the years progressed, however, political power and economic development were doled out to the well-connected and denied to the poor, resulting in almost all of the province's political positions going to members of Jamiat. Many prominent, even powerful members of HIG were frozen out of provincial -- and therefore national -- politics. While some former HIG commanders are in positions of power in the southern Tagab district, the contrast between members of Jamiat, who seem to dominate provincial-level politics, and members of HIG, who seem to dominate the insurgency, is stark.

Among elders in Kapisa, the frustration with how things have progressed is evident. Even as they discuss the intricacies of the security situation, it is clear that many simply don't know how to explain things to an outsider. HIG is clearly an enemy of the government, yet many in Kapisa remain proud of their association with that *tanzim* because it was so instrumental in defeating the Soviets.

## **'SWEEPING' THE TAGAB**

There have been at least two major campaigns in recent years to "sweep" the southern part of Kapisa, which is almost entirely taken up by the Tagab Valley. Little information is publicly available about the 2005 sweep other than the fact that it pushed a significant number of insurgent

fighters into Pakistan, and that when U.S. special operations forces left the area to conduct operations elsewhere, those same militants returned to the valley.

The November 2006 sweep known as Operation Al Hasn, on the other hand, was meant to be a comprehensive, “full spectrum” push to permanently undermine the insurgency in the Tagab area. It was notable for the ways in which a Special Operations Task Force (SOTF) integrated its planning and operations with both the United Arab Emirates Army and the local Afghan government.

One of the intentions of the campaign was to use so-called non-kinetic operations -- humanitarian assistance drops, psychological operations, and medical services -- to permanently “separate the enemy from the population,” as counterinsurgency experts describe it. During the 11-day operation, these efforts were by all accounts quite successful, with hundreds of people arriving at the firebases and staging areas -- both Forward Operating Bases mentioned above were built during this time -- to receive health care and blankets. Locals also began holding rallies in support of the provincial governor, Abdul Satar Murad, at the Tagab district center.

By the official end of the operation, Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry -- then-commander of Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan and recently nominated to be the next U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan -- declared, “This is the best example of full-spectrum counterinsurgency operations. This should be the model for COIN operations in Afghanistan.”

Nevertheless, by mid-summer 2007, the valley had once again become exceedingly dangerous.

Eikenberry’s premature optimism illustrates one of the challenges in measuring operational effectiveness in Afghanistan, namely that there is a significant seasonal element to fighting. It surges during the summer, usually reaches its peak in August or September, and then calms down as the commanders leave to spend their winters in Pakistan.

In 2007, coalition operations in Kapisa had become dominated by conventional forces: regular Army units from the 82nd Airborne Division moved into the province, and a Provincial Reconstruction Team established a permanent presence at FOB Morales-Frazier. While the presence of the Kapisa PRT might imply that the coalition’s focus in Kapisa had shifted to governance and development, the reality is that operations changed very little: Units from the Pennsylvania National Guard were in constant combat.

The limits of Western understanding of Kapisa also became apparent in 2007. That summer, the Afghan Ministry of the Interior fired Gov. Murad from his post. Rumors circulated that Murad was being punished for complaining about Afghan President Hamid Karzai to a Newsweek reporter. The ministry, meanwhile, claimed he was “sowing discord” in the province and providing the Coalition with faulty intelligence. It was a serious charge: Operation Al Hasn had been planned with information on militants and power brokers that was provided by Murad and his intelligence officials.

Some U.S. media outlets published rumors that Murad was fired on the recommendation of a former commander in the anti-Soviet jihad and current member of Parliament who was allegedly running a militia linked to a Taliban commander in Kapisa. Observers of the politics of the area believe the latter charge is farfetched, another example of the gap between rumor and reality in the area.

And it’s not just official provincial politics that are opaque. Local elders claim there are less than a dozen “actual Taliban” in the province, and that many of the attacks on coalition forces are executed by criminals falsely claiming the more intimidating mantle of Taliban or HIG. The challenge of finding the truth in such a confusing environment makes operational and analytical paralysis understandable.



By the end of summer 2007, the coalition began another clear-hold-build campaign, this one named Operation Nauroz Jhala. Instead of special operations forces, thinly stretched embedded elements with the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police drove operations. One embedded soldier who was active near the Tagab district center complained that for months his unit couldn't "hold" any ground they cleared, since there were so few of them.

By the early part of 2008, government corruption was drastically affecting operations in Kapisa. A French-led ANA unit conducted a large operation to secure and hold the Alisay Valley. The original plan required the ANA to sweep the area and round up or kill any militants it could find so the police could move in and set up stations and checkpoints. According to a U.S. soldier embedded with the Afghan units, though, barely any police showed up. Following the Serena Hotel bombing and the April parade attack, which rattled Afghanistan's top political leadership, the ANA units were pulled out to provide security in and around Kabul.

In June 2008, Jane's Terrorism & Security Monitor reported that the two high-profile attacks in Kabul were linked to the top Taliban commander of Kapisa. Within months of withdrawing the ANA from Alisay, the entire Tagab area had descended into chaos. 2008 was the province's worst year on record for ambushes, IED emplacements, and rocket attacks.

One month later, in July 2008, the French army took over operations in Kapisa. Currently they coordinate operations with the American PRT that remained in the province from a shared space on FOB Morales-Frazier. Shortly after taking over, 10 French soldiers died in a well-publicized ambush in the Sarobi district of Kabul province -- just south of the Tagab Valley. Domestic political reaction to the ambush caused the French to dramatically modify their tactics. In some areas these changes have resulted in rising local anger against what is seen as a lack of respect, particularly with regard to French soldiers' treatment of homes and women.

## CURRENT POINTS OF FRACTURE

The nine months since the French takeover have seen an aggressive increase in home searches, a major effort to pave roads, and enormous infrastructure projects to build wells, schools, district centers and police stations. But the security outlook in the province has changed very little. Even relatively calm, steadily developing areas like Nijrab complain that they are underserved and subject to the whims of provincial-level ethnic politicking.

In many mixed districts, such as Nijrab, there is a stark division between Tajiks and Pashtuns. This has been the case since before the Taliban; now, the severity of the divide threatens to derail political reconciliation in the province. Tajik elders accuse Pashtuns of being uneducated and violent. Pashtun elders, on the other hand, complain that Tajiks are dominating the Kapisa government and withholding government services and development funds from Pashtun areas. Many locals interviewed for this article suggested that ethnic politics in the province are far more segregated than they were 30 years ago. The current split is disturbingly similar to the 2001 split that saw Pashtuns abandon Jamiat to join the Taliban.

The implications of past political affiliations on current local politics is little understood. The current provincial governor fought with HIG in the 1980s; the sub-governor for Tagab fought for Harakat; the sub-governor for Alisay fought for Jamiat; and the police chief of Nijrab District fought for Jamiat. All of these men are fiercely proud of their service, and it is unknown how that pride might affect their governing decisions.

There is also a lot of popular resentment toward the influence of the tanzims. An elder from Afghanya Valley complained that, during the civil war, fighters from both Jamiat and HIG extorted money from shop keepers, and stole money and food from the villages they claimed to fight for.

Complicating matters is how the ethnic and political divides influence intelligence collection. As

a rule, Tajiks are more open and honest with Westerners, while Pashtuns can be more reticent (especially if they still associate themselves with HIG). In some cases, ethnically biased information has caused U.S. and Coalition forces to misread certain situations.

## A BASIC COIN STRATEGY FOR KAPISA

A fundamental concept of counterinsurgency operations is the need to live for long periods of time with the local population, since “knowing the people” is the first step in learning how to separate them from the insurgents. At present, however, the units embedded with Afghan security forces are the only ones that have such a truly localized view of the province, making them by far the most effective elements of the foreign presence in Kapisa.

While many embedded units see combat on a routine basis, in Kapisa several successive waves of Embedded Trainers have also made a priority of drinking tea with locals when they could. Tea is the lifeblood of social life in Afghanistan: everything in the country happens through relationships, and conversation over tea is how relationships develop.

Previous waves of special operations forces in the province have shown an immediate ability to either kill or chase off most militants. But since these units are usually soon ordered to move on to other areas, militants have simply filtered back into swept areas. Similarly, numerous embedded soldiers have complained that unpredictable factors, like Karzai’s mid-2008 decision to withdraw the ANA and ANP from the Alisay and Ghayn Valleys, have frequently resulted in entire districts being abandoned to the insurgency. While there are small numbers of ANP in Alisay district, they remain ineffective due to poor logistics and few personnel.

Conversations with several current and former soldiers active in southern Kapisa made it clear that physical presence is vital to reducing the insurgency. Current operations are based primarily from the two main FOBs in the area, but rarely last longer than a few hours every couple of days. When troops, both local and Western, spend an extended period of time on the ground interacting with locals, they create a more lasting reduction in militancy.

Reduced militancy, in turn, gives the local PRT greater freedom in administering development projects. Development needs in Kapisa are fairly basic: During interviews conducted in December 2008, Afghans regularly questioned the point of improving the public education system when there is no work for educated people to do. Rather, they wanted wells and irrigation canals for their fields, retaining walls to mitigate erosion, and even mosque improvements. “If you fix the mosque,” one elder said in January, “I can tell my people that you [America] are not against Islam. Hizb-i Islami never built us a mosque.” In February, another elder specifically asked the Kapisa PRT to perform more QIPs, or Quick Impact Projects, since they employ a lot of people, bring more immediate benefits to locals than a paved road, and provide ready examples of how the coalition can provide for local needs better than any insurgent group.

Another counterinsurgency challenge in Kapisa is what coalition soldiers call Key Leader Engagement, or KLE. At the moment, the KLE is an undefined activity: in PRT and battalion briefings, in doctrine and in person, few seem able to say what it involves other than in very vague terms (i.e. “engaging the key leaders in a community”). The Kapisa PRT is the primary vehicle for KLE, though battalions and brigades have their own KLE operations. All of these groups focus their KLE efforts on official leadership, and rarely get the chance to talk to unofficial community leaders. While speaking to a district sub-governor can reveal some things about a given area, it is only by talking with men of influence and elders that the “real” issues of a community can be discovered and then addressed.

Religious leaders are almost entirely excluded from coalition engagement efforts, as they don’t have any formal relationship with the government, despite exercising an enormous amount of influence in many communities. Consulting with mullahs and malawis for advice would not only

add another layer of understanding for planning future operations, but would further undermine the insurgent narrative that the coalition is opposed to Islam.

Examining the past and current failures of coalition operations in this tiny province near the Afghan capital shows that effective counterinsurgency does not have to be overly complicated. For short periods of time in Kapisa, special operations forces and even conventional units have been hugely successful, but none have been able to properly capitalize on those gains and to make them permanent. As the pendulum of power in Kapisa continues to swing back and forth between the coalition and the insurgency, war fatigue is in danger of setting in. Before that happens, the coalition should begin to pay attention to the lessons it has already learned and avoid repeating its past mistakes. With minor changes to current operations, the coalition could permanently improve the security, political, and economic situation in Kapisa.

The same principles that would make permanent these halting and temporary security gains in this tiny province need to be applied to the country as a whole. Holding territory, incorporating domestic security forces, and having an understanding of the social and political fabric of the local population are all tenets of counterinsurgency theory. Unfortunately, these ideas are only being applied by U.S. and coalition militaries sporadically, without regularity and follow-up. Until the effort is concerted and systematic, the United States and its allies should dramatically lower their expectations of success in Afghanistan. □

# ABU MUQAWAMA ON AFGHANISTAN: AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW EXUM

BY JUDAH GRUNSTEIN  
29 JUL 2009

Andrew Exum is a fellow at the Center for a New American Security, and author of the influential counterinsurgency blog [Abu Muqawama](#). He just returned from a month in Afghanistan, where he took part in recently appointed U.S. and Coalition commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal's 60-day review of strategy and operations. He graciously agreed to talk with WPR Managing Editor Judah Grunstein about his impressions from his trip. The views expressed here are his own, and do not reflect any U.S. government or military position, nor the views of the CNAS.

The following is an edited and abridged transcript of the interview. The full audio file is available [as a WPR podcast here](#).

*Taking an isolated image out of the time you spent in Afghanistan, what makes you feel optimistic about the possibility of a successful outcome?*

**Andrew Exum:** I think the most encouraging thing I saw or heard while I was in Afghanistan was probably a helicopter ride back from Khost province, back to Bagram, a Q&A that we had on the way back [with] Gen. Kurt Fuller from the 82nd Airborne. We were just asking him questions about, not only his environment, but the war in Afghanistan. And one of the things that became clear is that the U.S. Army's officer corps has undergone a tremendously difficult but ultimately rewarding learning process over the past few years, and there is a keen understanding of the operating environment in Afghanistan. Whether or not we're going to be able to translate our operational prowess into strategic success is very much a question that is yet to be answered. But there was reason for being encouraged.

*Taking that same question, what isolated snapshot would make you feel pessimistic about the outcome?*

**Andrew Exum:** One word: Kandahar. Keep in mind that I was in one of the first waves of soldiers to go into Afghanistan, in early 2002. And what was shocking for me was the degree to which we still do not understand this country that we've been in for the past eight years. What frustrated me more than anything else is that I don't think we have a good understanding of what is going on in the city of Kandahar, which is quite possibly the most strategically important city in Afghanistan. Our intelligence and the way that we gather intelligence continues to be focused on the enemy. What we need to know to be successful in Afghanistan is not just the size, disposition and composition of the Quetta Shura Taliban, or the Haqqani network, but we need to understand local dynamics. We need to make good social network maps, we need to understand power brokers at every level, we need to understand how regional power brokers interact with the insurgency, with the government, what their business ties are. And we really don't have much visibility on that.

*In the "Clear, Hold and Build" paradigm of counterinsurgency, it's obvious that the U.S. mili-*

*tary is going to be able to “clear” just about anywhere it decides to. Does Gen. McChrystal have adequate resources to “hold”?*

**Andrew Exum:** I think you’ve got two problems there. One is a conceptual problem and one is a resource problem. Nowhere that I went was I able to get a really coherent definition of what it means to hold and what it means to build, and how you do that. And I don’t think we’ve cracked the nut operationally on how we do those things. So first off, I think there’s some confusion as far as what that means. Second off, without question, we do not have the resources to hold much terrain in Afghanistan. We’ve got very limited international forces in Afghanistan, and we’re actually not using them to their best effect if we’ve got them “holding.” So if the Marines in Helmand are holding terrain right now, that’s a waste of resources. The “hold” function should be executed by a robust Afghan national security force. But right now, one of the things that is a constant problem is that we’ve got an Afghan National Army that is decent, that still needs a lot of work and that needs to be rapidly expanded. And we have an Afghan National Police that is good in some component parts, but overall has been a disaster. So we need more of the Afghan National Police, but we need them also to be responsible and good, and not take advantage of the local population. So no, we don’t have enough resources to hold a lot of the ground that we clear. And I think those resources are only going to come when we’re able to increase the rate at which we’re training and equipping the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police.

*You’ve argued, in the absence of adequate resources, for a “triage,” and in particular protecting population centers as the focus of counterinsurgency operations. How would you respond to the criticism that, 1) the civilian population is not as much a target of the conflict as it was, for instance, in Iraq; and 2) that the population centers aren’t necessarily where the insurgency is located?*

**Andrew Exum:** I think that the population is not being kinetically targeted in the same way it was in Iraq, but what that misses is a silent war of fear and intimidation. Let me sketch this out for you: The fall of Kandahar is not going to look like the Taliban rolling down the streets in tanks. The fall of Kandahar is going to look like the Taliban steadily making ground with a campaign of fear and intimidation, and creating an environment in which the Afghan government can’t operate in Kandahar, and Kandahar eventually becomes ideologically inhospitable to the government of Afghanistan, never mind Coalition forces. So first off, the population may not be targeted kinetically in the way that it was in Iraq, but it’s certainly being targeted.

To the second objection, there are certain populations that are being targeted more than others. There are reasons to be worried about the situation in the north, but overall the situation in Mazar-i-Sharif is relatively secure. The same can’t be said for the population in the Khost bowl, which is being targeted by the Haqqani network, or the population in Helmand province and Kandahar province, which are being aggressively targeted by the Quetta Shura Taliban. So my response would be twofold. First off, the population is being targeted. And second off, once we determine where that population is, we can triage and, I believe, deny the enemy some of his objectives.

*You’ve been pretty up front and open about the fact that the American public should expect U.S. casualties to rise, which is obviously a pretty hard political sell. Has it been a hard operational sell? Did you see, while you were there, a shift away from, for instance, the forward operating bases and the armored personnel carriers that some critics have said separate the U.S. and Coalition forces from the population they need to operate amongst?*

**Andrew Exum:** Well, you’ve put your finger right on something that Gen. McChrystal and his staff are really trying to change, and that’s operational culture. Right now, if a U.S. soldier dies in Wardak province, for example, in the report home to the United States and to his parents, we have to list what that soldier was wearing, how much body armor he had on. And if that soldier did not have on body armor, or was not traveling in an MRAP, commanders are going to be held responsible. Now that is not a dynamic that we need to encourage in this type of environment. It



very well may be that on certain days, it's appropriate for a soldier to travel in an MRAP, or to wear a lot of body armor. But on other missions and other days, it may be more appropriate for that soldier to not wear any body armor, and to be out there in the population, and to be building relationships with the Afghan people. Because this mission will succeed or will fail based on the relationships we are able to build with Afghans at all levels. And when we drive around allegedly secure cities, whether they be Kabul or Mazar-i-Sharif, in armored vehicles and armored personnel carriers, we've got two problems. First off, we're sending a message that we're scared. And in a counterinsurgency, where you've got to create an environment where the population feels bold enough to invest in the institutions of its own government, that's a problem. We can't expect the Afghan people to be brave, to not be scared, if we ourselves are traveling around allegedly secure cities in armored vehicles. The second problem is that, how exactly are we supposed to gather any type of meaningful intelligence or information about the population when we're separated from them by eight inches of bullet-proof glass? So we have a real issue in Afghanistan with operational and organizational culture, and that is going to be a tremendous obstacle for Gen. McChrystal and his staff over the next year.

***You mentioned the relationship to the Afghan government. I'm not sure how much you were among the civilian population. Did you get a sense of the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Kabul government and the opinion among the Afghan population?***

**Andrew Exum:** I talked with local Afghans in the south, in Oruzgan province, Herat province, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kabul, Khost. And there is a consensus among the people that -- and not touching the issue of whether there is rampant corruption in the Afghan state, and by all accounts there is -- there is certainly perceived corruption from the Afghan people. So we've got a serious crisis of legitimacy. On the other hand, there's reason to be optimistic. As hated and as disrespected as the Afghan National Police are as an institution, there's a lot of pride in the Afghan National Army. So we have succeeded in building some institutions that are respected and that are at least a point of pride. But until we take action, or until the government of Afghanistan takes action, against the predatory culture by which Afghan officials and regional power brokers take advantage of the Afghan people, we're going to have a very tough time winning this war. It is something that Americans don't like to face up to, but when you're fighting a counterinsurgency as a third party, your mission success is in large part determined by what the host-nation government does and fails to do. So that is cause for great concern over the next 12 months, and especially cause for concern in the aftermath of the election that's coming up in a few weeks.

***Tying back in to the points of optimism, points of pessimism: If you had to boil it down to one thing that Americans need to know about this war, what would that be?***

**Andrew Exum:** The thing that I would say is that this is going to be an extremely difficult war that demands more resources, that demands more of our attention, that is going to demand more American lives, unfortunately. But that there are U.S. and allied interests at stake in Afghanistan. Those interests being, not allowing Afghanistan to be a safe haven to be used by transnational groups to plot against the United States, and not allowing Afghanistan to be used as a safe haven for transnational groups to destabilize the government of Pakistan. So even though the war in Afghanistan is not going away anytime soon, we have clear U.S. interests at stake. Again, having said that, I would be irresponsible if I did not say that our ability to be successful in Afghanistan largely depends on the Afghans themselves. And we can not force the Afghan government to be responsible and to not be predatory towards its people. We can use our leverage, but it's going to be an uphill struggle.

***Looking ahead in this 12-month perspective that a lot of people have talked about now, if there's one thing that the American public needs to decide, what do you think that needs to be?***

**Andrew Exum:** Our goal over the next 12 months is to palpably change momentum in Afghanistan. I have no doubt that Gen. McChrystal and his team are going to have an effect in Afghanistan, and

that it's going to be a positive effect. But I think the American public and policymakers have to decide whether or not momentum has shifted enough come July or August of 2010, to justify our continued investment in the government of Afghanistan. □

# BEEFING UP COIN-LITE IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

BY HAIDER MULLICK

11 DEC 2009

Counterinsurgency, commonly referred to by its military acronym, “COIN,” essentially boils down to armed nation-building -- a deliberate process of empowering people and weakening guerrillas until a state-friendly balance emerges. By contrast, counterterrorism seeks the tactical annihilation of the enemy. President Barack Obama’s new Afghanistan and Pakistan strategy is an effort to do both, promising to dismantle and disrupt al-Qaida while leaving the expensive and time-consuming job of definitively defeating it to Islamabad and Kabul. Call it COIN-lite.

Can such an approach work?

For now, yes. But if we extend the time horizon to 5-10 years from now, the outlook is less promising. Al-Qaida and its affiliates will receive a severely damaging blow, but they won’t remain disabled for long. In medical terminology, the new strategy will stop the bleeding, but it cannot contain the risks of long-term infection.

In Afghanistan, military and civilian surges have already begun in highly populated, Taliban-controlled provinces -- Kandahar, Helmand and Zabol -- that straddle the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. In the coming months, this will augment ongoing efforts to overwhelm the enemy and rapidly transfer control to the Afghan police and army. Due to limited time and troops, however, subsequent efforts to out-administer the enemy will be nearly impossible. The Taliban and al-Qaida will remain weakened over the next two years, but they will re-emerge in the next five.

At the very least, America -- and hopefully its allies -- will have to continue to bear the financial burden of supporting the Afghan security forces for the next decade: The Afghan GDP will simply fall many times short of being able to maintain the proposed end-state of 400,000 army and police forces -- even factoring in increased economic investment and falling levels of violence.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, Washington’s strategy is driven by fear of a failing nuclear state and not by a need to create a sustainable partnership. The mission is intelligence-driven and enemy-centric, with an emphasis on near-term objectives: to bolster the Pakistani military’s campaign to regain and hold territory in the north (al-Qaida’s epicenter), to protect its nuclear weapons, and to quietly support democracy and development.

Such a strategy requires an increase in U.S. spies and drones deployed to Pakistani territory. But because such activity is highly unpopular among Pakistanis, most of the U.S.-Pakistan partnership will remain clandestine. That, in turn, will lead to even more cancerous anti-Americanism and conspiracy theories throughout the country. Eventually Pakistan’s military and civilian government will be infected. As for U.S. development aid, [it is, and will remain, invisible](#).

This policy of “ask but don’t tell” for Pakistanis wanting to know more about development aid

fails to take into account one of the most important battlefields of modern warfare -- that of public perception. Islamabad insisted that keeping development dollars secret was the best way to increase its own legitimacy and to keep American aid workers safe. The net result after eight years? The civilian government is crumbling, and American diplomats and aid workers are living in an embassy resembling Alcatraz.

Today, making the U.S.-Pakistan relationship transparent and comprehensible is no longer optional, but required. The fundamental problem of American non-military aid is not its amount, deliverance or usefulness, but rather that most Pakistani “citizen recipients” don’t know what they’re getting, why they’re getting it, and where it all ends up. These questions must be credibly answered, and can be in creative ways, in a country with more than 90 million cell-phone users and 18 million internet users. (For more see my pilot project, [www.usaidforme.com](http://www.usaidforme.com).)

Moreover, measured and holistic country-specific partnerships must be backed by a sound regional framework. For decades, Afghanistan has borne the brunt of an India-Pakistan proxy war, but Washington [has yet to formulate a realistic response](#) to this regional competition. Absent an effective influence-sharing formula between Indians and Pakistanis -- one approved by the Afghans -- President Obama’s strategy will lead the region back to the chaos of the 1990s. Only this time, there will be narco-terrorists eyeing nuclear weapons in the mix.

As a strategy, counterterrorism is limited. It stops existing terrorists, but not future recruits. Because al-Qaida and its affiliates lack structure and a fixed location, they cannot be militarily defeated. Instead, their destruction requires a long-term and multifaceted commitment of at least five to 10 years in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

While the scope and sequence of the necessary commitments differ between Afghanistan and Pakistan, some of the cures are the same for both countries. Both Afghan and Pakistani security forces -- especially police -- must be trained and equipped, albeit at different levels. More-visible non-military aid should be pledged toward helping Kabul and Islamabad improve education and the provision of justice.

Finally, American strategies and timetables will have to compete with al-Qaida’s counter-strategies and counter-timetables. Absent positive shifts in Afghan and Pakistani perceptions of the threat, as well as a demonstrated U.S. commitment to a long-term investment of its soft power, al-Qaida and its affiliates will simply wait out the American presence. To break the cycle of terrorist booms and busts, President Obama will have to make clear to Americans, Afghans and Pakistanis that while COIN-lite is the least-bad option for now, it will soon be upgraded. □

# KNOWING WHEN TO WALK AWAY FROM AFGHANISTAN

BY NIKOLAS GVOSDEV  
25 JUN 2010

Are the deck chairs being reshuffled on the Titanic that is the Afghan war? First, Afghan President Hamid Karzai forced the resignations of his interior minister, Hanif Atmar, and the head of his intelligence services, Amrullah Saleh. Next, the U.K. special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Sherard Cowper-Coles, went on indefinite leave, turning over his post to his deputy. Now, in the aftermath of the infamous Rolling Stone profile, U.S. President Barack Obama has removed Gen. Stanley McChrystal as commander of U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan, replacing him with Gen. David Petraeus.

What is interesting to note, of course, is that each of these men left or was forced out from his post for holding quite different views about the way forward in Afghanistan. Atmar and Saleh have opposed [Karzai's "plan B"](#) of reaching out to the Taliban through negotiations to try and bring them into a government of national unity. They were also among the most pro-American members of his cabinet. So perhaps Karzai was worried by the Soviet-era precedent of Moscow replacing ineffective Afghan communist leader Babrak Karmal with his intelligence chief Najibullah back in 1986, and wanted to forestall a replay of this scenario in 2010.

Cowper-Coles, Britain's counterpart to America's Richard Holbrooke, was an opponent of the U.S.-proposed "surge" in Afghanistan, arguing that there would be no military solution and that Karzai's strategy of negotiations was the only way forward to extricate the West from the apparent quagmire it faces in the mountains of the Hindu Kush. His strongly advocated position -- reiterated in a recent speech in London -- was creating a wave of cognitive dissonance within the ranks of the U.S.-NATO mission, putting him at odds with the rest of the team.

Finally, the intemperate remarks of McChrystal and his staff may have been the proximate cause of his removal, but Petraeus will find it just as difficult to navigate the contradictory political objectives that Washington, particularly in an election year, wants to see achieved. These pit the need to continue and expand the COIN mission, which stresses American soldiers accepting a higher risk of harm in order to protect the Afghan population, against the need to keep American casualties to a bare minimum so as not to fuel increasing domestic skepticism about the war. Alongside this contradiction is another: On the one hand, the U.S. and its allies must gradually reconstruct an Afghan state capable of meeting the country's governance challenges, most notably the provision of security. On the other, Washington desperately needs a series of rapid successes to show "progress" to an American public that is questioning the value of making such a long-term commitment.

The Obama administration is running up against the political clock, and more particularly, [Steven Metz's "three and out" paradigm](#), by which the U.S. population is "only prepared to support major counterinsurgency operations for about three years." The president, by reviewing Afghan strategy and taking personal ownership of the war last December, reset the timer. But now he needs to show

tangible success by the end of the year in order to sustain the public's commitment.

But changing personnel doesn't get at the heart of the question. The U.S. "surge" strategy for Afghanistan is based, to some extent, not on the American campaign in Iraq but rather on the lessons learned from "Plan Colombia" over the last decade. It assumes that Afghanistan under Hamid Karzai can duplicate the successes of Colombia under President Alvaro Uribe in rolling back entrenched insurgent groups. But that assumes a government in Kabul that is determined and able first to deploy security forces to retake and hold territory, and then to provide security and basic services to win the loyalties of the population.

That, in turn, rests on the assumption that the inability of the Karzai government to do so up to this point reflects a lack of capabilities rather than a lack of will. And the July 2011 benchmark for a U.S. troop drawdown is based on the calculation that a massive deployment of U.S. and NATO military force up front will encourage the Karzai administration to follow this course of action, by demonstrating what can be achieved. The offensive in Marjah, of course, was supposed to be the first such demonstration, but the results are so far decidedly mixed.

In assessing current developments in Afghanistan, it is striking to read a [1949 State Department White Paper](#) about the defeat of the Nationalist Chinese government of Chiang Kai-Shek on the mainland. The report concludes that the Kuomintang had "lost the crusading spirit that won them the people's loyalty during the early years of the war," and that the government had "sunk into corruption . . . and into reliance on the United States to win the war for them." Chiang's defeat did "not stem from any inadequacy of American aid." Rather, the Nationalists "proved incapable of meeting the crisis confronting them, [their] troops had lost the will to fight, and the government had lost popular support."

Could a similar memo be written about Afghanistan today?

The Taliban, of course, are not Mao's Chinese communist cadres, but the parallels between a corrupt and ineffective Kuomintang and the current regime in Kabul are apparent. And between 1945 and 1949, despite making changes in its military and diplomatic personnel sent to China, and despite large amounts of economic and military aid, the U.S. seemed to find no good and effective way to prevent a communist victory in the Chinese civil war.

Perhaps things will change in Afghanistan. The wild card -- just as in Iraq in 2007 -- is whether influential local leaders develop a stake in supporting U.S. efforts. Perhaps Petraeus will be able to duplicate in Afghanistan what he did in Iraq. But as bad as things were in Iraq in January 2007, he has been dealt a much weaker hand to play today.

Metz's parting advice, given two and a half years ago, is for policymakers to know "when to walk away" and abandon efforts to re-engineer a failing society, in favor of humanitarian aid and containment of the problem. The new personnel should continue to pursue the president's Afghan strategy, for now. But Washington should be considering its alternatives if Karzai ends up bearing a closer resemblance to Chiang than to Uribe. □



# **U.S. Military Doctrine and Strategy**

# COUNTERINSURGENTS IN THE HALLS OF POWER

BY SPENCER ACKERMAN

31 MAR 2009

Interneecine ideological battles have bedeviled the foreign policy of every U.S. administration in recent memory. Human rights liberals fought unsuccessfully with Cold Warriors for control of the Carter administration. New-right hardliners initially won the war for Ronald Reagan's foreign policy soul but then lost it to George Schultz's old-guard Republican realists. The Clinton administration became an altar on which liberal interventionists exorcised the Democratic Party's Vietnam Syndrome demons. Most bitterly and most tragically, the first term of George W. Bush's presidency demonstrated what happens when neoconservatives and their allies win more ideological contests than they lose.

Barack Obama's young presidency is already remarkable in many ways. One of the least remarked upon, however, is the absence of clear interneecine ideological combat. The Obama administration has no shortage of internal divisions, even when it comes to foreign policy. For instance, several young foreign-policy scholars who signed on with Obama's campaign when he was an underdog for the Democratic presidential nomination expressed bewilderment and disappointment at the subsequent nomination of Hillary Rodham Clinton as Secretary of State after Obama's election victory. Clinton's arrival at the State Department became a vehicle for Clintonites to exact revenge for the protracted primary battle by denying candidate Obama's policy advisers the jobs they expected to have once he became president. But this has primarily been a political battle, not an ideological one. The Clintonites might be more establishment-minded than their progressive Obama-centric counterparts, but they're also more technocrats than reactionaries.

Yet there is one faction within the Obama administration that deserves special attention, even if it recognizes itself more as a community of interest than a discrete ideology. Emanating from the Pentagon, a generation of theorist-practitioners of counterinsurgency warfare has emerged to reach a new height of influence in the shaping of American foreign policy. In the Bush administration and before, this group was a small band of dissenters, particularly within the Army and Marine Corps that nurtured many of them. Even after the troop surge in Iraq in 2007 introduced many in the United States to theories of "population-centric" war-fighting, few of the doctrine's proponents reached positions of prominence in either the administration that launched the surge or the 2008 presidential campaign of the Republican candidate, Sen. John McCain, who embraced it. In a remarkable turn of events, it is the administration of a progressive Democrat that has elevated this group of defense theorists, many of whom are Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, and embraced their theories of warfare.

If the Bush administration's early years provided the neoconservatives with their moment, the Obama administration has now provided the counterinsurgents with theirs. Deeply involved at the creation of the administration's new approach to the Afghanistan war and with implementing the administration's plan to extricate the U.S. military from Iraq, the counterinsurgents now possess the power they previously lacked to craft American strategy. This newfound influence is likely to

affect U.S. foreign policy in contradictory ways: escalating the Afghanistan war while de-emphasizing its military components; challenging and accommodating the bloated military budget; and changing the perception of which international actors are truly incorrigible American enemies. Distinguishing the counterinsurgents from other recent schools of defense thinking, particularly ideological ones, is that counterinsurgents are more likely to be passionate about transforming the internal structure of the national-security apparatus than they are about discrete formulations of the national interest.

While they serve a Democratic administration -- and, indeed, a progressive one -- many style themselves as beyond considerations of partisan politics, and have minimal interaction with the progressive movement that brought the president to power. That, in turn, has led to an uneasy relationship with Democratic partisans, many of whom are exhibiting growing uneasiness with the Afghanistan war. But to listen to several counterinsurgents, the U.S. would be better off waging as few counterinsurgencies as possible. All of this raises a question that will be on display as the counterinsurgents help shape national security policy in the next four years: will counterinsurgency theory check U.S. military excesses or exacerbate them?

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If the counterinsurgents don't view themselves as bound by a common ideology, they certainly view themselves as bound by a common set of experiences. The first of these was the inability of the U.S. military to win the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan using traditional conceptions of land warfare. The second was the U.S. government's reliance on the U.S. military to prosecute these wars without the benefit of support from civilian components of national security. In 2003, the New York Times Magazine profiled John Nagl -- at the time an Army major and battalion operations officer in Balad, Iraq, and one of the few in the U.S. military familiar with the work of the Algerian War-era French counterinsurgent, Lt. Col. David Galula. The article portrayed Nagl as frustrated over the lack of support his soldiers received from an incompetent civilian occupation government.

To the counterinsurgents, the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan are less strategic -- should the U.S. have invaded in the first place? -- than practical. Most fundamentally, military commanders in the two post-9/11 wars learned that applying massive amounts of force to a population harboring an insurgency was more often than not counterproductive to the war effort. Relatedly, neutralizing visible leaders of insurgent groups had marginal effects on the insurgent groups' resilience. During 2003 and 2004, the 4th Infantry Division in Iraq alarmed other units with its apparent emphasis on mass detentions as a response to the growing guerilla resistance. In mid-2006, the U.S. military succeeded at great cost in killing Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaida in Iraq. In both cases, the insurgencies in Iraq grew more powerful after apparent American successes.

The conclusion reached by several officers was that successfully prosecuting these wars required discrimination in the use of force; coordination in the application of national power; and, above all, winning the allegiance of the indigenous population to keep the insurgency from using it as a feeder pool. By 2007, a growing number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and civilians -- diplomats, development workers, legal advisers, economists and outside analysts -- had also concluded that the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan were best confronted by addressing the legitimate concerns of Iraqi and Afghan civilians.

That required attentiveness to the security of the locals, rather than strictly focusing on the security of U.S. troops. It required providing an outlet for their political grievances, rather than treating them as losers who needed to accept a new political order that had left them in the cold. And it required giving them tangible economic and material benefits for supporting a host government over an insurgency, rather than promises of rewards in a far off future to get them to cast their lot in with the government.

Implied in all of this was that the arduous task of persuading a population to bandwagon with a government and not its enemies required unity of effort between defense, development and diplomatic elements of national security. Adherents of this approach -- part military doctrine, part political science -- use the term “population-centric COIN,” or counterinsurgency, to describe it.

Its most important exponent, advocate and intellectual force happens to be the most respected general officer the U.S. Army has produced since Colin Powell. David Petraeus’ achievements in Iraq are well known by now, and his turn as commander of U.S. forces during the surge in 2007 has become the galvanizing event for the counterinsurgency community, even if no consensus exists within that community on the broader value of the Iraq war. Whatever the failures of the surge to provide a lasting political compact in Iraq, Petraeus proved that a military strategy centered around the provision of public safety and a discrimination between committed and transactional enemies could achieve significant and relatively rapid gains in security.

Typically overlooked in the hagiography of Petraeus is his crucial time commanding the Combined Arms Center at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, the Army’s brain trust. Ever since Vietnam, the Army and Marine Corps’ few counterinsurgency experts have been an obscure band of military dissenters, out of step with the doctrinal evolutions of their services. But on the banks of the Missouri River, Petraeus turned Leavenworth into a hive of counterinsurgency study, establishing a joint Army-Marine Corps COIN Center -- with a chair cleverly named for Ike Skelton, the powerful senior Missouri Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee -- and convening like-minded counterinsurgency scholars for idea-sharing and networking. At Leavenworth, under Petraeus’ command, the Army began to institutionalize the study of counterinsurgency, and began rethinking many of the methods of warfare that had resulted in quagmires in Iraq and Afghanistan.

By the time Petraeus made it to Baghdad to put his rethink into practice, another intellectual center, this one in Washington, was getting off the ground. Two Clinton-era Pentagon officials, Kurt Campbell and Michele Flournoy, founded the Center for a New American Security to recast the Washington security debate, particularly within the Democratic Party. While, superficially, CNAS appeared to be a force pulling the Democrats in a more conservative direction -- its first white paper on Iraq offered a plea against withdrawal -- its hires were not the low-level officials from the previous administration that populate typical think tanks, but rather students and practitioners of counterinsurgency. CNAS offered the iconoclastic counterinsurgents a pathway into the Democratic Party policy apparatus; the Obama campaign -- which also fashioned itself as unencumbered by traditional thinking on security -- was eager to extend an invitation.

In January, Flournoy became the Obama administration’s under secretary of defense for policy. The position comes with a measure of irony: Doug Feith, a leading neoconservative, held the job during George W. Bush’s first term, using it to hire several like-minded thinkers who subsequently helped plan the Iraq war. Under Flournoy, the outpost still retains its role as the intellectual headquarters for a particular vision of defense. But Flournoy’s priority, in keeping with a particular substrain of counterinsurgency thinking, is to spread out the burdens of national security away from the military and toward the civilian agencies of government. “Whole of government” was a phrase she used repeatedly in her January confirmation hearings, by which Flournoy meant that the burdens of security have to be rethought and expanded in a comprehensive manner. “Across the U.S. government as a whole, working with our NATO allies, working with the Afghan government, working with international donors . . . all elements of national power [should be] brought to bear,” Flournoy told senators in describing her approach to Afghanistan.

Flournoy has hired a number of counterinsurgents and their allies from her old think tank and elsewhere. Janine Davidson is one of the most important members of the counterinsurgency community and one of the few to come from the Air Force, where she used to fly C-130s. She played an integral role in cobbling together the community from obscure corners of the government during the waning days of the Bush administration. From her post in the Pentagon, she helped start a mostly-online salon for counterinsurgent communication called the Consortium for Complex

Operations, where diplomats, aid workers, troops and others could exchange ideas ahead of deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan, and assess what worked and what didn't after returning.

Davidson is in the process of becoming a deputy assistant secretary of defense for plans, a somewhat new position that Flournoy is carving out of the directorate of special operations, low-intensity conflict and interdependent capabilities (SO/LIC & IC). In itself that move is significant: SO/LIC & IC has long been more interested in irregular warfare than the rest of the policy shop. Flournoy's rearrangement suggests an integration of nontraditional thinking about warfare across the policy shop. Leading that effort will be Kathleen Hicks, an ally of Flournoy's from a previous job at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a director of policy planning in the Bush Pentagon. Hicks brings with her an interest in integrating civilian components of national security into defense planning.

Several of Flournoy's CNAS colleagues have also followed her into the Pentagon. James Miller, CNAS' vice president for research, is her principal deputy, expected to play a leading role in coordinating the Quadrennial Defense Review, a massive study of defense policy that occurs every four years. Colin Kahl, a dedicated counterinsurgent who focused on Iraq as a junior Pentagon official and at CNAS, is now deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East, a choice that indicates that section of the policy shop will focus heavily on Iraq. Vikram Singh, a South Asia expert at CNAS who also toiled in the belly of the Bush Pentagon, is now a trusted advisor to Flournoy on Afghanistan. Shawn Brimley, another CNAS counterinsurgent who worked on defense reorganization issues as well as Iraq, has also joined the policy shop.

At least two other counterinsurgents who are newly minted deputy assistant secretaries of defense are worth noting: Craig Mullaney, who has the Afghanistan portfolio, and Phil Carter, who has the detainee portfolio. Both are war veterans -- Mullaney of Afghanistan and Carter of Iraq -- but as significantly, both served as captains. To go from being junior officers to senior civilian officials is a large jump. But such an approach bears a resemblance to how Petraeus assembled his brain trust in Iraq, skipping over several layers of the chain of command to find sharp and unconventional thinkers to advise him.

Some of them, still in uniform, are key allies to their civilian counterparts in Flournoy's directorate. David Fastabend, a two-star Army general, is director of strategy and planning for the Joint Staff, which advises the service chiefs. In Iraq, he helped Petraeus recast strategy dramatically by arguing for cutting deals with insurgent groups willing to take them, a key factor in reducing violence. John Allen, a three-star Marine general, led Marines in western Iraq before becoming Petraeus' deputy at U.S. Central Command. Allen played a key role in the command's strategy review toward the Middle East and South Asia, which brought in hundreds of development, diplomacy and defense experts for advice. Two generals that Petraeus advised the Army to promote, H.R. McMaster and Sean MacFarland, were early and innovative practitioners of counterinsurgency in Iraq, and are sure to welcome and assist the Pentagon's new turn toward it.

Counterinsurgents at the State Department are harder to locate, reflecting two complaints often heard from counterinsurgents and veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan: the relatively small number of diplomats who have served in the wars and, more generally, the State Department's lack of an expeditionary culture. A key figure charged with changing that is Amb. John Herbst, a holdover from the Bush administration, director of a small office called Reconstruction and Stabilization, which seeks to build capacity within the department for diplomacy toward weak and failing states. Another counterinsurgent ally is Derek Chollet, a former CNAS scholar and adviser to John Edwards who now serves as deputy director of policy planning, but whose influence remains unclear.

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The first and most important test for the counterinsurgents is in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Flournoy was a co-chairwoman of the administration's strategy overhaul, making her present at the

creation of what may well be its defining policy initiative. The Obama administration's approach to the Afghanistan war reflects best counterinsurgency practices: getting troops out where the population is, in order to protect Afghans from insurgents; swarming civilian development workers and diplomats into the country to "out-govern" the insurgents, instead of just out-fighting them; orienting the political strategy toward local leadership rather than corrupt or unresponsive national leadership; and attempting to strike deals with whatever insurgent groups are willing to accept them. It may not work, and if it doesn't, the counterinsurgents will not be able to deny responsibility for the policy.

Yet one of the more distinguishing aspects of the counterinsurgents is the degree to which the battles they wish to fight the most are internal. Their passions are most aroused by ensuring that institutional centers of military knowledge like Ft. Leavenworth or the Joint Forces Command incorporate counterinsurgency lessons. This reflects the community's largest fear: that a U.S. military embittered by its experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan will deny itself the tools necessary to combat future insurgencies, as happened in the post-Vietnam era. A central tenet of counterinsurgent thinking to emerge from the Iraq war is that a lack of capacity for counterinsurgency will not stop civilian political leadership from forcing the military to wage such campaigns. So it is preferable for preparedness' sake to institutionalize counterinsurgency, in order to prevent having to relearn it from bitter experience once again.

One of the most passionate counterinsurgency arguments in 2007 and 2008 came after an unconventional Air Force general named Charlie Dunlap published a monograph called "Shortchanging the Joint Fight?" In it he critiqued the 2006 Army and Marine Corps field manual on counterinsurgency for insufficient attention to the prospects for air power in counterinsurgency. Traditional counterinsurgency theory is wary of air power for its imprecision, but Dunlap argued that modern air power is more precise than most artillery pieces. A debate broke out over whether Dunlap was sincere or whether he represented an Air Force attempt at stifling counterinsurgency advances. Similarly, it's telling that Michele Flournoy's first public speech since her confirmation was at a Brookings forum on stability operations -- Davidson moderated -- on the very day that the administration released the broad outlines of its Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy.

Taken together, the counterinsurgent attempt at reorienting the two U.S. ground wars and the counterinsurgent predilection for inward institutional focus has created a measure of cognitive dissonance between themselves and outside observers. A debate has broken out in the blogosphere, for instance, between prominent counterinsurgent blogger and CNAS research fellow Andrew Exum -- an Iraq and Afghanistan veteran who contributed to the Central Command strategy review -- and several progressive and libertarian critics over the degree to which the counterinsurgents normatively advocate counterinsurgency. In commenting on a review of a new book by counterinsurgent luminary and Petraeus adviser David Kilcullen, Exum argued that "No one who really understands [counterinsurgency] wants to do it." Many are unsure whether the counterinsurgents truly endorse that statement beyond a generalized understanding of the horrors of war.

That tension is also at the heart of the counterinsurgency dilemma facing both Obama's progressive constituency and others seeking restraint in American foreign policy after the reckless adventurism of the Bush years. On the one hand, several aspects of counterinsurgent activity comport with progressive principles: the emphasis placed on material development and judiciousness in the use of force; the willingness to reconcile with persuadable enemies; the concern for the well-being of a civilian population. But on the other hand, at its heart, counterinsurgency is coterminous with military occupation, something progressives -- including progressive counterinsurgents -- find unacceptable. The two are extricable, of course, as with the U.S. advisory mission in the Philippines in its battle against separatist insurgents, and rarely has the U.S. launched a war simply because it possessed new tools of warfare. But the role that U.S. forces would play in suppressing rebellions in peripheral quarters of the world is reason enough for concern about counterinsurgency among progressives and foreign policy realists alike.



It is unclear how that dilemma will be resolved. In fact, if recent history is any guide, it won't be. Ideological disputes often characterize elements of administration policy, but rarely does one ideological faction achieve unchallenged supremacy. The counterinsurgents who now help guide the Obama administration are experiencing their moment of opportunity after a long period of obscurity. Whether or not they ultimately gain the upper hand in the administration, the difficulties of the threats the U.S. faces may lead them to pine for the days when they were anonymous military dissenters. □

# THE U.S. ARMY'S DOCTRINAL RENAISSANCE

BY JACK KEM

14 OCT 2008

This month's release of Field Manual 3-07, "Stability Operations," marks a milestone for the United States Army. With it, the Army acknowledges and codifies a dramatic change in thinking: No longer does the mission of the military stop at winning wars; now it must also help "win the peace."

As Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell, IV, states in the foreword to the new manual:

As the Nation continues into this era of uncertainty and persistent conflict, the lines separating war and peace, enemy and friend, have blurred and no longer conform to the clear delineations we once knew. At the same time, emerging drivers of conflict and instability are combining with rapid cultural, social, and technological change to further complicate our understanding of the global security environment. Military success alone will not be sufficient to prevail in this environment. To confront the challenges before us, we must strengthen the capacity of the other elements of national power, leveraging the full potential of our interagency partners.

The "Stability Operations" manual codifies guidance from several national and defense policies that preceded it [1], to make long term stability in the aftermath of warfighting an operational priority for the American military. According to one of them, Department of Defense Directive 300.05, stability operations are:

. . . a core U.S. military mission that the Department of Defense shall be prepared to conduct and support. They shall be given priority comparable to combat operations and be explicitly addressed and integrated across all DOD activities including doctrine, organizations, training, education, exercises, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and planning.

As a result, stability operations are now considered as important as, and sometimes even more important than, traditional offensive and defensive operations. The enormous shift in mindset is an acknowledgement of the reality of today's operational environment, and of the operational environment that is likely to unfold in the future.

Stability operations have a precise doctrinal definition, and differ from traditional warfighting concepts of offensive and defensive operations, which emphasize the use of lethal combat power against an enemy force. Stability operations instead focus on providing a foundation for conflict transformation. The emphasis is on reestablishing security and control so as to enable other instruments of national power (diplomatic, information, and economic means) to facilitate transition to civilian control by the host nation. They involve a variety of military missions and tasks, and are conducted in coordination with civil instruments of national power to "maintain or reestablish a

safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.”

For the Army, offensive and defensive operations rely on the *destructive* capabilities of military forces; stability operations rely on the *constructive* capabilities of the military. The reality of today’s operational environment is that these actions take place simultaneously; what you break and destroy today, you may have to rebuild tomorrow. By putting stability operations on an equal doctrinal footing with offensive and defensive operations, the new stability operations manual introduces the consideration of the *consequences* of all actions in a conflict into the planning and operational phases. Colin Powell’s famous “pottery barn” rule -- “you break it, you own it” -- now applies at the operational level.

The manual does not suggest that the military -- and specifically the Army -- be expected to “win the peace” alone, but neither does it limit its role to setting the conditions for the transformation to a stable peace. The military may well have to take the lead by necessity. An important component of the manual is its concept of a “comprehensive approach,” by which it means coordinating the various efforts of all of the actors involved in stability operations -- including military forces, U.S. government departments and agencies, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, multinational partners, and private sector entities -- to achieve a unity of effort. This goes beyond both the concept of jointness within the military, as well as the concept of the “whole of government approach,” towards an integrated interagency framework. The “comprehensive approach” requires a correspondingly broad skill set that includes accommodation, understanding, shared purpose and cooperation, in order to bring what Joseph Nye calls “smart power” to bear on the conflict zone.

## THE ROLE OF DOCTRINE IN THE ARMY

Doctrine plays a special role in the United States Army, providing fundamental principles and “best practices” for the Army to effectively accomplish its role in support of national objectives. It is not intended to be prescriptive; instead, it is intended to provide enough detail to guide operations, while being flexible enough for commanders to exercise appropriate initiative. It is an authoritative reference, but one that requires judgment in application.

To be useful, doctrine must satisfy a number of criteria. To begin with, it must be vetted, accurate, and acceptable, all of which is ensured by the deliberate process involved in developing doctrine before it is published. Second, it must be well known and commonly understood, which the Army’s training and education programs function to accomplish. When all of these criteria have been met, doctrine forms the common language and shared professional culture throughout the Army. As Mr. Clint Ancker, the Director of the Army’s Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate says, “Doctrine is sound military advice prepared in advance.”

There are several levels of doctrine within the Army, ranging from overarching capstone doctrine, to more focused keystone doctrine, to detailed supporting doctrine. Of the two capstone doctrinal manuals, FM1 (“The Army”) contains the Army’s vision, while FM 3-0 (“Operations”) provides the overarching principles for conducting “full spectrum operations” (operations conducted in all environments). FM 3-0 also describes how the Army links tactical operations to strategic aims, as well as the conduct of Army operations in unified action with other forces.

The next level of doctrine is the Army’s fifteen keystone doctrines, of which FM 3-07, “Stability Operations,” is but one. These manuals focus on keystone concepts such as particular elements of combat power (for example, intelligence, sustainment, and fire support), full spectrum operations (which includes FM 3-07, “Stability Operations”), continuum of operations, and reference. FM 3-24, “Counterinsurgency,” is a keystone “continuum of operations” manual that was published in December 2006.

The third level of manuals is Army supporting doctrine. These manuals provide greater detail for tactics, techniques, and procedures. Examples of these doctrinal publications include FM 3-06, “Urban Operations,” and FM 5-19, “Composite Risk Management.”

Amazingly, there are about 550 different doctrinal manuals in the Army, of which only roughly 48 (two capstone manuals, approximately 15 keystone manuals, and about 31 priority Army supporting doctrinal manuals) provide broadly referenced perspectives for the Army. As a result, there is now a concerted effort to produce fewer manuals of higher quality to avoid redundancy and add clarity to doctrine.

## THE CURRENT DOCTRINAL ‘RENAISSANCE’

Nevertheless, the development of doctrine is a continual process. The current capstone “Operations” manual, FM 3-0, was published in February 2008, representing the manual’s 15th edition since it was originally published in 1905 but, significantly, its first revision since the events 9/11. On average, the “Operations” manual is revised every seven years.

The publication of a new “Operations” manual is a major event in the Army, because it frequently represents major changes in the Army’s approach to war. As examples, the 1976 edition of the “Operations” manual (at that time FM 100-5) shifted the focus of the Army away from the war in Vietnam, incorporated lessons from the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and changed the operational theme to the Active Defense, while the 1982 edition adopted the more offensive approach of the Air Land Battle. Both represented major changes in the Army’s conception of warfighting.

The 2001 “Operations” manual, FM 3-0, was published in June 2001, just prior to the events of 9/11. That edition did incorporate many of the lessons learned in the turbulent period following the fall of the Berlin Wall, including the events in Bosnia. In particular, “full spectrum operations” emphasizing non-lethal actions were incorporated as an essential component of the Army’s operational concept, to be included with combat actions. The 2001 “Operations” manual, however, still categorized stability operations as “other” types of operations.

Raising stability operations’ to the same level as both offensive and defensive operations wasn’t the only way in which the February 2008 edition of FM 3-0 continued the Army’s conceptual evolution. The operational concept in this edition emphasized that the Army was in a period of “persistent conflict,” requiring Army forces to conduct full spectrum operations while simultaneously involved in the four elements of offense, defense, stability, and civil support operations. Army forces would also conduct operations as part of a joint interdependent force rather than fighting alone, and would accept prudent risks to create opportunities. In addition to recognizing the importance of stability and civil support operations, the manual also emphasized that Army operations would extend beyond purely military considerations to include non-lethal capabilities in its operational concept. Significantly, the 2008 FM 3-0 *Operations* manual stressed the importance of the human element in all operations, but especially those that take place among the population. These concepts in the capstone manual built on the gains from the earlier manual on “Counterinsurgency,” and helped set the conditions for the follow-on manual for “Stability Operations.”

## THE COUNTERINSURGENCY MANUAL: A NECESSARY ANOMALY

The highly touted manual FM 3-24, “Counterinsurgency,” was the result of an intensive effort by a number of leading experts in the field of counterinsurgency, led by then-Lt. Gen. David Petraeus. It was developed on a fast track and published in December 2006, just prior to the “surge” in Iraq, in order to meet an urgent need for a doctrinal framework for the ongoing and future operations in Iraq.

Because it preceded the 2008 FM 3-0 “Operations” manual, it was developed without the benefit

of any guidance from a current capstone manual. Nevertheless, the counterinsurgency manual addressed the immediate requirements of ongoing counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and therefore became the emergent doctrinal framework for the U.S. Army, as well as for the U.S. Marine Corps, for over a year (from December 2006 until the publication of FM 3-0 in February 2008). As the foreword to FM 3-24 clearly states, the manual was “designed to fill a doctrinal gap”:

It has been 20 years since the Army published a field manual devoted exclusively to counterinsurgency operations. For the Marine Corps it has been 25 years. With our Soldiers and Marines fighting insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is essential that we give them a manual that provides principles and guidelines for counterinsurgency operations.

Despite being an anomaly to fill an immediate need, the development process for the Counterinsurgency Manual sparked a doctrinal “renaissance” that is characterized by full spectrum operations, operating among the population, and an open and transparent development of doctrine with stakeholders directly involved. Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell, IV, notes this in a recent blog entry on the release of FM 3-07, “Stability Operations”:

Overall, FM 3-07 marks another step in a doctrinal renaissance that began in 2006 with the release of the Army’s counterinsurgency manual. As a companion piece to that manual, FM 3-07 charts a definitive roadmap from violent conflict to stable peace, blazing a pathway into an uncertain future characterized by persistent conflict across the international system.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF FM 3-07: ENGAGING THE STAKEHOLDERS

Significantly, the very skill sets needed for the Army’s new “comprehensive approach” -- accommodate, understand, base on purpose, and cooperate - were used as the basis for developing the FM 3-07, “Stability Operations,” manual, which took nearly a year of writing, revising, and coordinating with a wide array of stakeholders in the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, non-governmental, and private sector community.

***Accommodating.*** In order to accommodate the concerns and contributions of all of the stakeholders, the Army created multiple points of entry to influence the development and writing of the doctrine. An example was the Interagency Symposium hosted by the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center (CAC) in June 2008, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The symposium used panel discussions and working groups to air out issues, including going beyond the “interagency label” to address specific concerns of the NGO and IGO community. This formal process continued an informal process of engaging stakeholders during the entire writing and revising of the manual. The final edition of FM 3-07 reflects this interaction, with the inclusion of appendices such as “USAID Principles of Reconstruction and Development” and “Humanitarian Response Principles.”

***Understanding.*** Understanding the interests and objectives of all of the stakeholders was a key component of the development of the doctrine. In addition to the Interagency Symposium in June 2008, this was accomplished through a wide variety of venues designed to “socialize” stability operations to all of the stakeholders. These included a special Interagency Reader edition of Military Review, increased participation of interagency and NGO/IGO partners in training exercises, and increased interagency integration in military education at the Command and General Staff College. While a lot of room for improvement remains, great strides were made in improving understanding among the military and its interagency and NGO/IGO partners.

***Base on Purpose.*** Basing Stability Operations on purpose has its own unique challenges. Admittedly, there are some huge cultural differences between the very diverse stakeholders of the military, the interagency, and the NGO/IGO communities. Each wants to leverage the capacity of

the others; none want to be “used” by the others. Achieving the “unity of effort” in the comprehensive approach therefore has to focus on the end state. In the case of stability operations, the shared purpose or end state is the existence of a legitimate, functioning host nation government. For the development of FM 3-07, the purpose was to develop a manual that had utility for all of the stakeholders involved.

**Cooperation.** Cooperation in the development of the Stability Operations manual was reinforced by greater institutional familiarity, trust, and transparency. Doctrinal publications are meant to be read, studied, and used as an ongoing process. As Lt. Gen. Caldwell wrote recently, FM 3-07 “is already driving change across the Army, but it’s also influencing changes across the other departments and agencies of the U.S. Government, aid organizations, and our allies.” This process of change requires continued cooperation among all of the stakeholders to remain “a manual that has equal relevance to our partners both in and out of uniform.”

## THE WORK AT HAND: FULL SPECTRUM OPERATIONS

The evolution of the “doctrinal renaissance” began with FM 3-24, “Counterinsurgency,” in December 2006, as a stopgap measure to fill a doctrinal gap for current operations. Even though it followed a year later, the capstone operational doctrine for the Army, FM 3-0, re-emphasized the importance of full spectrum operations that included stability operations, counterinsurgency, and traditional warfighting characterized by offensive and defensive operations.

Future doctrinal development will continue this trend, with the development of additional keystone doctrinal publications in the next year that emphasize full spectrum operations. The first of these manuals will be the keystone manual on training (FM 7-0), closely followed by development in the keystone doctrinal areas of planning, information operations, and civil support operations.

Counterinsurgency, or COIN, will still remain important to the doctrinal framework, but with the release of the stability operations manual and the additional keystone manuals, the emphasis will shift away from the COIN-centric approach to a broader approach that spans the full spectrum of conflict. These operations require adaptability in order to deal with changing conditions, and to apply the necessary resources and capabilities to achieve results. Based on the lessons of the recent past, including the Second Lebanon War, there will also likely be a renewed interest in limited conventional war.

One clearly needed clarification for future doctrinal development involves the concept of the “spectrum of conflict.” As illustrated by a chart in FM 3-0, “Operations,” the “spectrum of conflict” for full spectrum operations progresses from “stable peace” to “unstable peace” to “insurgency” to “general war.” The third element, insurgency, doesn’t really capture completely the evolution from unstable peace to general war. An increase of violence may be characterized by an insurgency, but it may not necessarily go that route. By definition an insurgency is “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict.” A possible alternative along the spectrum of conflict could just as easily be characterized by limited conventional war between nation-states or a “proxy war” between great powers. It is interesting to note that the “spectrum of conflict” chart from the operations manual (FM 3-0) was not included in the new stability operations manual (FM 3-07).

Conceptually, the “spectrum of conflict” construct may be an oversimplification of the nature of conflict. Just as stability operations will take place simultaneously with offensive and defensive operations in a conflict, there may also be disparate elements of unstable peace, insurgency, and limited conventional war occurring simultaneously in a conflict. Future doctrinal development might require a departure from thinking of warfare in purely linear terms in order to incorporate this simultaneity into doctrine.

It also must broaden what remains a limited consideration of the different actors in a conflict.



The “comprehensive approach” for Stability Operations acknowledges that operational outcomes depend upon multiple stakeholders with varying degrees of responsiveness -- ranging from command and control to collaboration to cooperation -- to the “ones in charge.” Ideally, the various stakeholders are unified by a shared end state objective.

But that only represents the “good guys” in a conflict. There may also be just as many adversaries and neutral players in an operational environment that takes place, as stated in FM 3-0, “among the people.” The population will have varying levels of allegiance to friendly forces, including active and passive support and resistance. And while “winning the hearts and minds” seems to be a trite statement, it still represents a reality that must be considered to ensure a lasting peace.

The consideration of adversaries is just as complex. Multiple local groups might be vying for control in a conflict, which could in turn give rise to “proxy wars” supported by external organizations and nation-states. There could be a combination of “middle and great power” behavior patterns displayed in the operational environment, or else a return to conflicts taking place on the periphery with the great powers avoiding direct involvement but using smaller powers as proxies to fight for resources. In terms of the “great powers,” this will all most likely be characterized by a multi-polar international security environment, with an emphasis on gaining access to resources to assist economic growth.

No doctrine can see into the future, nor can it respond to all of the questions that operational circumstances give rise to. But that isn’t its purpose. FM 3-0, *Operations*, describes how doctrine should be used:

Doctrine is a guide to action, not a set of fixed rules. It combines history, an understanding of the operational environment, and assumptions about future conditions to help leaders think about how best to accomplish missions. Doctrine is consistent with human nature and broad enough to provide a guide for unexpected situations. It is also based upon the values and ethics of the Service and the Nation; it is codified by law and regulations and applied in the context of operations in the field. It provides an authoritative guide for leaders and Soldiers but requires original applications that adapt it to circumstances. Doctrine should foster initiative and creative thinking.

One thing is certain. The ongoing doctrinal development will continue to expand the body of knowledge, informed by and coordinated with the full range of stakeholders. □

#### NOTES:

*1. Including the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, and National Military Strategy, National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 44, and Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 3000.05.*

# AIRPOWER AND SAVAGE WARS

BY ROBERT FARLEY

05 JAN 2011

On Monday, [USA Today reported](#) that the United States Air Force was increasing the size of its Afghanistan contingent in order to keep up with the dramatic expansion in [the rate of airstrikes](#) since Gen. David Petraeus took over command of the war effort.

To some, the fact that Petraeus -- the American military figure most associated with [FM 3-24](#) (.pdf), also known as the [counterinsurgency](#) (COIN) manual -- is responsible for increasing [the use of airpower](#) in Afghanistan represents a paradox. FM 3-24 takes a notably [dim view of airstrikes](#), suggesting that they “can cause collateral damage that turns people against the host-nation government and provides insurgents with a major propaganda victory. Even when justified under the law of war, bombings that result in civilian casualties can bring media coverage that works to the insurgents’ benefit.” Soldiers with rifles, it is implied, are better at protecting civilians than fighter jets with bombs.

To be sure, to suggest that COIN is all about building houses and making friends is a poor caricature of the actual military tasks involved in a counterinsurgency campaign. Winning the acquiescence of the local population depends less on directly meeting their needs than on supplying security, which often requires “kinetic” action against insurgents. Thus, even “population-centric” COIN requires bombing people.

Nevertheless, assessments of the utility of airpower in counterinsurgency efforts have always been bound up in debates over the utility of airpower itself and over the importance of air forces as a separate arm of the military. The warnings about airpower found in FM 3-24 aren’t just explained by military necessity or the danger that bombs pose to innocent civilians; they are also driven by a century-old conflict between advocates of ground forces on one hand and of airpower on the other. FM 3-24 condemns airpower because the manual is first and foremost an Army document. And whatever COIN’s effect on insurgents, the Army’s advocacy of it has succeeded in putting the Air Force on the defensive.

In the wake of World War I, the Royal Air Force needed to supply a compelling reason for its continued existence. As another general European conflict seemed a distant prospect, the RAF claimed that it could win “savage wars,” and police the empire on the cheap. The RAF argued that it was easier to bomb remote villages filled with malcontents than to send troops against them, and suggested that airpower could solve problems of imperial maintenance in India, Iraq, and Africa.

[I]n these countries it may be proved that the Air Service is capable of maintaining order at a small cost as compared with military occupation. If these “policing duties” can be successfully carried out by the utilization of air power, the enlargement of the Air Force to meet greatly increased responsibilities must follow; it is in such work that the commitments of the Royal Air Force are likely to show their greatest present increase.

The British Army, already somewhat resentful about losing control of its aircraft and deeply irritated by RAF aspirations to police the empire on the cheap, replied:

Errors both in intelligence, and in identification of targets from intelligence, must inevitably be relatively frequent, unless the alternative of extreme caution is adopted, which involves the surrender of one of the greatest factors in the moral effect of aircraft, rapidity of action.

The effect of such errors is naturally exasperation, and . . . the initial state of terror produced by intensive air action is followed by a sense of exasperation rather than of submission. This is largely due to the fact that in many cases, women and children and the infirm are apt to suffer equally with, or more than, fighting men. Hatred and a desire for revenge are likely to be engendered thereby. . . .

The general consensus of opinion is that in their present stage of development, aeroplanes cannot be relied upon as the main weapon of an administration in its task of preserving law and order. . . . Although the moral effect of intensive air action is great, it is transient, and the indiscriminate destruction of life and property which will inevitably result must tend to alienate the sympathies of the inhabitants from the administration.

These sentiments, written in 1921, continue to resonate with counterinsurgency theorists, and bear a striking similarity to the language used in FM 3-24. They were also prescient: Terror bombing had a significant immediate effect on imperial policing, but its impact steadily waned as the policed populations came to understand the limitations of airplanes armed with bombs. Nonetheless, the early successes of the RAF helped win it permanent independence.

The argument over airpower in the modern COIN context has played out over similar but not identical lines. The United States Air Force is so far in no serious danger of contraction, but its ability to lay claim to resources may be threatened by perceived changes in the nature of threats. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates hasn't made things any easier for the Air Force, having removed several senior officials and cancelled some service priorities. Gates' emphasis on winning current wars as opposed to preparing for future wars has also forced the Air Force to "play nice" with the Army.

The Air Force has responded mainly by emphasizing its usefulness, including citing statistics of the extent of the air wars over both Iraq and Afghanistan. But promoting the usefulness, and even the necessity, of airpower in COIN operations represents a double-edged sword for the Air Force. While there's considerable merit to the Air Force's position that modern COIN requires the use of airpower for reconnaissance, close air support, and air mobility, the argument assumes the centrality of ground forces' contribution to such campaigns. In other words, emphasizing airpower's usefulness to COIN places the Air Force in an essentially subsidiary role, in support of ground troops. Historically, independent air forces have bitterly resisted subordination to ground forces, preferring missions that allow them to make an independent strategic impact on conflicts.

Not all airpower advocates have accommodated themselves to the primacy of ground forces. Retired Maj. Gen. Charles Dunlap (USAF) argued vociferously in [several published pieces](#) that the U.S. military focus on COIN was wrong-headed, and that "America's Asymmetric Advantage" lay in its ability to use coercive airpower around the world. One potential implication of this argument is that the United States has chosen its wars rather poorly, and in the future should refocus on conflicts that it can win cheaply and easily. The "Boots on the Ground Zealots" of the Army's COIN faction can never, in this formulation, be trusted to do anything either cheaply or easily.

Doctrinal fights are about ideas, but also about resources. The non-kinetic vision of COIN theorists is grounded in some important assumptions about how populations react to air strikes, but also supports a particular distribution of resources across the services. The apparent puzzle of an

airpower-wary general ratcheting up a bombing campaign is less puzzling from the point of view of bureaucratic politics and inter-service rivalry: Yes, Petraeus has increased the use of airpower, but it continues to be in support of “his” -- that is, the Army’s -- war. And for the time being, the Air Force continues to negotiate on Petraeus’ terms. □

# THE RE-ENCHANTMENT OF NETWORK-CENTRIC WARFARE

BY ADAM ELKUS

22 JUN 2011

A month after the mission that killed Osama Bin Laden, defense analysts are [pointing to a growing collaboration](#) between conventional and irregular forces and are calling for a lighter global military footprint, one based on raiding and strike capability rather than ponderous presence. The newfound enthusiasm for “collaborative warfare” [is reviving a concept once thought dead](#): network-centric warfare (NCW).

Paradoxically, NCW has proved itself well-suited to low-intensity operations and the culture of special operations forces, where once it was commonly associated with high-intensity conflict against a peer competitor. But NCW’s low-intensity revival also suggests that it will continue to face significant conceptual and practical obstacles to its conventional implementation.

Few agree on a common definition of NCW. There is the historical concept of NCW, which Navy analyst [Norman Friedman argues simply means](#) more information processed at higher speeds. There is the concept laid out by Vice Adm. Arthur K. Cebrowski, [who famously argued](#) (.pdf) that the military ought to shift away from singular platforms to systems -- an argument buttressed by his use of early 1990s corporate logistics and computing as role models from the civilian domain. And University of Utah professor [Sean Lawson argues](#) that Cebrowski’s innocuous version of NCW was later perverted into a hubristic and technocentric military doctrine intended to underlay a strategy with unlimited aims.

Criticisms of NCW are now clichés in defense analysis: It elevated computers over humans, prized speed of information over thoughtful analysis and neglected the role of fog and friction in warfare. Finally, critics charged that the doctrine -- optimized against a peer competitor -- did not carry over to irregular warfare. But, ironically, irregular warfare has proved a formidable testing ground for a certain kind of networking, carried out not by the Air Force or Navy but by the light infantry of the special operations community.

[A study](#) (.pdf) by two researchers at the National Defense University (NDU) argues that the special operations community developed a form of network analysis that allowed it to create network charts of insurgencies and map local environments as ecosystems. This ecosystem view of local conditions, relationships and power structures -- informed by all-source intelligence -- allowed the special operations community to better target insurgent networks.

Of course, intelligence is useless without the capability to rapidly exploit it. The NDU study claims that the close collaboration of intelligence and operations personnel dramatically shortened the “sensor-shooter” loop, [with particularly lethal results](#). Collaboration with intelligence agencies and conventional forces in support of the new counterinsurgency strategy ensured that tactical gains did not take place in a policy vacuum.

Granted, the actual strategic effectiveness of high-value targeting [has been disputed](#) and will likely only be definitively assessed when a comprehensive history of its use has been written. Conventional forces also adapted very well -- both before and after the shift in strategy -- to irregular warfare. But examined in isolation, the special operations targeting machine that killed bin Laden represented many aspects of NCW: agility, collaboration, decentralization, and decisive speed. More generally, [retired Gen. Stanley McChystal himself paid homage](#) to network theory in his review of his efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But how did the networked special operations community succeed where many think the rest of the defense community failed? The form of networked warfare that emerged in the special operations community was not the original NCW but “[netwar](#)” -- a strategic concept that emerged in parallel to NCW but focused instead on small teams that attack from multiple directions to swarm and overwhelm an opponent. While NCW and netwar overlap, NCW is the intellectual offspring of attempts to mimic large globalized corporations such as Microsoft and Amazon.com, whereas netwar is a conscious attempt to learn from the decentralized organizational structures, such as hackers and dot com start-ups, that oppose them.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq represented a triumph of the “Microsoft” form of NCW, [as new research suggests](#). The speed, integration and striking power of American forces in the Iraq War’s conventional phase represented a clear advance over past operations. Netwar’s contribution to the counterinsurgency in Iraq was a “Linux” form of NCW. Both should be understood as two sides of the same coin.

Netwar’s advent in the special operations community, however, may not prove to be a suitable model for the rest of the joint community. The special operations community has always been a magnet for unconventional ideas and personalities. Its small size, emphasis on collaboration and experimentation, and comparatively small budget made it an ideal testing lab for collaborative warfare. It is not immediately clear whether such a highly focused and size-limited concept of operations could be “scaled up” to the entire United States military.

To embrace the network also means embracing the risk of higher casualties, which policymakers are unlikely to do, even if a more agile military would be more strategically effective. [As Christopher Albon noted](#), the tactical risk to individual teams operating as part of a vast network of military units may be too large for casualty-conscious policymakers to bear. Small units -- even if networked closely together -- risk being overrun.

Whatever its complications, network-centric warfare -- in whatever form -- should not be tossed into the intellectual waste bin. Mass and agility both have a mutually reinforcing role to play in enhancing strategic effectiveness. Special operations historian James Kiras wrote in his book “[Special Operations and Strategy](#)” that conventional mass is used sequentially in defined campaigns, whereas agility is used in a nonlinear fashion to produce cumulative costs on the enemy. Such a deadly combination would certainly re-establish the U.S. military’s ability to intimidate any enemy. □



# U.S. ARMY MUST DEFINE ROLE IN A FUTURE WITH NO ENEMIES

BY ROBERT FARLEY

28 SEP 2011

What future does the United States Army face? During eight years of operations in Iraq and 10 years in Afghanistan, the Army has shifted from being a force focused on high-intensity conventional operations to one more comfortable fighting a dispersed enemy intermingled with the population. However, operations are winding down in Iraq, and an endpoint seems to be nearing in Afghanistan. Armed with the collective experience developed in the War on Terror, how will the Army move forward to face new challenges and threats? The answers involve political and military considerations that may contradict each other.

The fact that the Army lacks a clear opponent to define itself against complicates its ability to make a case for its future role. The Navy and the Air Force may face difficulties explaining their roles to a skeptical public, and they may also have problems developing a cooperative doctrinal framework, [AirSea Battle](#), for potential hostilities with China. Nevertheless, they both seem to have an identifiable mission against a peer competitor opponent. Moreover, they both potentially have a big-picture story to tell about the role that they play in the world. The Navy acts as the guarantor of world maritime trade and American prosperity, while the global reach and global power of the Air Force serve as a deterrent to potential wrongdoers worldwide.

The Army faces a more difficult problem, because for the moment it's hard to find an enemy for it to fight. South Korean military superiority over North Korea continues to grow. While Poland and the Baltic states worry about Moscow, few think that the Russian army will threaten NATO in the near or medium term. At the same time, there appears to be little will in Washington to make a ground commitment to defending Georgia from Russian attack. Similarly, few have an appetite today for any potential invasion and occupation on the scale of Iraq. The only operations conceivable in the near future that would require both maneuver and counterinsurgency warfare involve the conquest and occupation of Iran and North Korea. Neither seems to be in the cards, and as noted, the burden of defeating and occupying North Korea would probably fall to the South Koreans.

The Army is left with the discordant goals of maintaining its capacity to conduct high-intensity maneuver warfare alongside large scale counterinsurgency operations, at a time when no one seems to have any interest in fighting either kinds of war. To manage the problem of having no specific threat, the Army has adopted what amounts to a capabilities-based approach to doctrine. The term "Full Spectrum Operations" (FSO) rejects the idea of a clear distinction between conventional and counterinsurgency combat, instead linking high-intensity maneuver warfare and "Revolution in Military Affairs" thinking with COIN concepts such as population protection, support and relief. However, FSO runs the risk of becoming so all-encompassing that it [loses all meaning](#).

So with no Soviet Union, no clear role in war against China and a skeptical public, [what is the Army to do](#)? From a doctrinal point of view, embracing uncertainty seems the right way to go. While no specific threat looms as large as a sea-air conflict with China over Taiwan, a host of

smaller threats could potentially require the use of conventional and unconventional Army capabilities. Achieving full combat spectrum dominance is a reasonable response to such an uncertain threat environment. Collapses of the Mexican or Pakistani states may not be particularly likely, but both present a big enough problem that they could conceivably require the use of the Army to either kick in doors or manage the aftermath of conflict.

The problem with a capabilities-based approach, however, is political. Especially with the potential for [cuts in the defense budget](#), explaining the need for military capabilities in terms of unlikely “what if” scenarios [is less compelling to civilians](#) than pointing to clear, understandable threats. To be sure, attacking the Army is politically difficult in the current climate in Washington. Along with the Marine Corps, the Army has borne the brunt of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, with consequent impact on its personnel and equipment. Reducing its strength relative to the other two services would be perceived as shortchanging its sacrifice. Moreover, the Army carried out a wide-ranging and impressive doctrinal shift during wartime, reorienting itself toward counterinsurgency.

However, the memory of Iraq and Afghanistan won’t remain politically potent forever, and evaluation of the “COIN turn” in Army doctrine may change over time. Ten years from now, the Navy and the Air Force will be able to explain before Congress their need to expand capabilities in the Pacific because of the ever-growing threat posed by the People’s Liberation Army Navy and the People’s Liberation Army Air Force. If the Army still relies on the memory of ambiguous outcomes in Iraq and Afghanistan, it may find itself increasingly on the losing end of procurement battles. While pursuing a doctrine that emphasizes flexibility and capability across the combat spectrum may make sense from a military point of view, such an approach could hamstring the Army in political competition against the other two services.

The short-term future for Army doctrine appears reasonably clear: distilling the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan while remaining capable at missions of both high and low intensity. In the longer term, the absence of a clear threat may present a messaging problem. An even-larger problem lies with the structure of the U.S. military establishment itself, which remains a relic of the 1947 National Security Act. Creating three independent military services and tying procurement to the ability of each service to craft a case for its specialization risks placing bureaucratic and political interests ahead of grand strategic considerations.

This isn’t to say that the Army should hope for a collapse of Mexico or a new war between Iran and Iraq in order to maintain its relevance. But it does mean that the Army has to think about developing a compelling narrative about the role it plays in maintaining American safety and security at a time when it might not have much to do. □

# MILITARY POWER IN A DISORDERLY WORLD

BY DAVID W. BARNO

22 MAR 2011

The opening acts of the 21st century have fundamentally challenged long-held notions of military power. The past decade has unveiled not only the disruptive power of terrorist groups with global reach, but also the ability of low-budget insurgent groups to directly confront the best military forces of the West -- with surprising success. Moreover, recent revolutionary events across the Arab world have demonstrated the limits of military power when facing mass popular uprisings. Disorder, chaos and violent extremism seem on course to replace state-on-state violence as the most common forms of conflict in the new century. Given this new security environment, the U.S. military must begin to play a larger role in conflict prevention in order to fully realize its value, commensurate with its cost, in this new disorderly world.

The attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 -- launched not with tanks, warplanes or intercontinental missiles, but with commercial airliners -- were the most deadly assaults on U.S. soil since the American Civil War. Unconventional wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have also [rattled the conventions of military thought](#), as insurgents equipped with inexpensive weaponry have inflicted prolonged attrition on U.S. forces. The U.S. military has spent billions of dollars defending against these new, low-cost threats, but the West and its military thinkers are still grappling with the full security implications of these dramatic upheavals in traditional military power balances. The era of asymmetric warfare has arrived with a vengeance.

Recent [revolutionary events in the Arab world](#) -- starting in Tunisia and rapidly spreading to Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain -- have further highlighted today's shifting balance of power. While the outcome of these upheavals is still unclear, they reflect a new sort of asymmetrical power wielded by popular movements and expressed through mass street demonstrations. These spontaneous movements -- [organized and enabled by modern technologies](#) such as cellphones, Twitter and Facebook -- have directly challenged the "hard power" of state militaries, albeit with mixed results to date. Yet at the same time, the West's hard-power response to the Libyan regime's harsh backlash against its people has further demonstrated that conventional military power remains a powerful tool -- in this case employed to enforce the will of the broader international community as expressed by U.N. resolutions.

Another version of this asymmetric power shift has played out against Western forces in the wars for Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite successful high-tech U.S. military campaigns at the outset of each conflict, the enemy quickly adapted with inexpensive forms of asymmetry, in the shape of attacks by car bombs, suicide vests and IEDs, and with clashes often captured and disseminated via cellphone videos. The cost to the insurgents of these unconventional weapons is minimal, but the U.S. defensive response to protect its army is staggering. The multibillion-dollar fleet of [heavily protected MRAP vehicles](#) designed to protect U.S. soldiers against IEDs is just one example. This reflects in part an insurgent strategy of "cost imposition," whereby the enemy attempts to drive the costs of the war in lives and fortune to a point where it no longer makes strategic sense for the

U.S. to pursue its aims.

The evolving nature of global threats echoes the tactical asymmetry found on the ground in Afghanistan and Iraq. Where the 19th and 20th centuries were dominated by a Westphalian order of nation-states, nonstate actors have moved to center stage in today's global order. This is a "flat world" of multinational companies, interwoven crime syndicates, global special interest groups, Internet-fueled extremist ideologies and terrorist networks. In many ways, the comfortable order and rule of law represented by the nation-states seated at the U.N. is fading, overtaken by a complex mix of other competitors for power. Of even greater concern, the destructive power accessible to even tiny groups is skyrocketing, rendering both deterrence and containment of fringe actors exceedingly difficult.

The role of U.S. military forces in this new era of global disorder requires a careful assessment. The U.S. Department of Defense has traditionally analyzed foreign military capabilities and assigned priorities based upon their potential threat to U.S. interests. In today's world, a threat-calculus based upon conventional military capabilities makes less sense, as does the impetus to simply build a U.S. military to confront these nation-state threats. In a disorderly world, terrorist groups, transnational criminals or state failure may generate a serious threat to U.S. vital interests as readily as a cross-border invasion. In this environment, a U.S. military too deeply invested in conventional military capabilities may be poorly positioned for other strategic challenges facing the United States. But if it seems obvious that the next U.S. military must be able to more than just fight or deter other armies, navies and air forces, exactly what else it should be doing is less clear.

In many ways, the current "supply of security capital" by the United States is woefully out of balance with the "demand signal" driven by threats in this new disorderly world. A U.S. Foreign Service with fewer than 8,000 diplomats to cover the globe contrasts with a U.S. Marine Corps of 200,000 leathernecks. A foreign aid and development budget of less than \$60 billion competes with a base defense budget that exceeds \$550 billion a year. But the bureaucratic realities of Washington and the U.S. Congress give scant hope that any major realignments between U.S. government departments will occur. This is a fundamental dose of reality: Even in an era of fiscal austerity, Defense will continue to have a disproportionate share of U.S. government discretionary spending. This recognition should drive new thinking on maximizing those assets.

One outcome should be clear: The U.S. military must begin to [play a larger role in global conflict prevention](#) in this new disorderly world. Military forces based largely in the United States waiting for a war to break out are simply an unaffordable resource drain in a financial environment where the annual interest payments on the nation's debt will exceed its \$550 billion defense budget by the end of this decade. The U.S. military is no longer a sound investment if it only defends and deters -- it must now also actively help prevent conflicts and stabilize key regions of the world where instability can threaten vital U.S. interests. All three missions -- defend, deter, prevent -- are important, and the next U.S. military should be organized, trained and equipped to actively engage in each.

Making this change will require a strategic reset in both U.S. military and diplomatic thinking. Fortunately, the nation-building and counterinsurgency experiences of the past 10 years have prepared the military well for this adjustment. Building on this experience makes sense. This new task of "selective stabilization" can better align the military with U.S. diplomatic missions abroad in at-risk areas and leverage a broader array of U.S. power. Yet this logic will be strongly opposed by those worried about a further "militarization of foreign policy" -- while failing to recognize that the diplomat's traditional remit of "represent, report and negotiate" is shrinking in today's disorderly world. Fewer regions will demand these traditional diplomatic talents alone, and many more will require new skills in integrating U.S. hard and soft power in potential conflict zones.

Demographic and natural resource trends signal that violent upheaval and the threat of instability will menace ever greater parts of the world, especially in the Middle East, Africa and Central and

South Asia. U.S. vital interests in these regions are less threatened by interstate war than by the risks of internal extremism, instability and terrorism. Stabilizing the most important of these regions is an essential new task, and one that will require the combined talents of State and Defense.

None of this suggests the deployment of Army divisions to the Maghreb or Marine landings on the Nigerian coast -- quite the opposite. Nor does it suggest the U.S. military abandon war fighting to take on a global nation-building role in lieu of its traditional combat responsibilities. But the nation's large investment in the military argues for a greater return on investment in response to an increasingly disorderly world.

That said, the lead for any expanded engagement by U.S. military forces overseas must remain the U.S. ambassador as chief of mission in any country with a U.S. presence. But in zones of potential conflict, the military can provide the ambassador with planners and strategists, logisticians and analysts, technicians and foreign area officers -- and, often, defense dollars. The U.S. military can also deliver core capabilities to help train and professionalize less-capable militaries in these regions around the world, modeling U.S. values and norms that are the global standard of military excellence. The restraint and responsibility exercised by the U.S.-trained Egyptian military in responding to the popular protests and managing the ongoing transition of power in Egypt is the best recent example of the power of this influence.

The Era of the Disorderly World has already dawned. The importance of conventional militaries in this world has changed, but it has not gone away. Hard military power remains potent, and U.S. military power remains the dominant hard power force in the world -- and will remain so even in an era of U.S. fiscal austerity. But in order to prepare to confront the most dangerous conventional and unconventional threats to the nation, more is demanded. The U.S. military must add to its strategic portfolio a new mission: conflict prevention. Too many scarce resources are vested in the military to simply preserve it for the next war. These costly investments should be leveraged to make that war much less likely -- particularly in the highest-priority regions for U.S. vital interests around the world. Confronting this dangerous and disorderly world will require all of the diverse sources of talent that the United States can muster. □

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