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Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

DOING WHAT YOU KNOW

THE UNITED STATES AND 250 YEARS OF IRREGULAR WAR

DAVID E. JOHNSON

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Cover Photo: Long Khanh Province, Republic of Vietnam. SP4 R. Richter, 4th Battalion, 503rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade and Sergeant Daniel E. Spencer with a fallen comrade Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration.

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Introduction

The United States has been continuously engaged in irregular combat since initiating operations in Afghanistan the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S. homeland. Its military forces, particularly the Army, Marine Corps, and Special Operations Forces, have made significant adaptations after the onset of the insurgency in Iraq following the initial success of conventional operations there in 2003. Yet, victory—achieving the desired political objectives—in Iraq and Afghanistan continues to elude the United States more than fifteen years into the Global War on Terrorism despite significant investments in blood and treasure.¹ This study endeavors to answer the question: Why is that?

The United States has a long history of engaging in irregular wars and countering insurgencies, one that predates its independence. Many of these efforts, as will be recounted, were successful. Others were not. To understand what worked, what did not, and why, this study assesses the measures, both coercive and benign, that the United States has used in a limited number of pivotal cases to determine if U.S. irregular warfare and counterinsurgency (COIN) approaches have changed significantly over the past two centuries. It also makes recommendations for the future.

1 There is a broad literature on U.S. counterinsurgency efforts. As Martin van Creveld noted on the back cover of Beatrice Heuser and Eitan Shamir, eds., *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), “Over the last decades, so large has the literature on insurgency and counterinsurgency become that, had it been loaded on the *Titanic*, that ship would have sunk without any help from the iceberg.” That said, there are several useful assessments, particularly on the political and strategic dimensions of Iraq and Afghanistan that I found particularly useful. See Richard D. Hooker Jr. and Joseph J. Collings, eds., *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015); Frank G. Hoffman, “Small Wars Revisited: The United States and Nontraditional War,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 6, December 2005; and Paul Cornish, “The United States and Counterinsurgency: ‘Political First, Political Last, Political Always,’” *International Affairs* 85, no. 1, 2009.

A Word of Caution

In the 1989 revised edition of his collection of essays on the American Revolution, historian John Shy reflected on his perspective when he wrote the original volume, published in 1976 shortly after the fall of South Vietnam:

Several of [the essays] play deliberately in that dangerously subjective zone where past meets present, and all of them may too naively reflect the special *Angst* of the 1960s and the 1970s to give readers confidence in their interpretations, their judgments, and even their use of evidence.²

Shy's confession is particularly relevant to those writing about American COIN and foreign policy now. Much of what has been written about COIN in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks by al Qaeda has been shaped by the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Inevitably, it seems, much of the literature has become directly or indirectly focused on “lessons” from the past and ongoing operations to inform or, in some cases, validate U.S. COIN theory and practice—or to refute them.³ Indeed, the debate over U.S. COIN doctrine, codified in the 2006 Army/Marine Corps manual *FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5: Counterinsurgency* and subsequent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, became so polarized that two camps formed: the COINdinistas and the COINtras.⁴ The debate, however, is about much more than the efficacy of COIN. Rather, it is a more fundamental discussion about the ability of U.S. interventions to provide stability in countries the United States deems to be vital to its interests—how to attain the strategic “ends” favorable to U.S. national security. The “way” to eventual success among COIN advocates is population-centric COIN. The “means” are, as they have inevitably been in the past, boots on the ground.

This debate is accelerating as the United States and its coalition partners attempt to craft a way ahead in Afghanistan. Also looming large is the war against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militants and, as of this writing, U.S. policymakers' attempts to craft a strategy to defeat them.⁵ Clearly, these are the results predicted by COIN supporters—given the need for staying

² John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence*, revised edition (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990), p. 297.

³ For an insightful essay on the misuse of history in U.S. COIN doctrine and practice, see Celeste Ward Gventer, “Keep the Change: Counterinsurgency, Iraq, and Historical Understanding,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 25, no. 1, January 2014.

⁴ See Thomas E. Ricks, “The COINdinistas,” *Foreign Policy*, November 30, 2009, available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/11/30/the_coindinistas. See also “The Post-COIN Era is Here,” *Zenpundit*, blog, January 25, 2010, available at <http://zenpundit.com/?p=3315>. The years-long, frequently acrimonious debate between Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, author of *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* and a key author of the 2006 *Counterinsurgency* manual, and Colonel Gian Gentile, author of *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*, came to epitomize the polarity of the COINdinstia and COINtra points of view.

⁵ On November 7, 2014, President Barack Obama authorized sending up to 1,500 additional U.S. troops to Iraq, doubling the “non-combat” advisory U.S. presence on the ground there. See Missy Ryan, “Obama Plans to Double U.S. Force in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, November 7, 2014, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-more-than-doubles-number-of-troops-authorized-for-iraq/2014/11/07/846e0442-66bb-11e4-9fdc-d43b053ecb4d_story.html. ISIS is also known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and IS (Islamic State).

power and resolve in COIN and nation building they say are prerequisites for success. The recriminations started early, with John Nagl, a central COINdianista, figuring prominently:

This [rise of ISIS] is both extremely unfortunate and entirely predictable, given America's abdication of its responsibility to continue to support an Iraqi government that we spent more than a trillion dollars and thousands of American lives establishing. Now, territory that my friends lost limbs and eyes and lives seizing from radical Islamist insurgents will have to be purchased again, at the cost of another butcher's bill.⁶

Similarly, Council on Foreign Relations fellow Max Boot wrote in *Foreign Affairs*:

Washington must recognize that counterinsurgency and nation building take time. In Iraq, the United States had all but won by 2011, when U.S. troops had to leave because Obama failed to negotiate a new status-of-forces agreement, in part because he never made it a priority. Now, ISIS has gained control of a chunk of Syria and Iraq larger than the United Kingdom and declared a caliphate, and violence in Iraq has shot back to its 2008 level. A similar disaster could occur in Afghanistan if the United States pulls out completely in 2016, as Obama has pledged. In any given conflict, Washington needs to make a long-term commitment, as in Kosovo, where U.S. troops have been deployed since 1999. Otherwise, it shouldn't bother to get involved in the first place.⁷

Boot and others ignore the fact that no U.S. soldiers were being killed subsequent to the U.S. ground intervention in Kosovo. In essence, the argument of many COIN advocates is that we have to stay in Afghanistan and Iraq, following our necessary return, as long as needed to "win." Similarly, others have argued that the U.S. successes in Germany, Japan, and Korea were the result of long-term commitment. Again, what is blithely passed over is the fact that in all of these cases there was an end to violence and an absence of subsequent insurgencies. Comparing nation building under fire versus occupations in relatively benign post-conflict environments is like comparing apples to purple.⁸

6 John Nagl, "America Needs a More Aggressive Strategy Against ISIL. Now," *Politico Magazine*, October 12, 2014, available at www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/10/america-needs-a-more-aggressive-strategy-against-isilnow-111821.html#ixzz3InfOIiO5.

7 Max Boot, "More Small Wars: Counterinsurgency Is Here to Stay," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 6, November/December 2014, p. 14.

8 For an examination of nation building, particularly the reasons for success in post-World War II Germany and Japan, see James Dobbins et al., *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2003).

There are, however, other voices who question the utility of U.S. interventionism and COIN approaches, chief among them Andrew Bacevich, who noted in an interview with Bill Moyers:

Let's look at what U.S. military intervention in Iraq has achieved, in Afghanistan has achieved. Is the region becoming more stable? Is it becoming more democratic? I mean, if the answer is yes, then let's keep trying. But if the answer to those questions is no, then maybe it's time for us to recognize that this larger military project is failing and is not going to succeed simply by trying harder.⁹

The United States is not new to COIN or irregular warfare, but its approach has changed significantly since the invasion of Iraq in 2003.¹⁰ Furthermore, as will be discussed below, this shift is most evident in the fundamental purpose of operations, from “closing with and killing the enemy through offensive operations” to “protecting the population.”

9 Bill Moyers, “Andrew Bacevich: Chaos in Iraq,” *BillMoyers.com*, June 20, 2014, available at <http://billmoyers.com/segment/web-extra-chaos-in-iraq/>.

10 The U.S. Army displays 189 streamers, each signifying a military campaign from the American Revolution to the ongoing War on Terrorism. See “Listing of the Campaigns of the U.S. Army Displayed on the Army Flag,” Center of Military History, U.S. Army, updated March 20, 2017, available at <http://www.history.army.mil/html/reference/campaigns.html>.

Two Centuries of Irregular Warfare and COIN at Home and Abroad

It has been over a decade since the U.S. Army and Marine Corps published and began executing their formalized 2006 COIN doctrine. As decisions are formulated about how to go forward in Afghanistan and Iraq—and potentially other places in the future—it is important to understand a number of issues. First, although the United States has been involved in numerous conflicts since its founding, few of these conflicts have involved COIN in the way it is represented in current doctrine. From the American Revolution to Vietnam, the United States and its military adapted to the specific conflict and then reverted to their preferred conventional nature.

Regular Even in Revolution—The Origins of American Conventionality in War

The United States was born of an insurgency against Great Britain. The principal reason for the success of the American Revolution is ironically similar to that identified by Andrew Mack in 1975 as to why insurgents have often prevailed since World War II: “For the insurgents the war is ‘total,’ while for the external power it is necessarily ‘limited’.”¹¹

The American Revolution became a protracted conflict wherein the populace of the thirteen colonies presented a persistent challenge to pacification. Their rebel militia, guerrillas, and Continental Army created a constant military problem that the British sought to solve through “maneuver, battle, and pursuit.”¹²

11 Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” *World Politics* 27, no. 2, January 1975, pp. 175, 181.

12 Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*, p. 233.

FIGURE 1



General George Washington awarding the Badge of Military Merit (predecessor to the Purple Heart) to Sergeant Elijah Churchill of the 2nd Continental Light Dragoons and Sergeant William Brown, 5th Connecticut Regiment, Continental Line, on May 3, 1783 at Hasbrouck House in Newburgh, New York. Image courtesy of the Center of Military History.

General George Washington’s imprint on the conduct of the Revolution is fundamental to the way the United States approached warfare—then and into the future. Washington, when asked to wage an irregular campaign against the British, refused this option, eschewing any notions that “a war fought to attain revolutionary purposes ought to be waged in a revolutionary manner, by calling on an armed populace to rise in what a later generation would call guerrilla warfare.”¹³ Indeed, Washington modeled the Continental Army along British lines, an army whose structure and procedures he understood from his service with it during the Seven Years’ War. Thus, despite the mythology of the American Revolution being won by militia fighting irregular warfare, at the end of the day what defeated Britain was an American army

13 Russell F. Weigley, “American Strategy from Its Beginnings through the First World War,” in Peter Paret, Gordon A. Craig, and Felix Gilbert, eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 410.

fighting by the rules of war of the day.¹⁴ In the words of Russell F. Weigley, “Washington fought the British as he had seen the British fight the French: using American citizen soldiers as auxiliaries, but with his principal reliance upon European-style regulars, in the American approximation of them, the Continental Army.”¹⁵

Washington’s refusal to engage in irregular war was motivated by his fear that to do so would “tear apart the entire social contract” by violating the international rules of war. He was also concerned not to diminish “the dignity of the American cause,” and thereby hinder the new country’s entry into the community of nations.¹⁶ By war’s end, Washington had created a “respectable army.”¹⁷ The Continental Army was a mirror image—but in buff and blue—of the British redcoat army it had fought.

The insurgencies the U.S. government concerned itself with after the Revolution were domestic. Shays’ Rebellion (1786–1787), the Whiskey Rebellion (1791–1794), and Fries’ Rebellion (1799–1800) all had their origins in responses to federal taxation and were early tests of the U.S. government’s ability to enforce its laws. The Constitution of the United States reflected the concerns of the drafters about domestic insurrection in the aftermath of Shays’ Rebellion by giving Congress the power “to provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions.”¹⁸

The defense establishment of the United States until World War I was reflective of a nation guaranteed safety because of its isolation and, after the War of 1812, the protection of the *Pax Britannica*. During times of peace, the Regular Army remained small and mostly stationed on the periphery of the nation to guard its frontiers, coastlines, and, after the Spanish–American War, its overseas possessions. In the event of any crisis, the small Regular Army would swell its ranks with volunteers and militia or, as during the Civil War, turn to conscription.

14 See Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, enlarged edition (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 44–73.

15 Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, p. 73.

16 Weigley, “American Strategy from Its Beginnings through the First World War,” p. 412.

17 Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775–1783* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1981), pp. 331–332.

18 U.S. Constitution, art. I, sec. 8. For a history of these three revolts and other domestic disorders, see Robert W. Coakley, *The Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1789–1878* (Washington, DC: Army Historical Series, 1988). For an in-depth discussion of Shays’ Rebellion, see David P. Szatmary, *Shays’ Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

The Navy “deployed its small squadrons around the world to protect the merchantmen from piracy, to carry diplomatic representatives abroad, to explore and chart unknown seas, to suppress the African slave trade, [and] to persuade hermit kingdoms like China and Japan that the American flag was to be taken seriously in matters of personal safety and commerce.”¹⁹ The principal role of the Marine Corps was “service afloat as security forces and landing party light infantry.”²⁰

Adapting the Regular Army for the Irregular—the Indian Wars of 1790–1891

It was the Regular Army upon which major responsibility fell for policing America’s frontiers before World War I. The Regular Army clung to its conventional practices and organizations, only moderately adapting in the face of irregular opponents during the Indian Wars and the Philippine Insurrection.²¹ This was not always appropriate, as pointed out by historian Robert Utley:

The frontier army was a conventional military force trying to control, by conventional military methods, a people that did not behave like conventional enemies and, indeed, quite often were not enemies at all. . . . The situation usually did not call for warfare, merely for policing; that is, offending individuals needed to be separated from the innocent and punished. . . . The conventional force was unable to do this and . . . as a result punishment often fell, when it fell at all, on guilty and innocent alike.²²

Utley also commented on why this was so:

In part the generals were motivated by a desire to place the Army on a more enduring basis than afforded by Indian warfare. But in part, too, they were genuinely concerned about national defense. . . . The army they fashioned was designed for the next conventional war rather than the present unconventional war.²³

Thus, the military establishment of the United States in the nineteenth century faced similar challenges to that of today: preparing for a major conventional war while simultaneously conducting irregular campaigns. This remained effective against American adversaries until World War I. The military forces of the United States conquered the North American

19 Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, revised edition (New York: The Free Press, 1991), p. 52.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 128.

21 Brian Linn notes that the Philippine Insurrection was “the most successful counterinsurgency campaign in U.S. history” and that “it is the logical starting point for the systematic examination of military interventions, civic action, and pacification operations.” Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899–1902* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), p. 328.

22 Robert M. Utley, “The Contribution of the Frontier to the American Military Tradition,” in Harry R. Borowski, ed., *The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History, 1959–1987: A Collection of the First Thirty Lectures Given at the United States Air Force Academy* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1988), p. 531.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 530.

continent, defeated Mexico and Spain, and adapted sufficiently in the moment to prevail over irregular adversaries, be they Sioux warriors or Filipino guerrillas.

The conflict between Native Americans and Europeans in North America was continuous, at various levels of violence, from the early 1600s until the end of the Indian Wars in 1891. Eliot Cohen examined the two centuries of warfare that waged from the early 1600s in the corridor from Albany to Montreal in his recent work *Conquered into Liberty*. In New England, the combatants were alliances of French and English colonizers with different tribes, frequently subsumed in ongoing European wars. In Cohen's words, "From before independence . . . the United States has been the territory of war."²⁴ And these were wars of extraordinary brutality on all sides.

An entry from the journal of Major Robert Rogers, commander of the storied Rogers' Rangers fighting for the English during the French and Indian War (1754–1763), reveals the methods employed in that war. They foreshadow the total war waged by General William Sherman in the Civil War and in subsequent campaigns against Native Americans in the West. Rogers, on a mission in 1756 in the area of Lake George in New York, was ordered by his commander "to use my best endeavors to distress the French and allies, by sacking, burning, and destroying their houses, barns, barracks, canoes, battoes, &c., and by killing their cattle of every kind; and at all times to endeavor to way-lay, attack, and destroy their convoys of provisions by land and water, in any part of the country, where I could find them."²⁵

These methods are similar to those recorded by Army officer James Parker in his memoirs of an encounter between the Army and the Cohardie Comanche one hundred years after Rogers' Lake George mission:

The Cohardie Comanches, the scourge of Texas and the Southwest, were in 1874 attacked by Mackenzie with the 4th Cavalry, at their camp in the Paladuro Cañon of the Staked Plains. Twelve hundred Indian ponies were captured and shot to prevent their recapture. Most of the Indians then surrendered.²⁶

In the campaigns in the West, the advantage the Army had on the vast frontier was its ability to sustain itself while depriving the adversary of the capacity to subsist. Again, much like Rogers' Rangers,

the American Army's most effective tactics were to target . . . Indian food stores, pony herds, and teepees, especially in wintertime when tribes were much less mobile. Given the Indians'

²⁴ Eliot A. Cohen, *Conquered into Liberty: Two Centuries of Battles along the Great Warpath that Made the American War of War* (New York: Free Press, 2011), p. 340.

²⁵ Robert Rogers, *The Journals of Major Robert Rogers* (Albany, NY: Joel Munsell's Sons, 1883), p. 46.

²⁶ James Parker, *The Old Army: Memories, 1872–1918* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), p. 33. Parker was a retired brigadier general who served in the Indian Wars, the Spanish–American War, the Philippine Insurrection, and World War I. He won the Medal of Honor in the Philippine Insurrection in an action at Vigan, Luzon, Philippine Islands, on December 4, 1899.

subsistence-level economy, it did not take much to put them on the brink of starvation, giving them no choice but to enter a reservation.²⁷

This approach, however effective, caused problems for the U.S. government that would reverberate in future COIN campaigns as deaths and deprivations among noncombatants, particularly women and children, “brought down upon the Army the wrath of Eastern newspapers and philanthropists who chastised it for waging barbaric campaigns of extermination.”²⁸

Intelligence during the Indian Wars was a key issue—finding an elusive adversary in the broad expanses of the West was a huge challenge.²⁹ The Army employed long-duration small-unit reconnaissance patrols to find the Native Americans. Additionally, the Army employed Native American scouts, often from different tribes than those they were campaigning against, because soldiers did not know the terrain or how to track their foe. In 1866 Congress recognized this challenge and authorized 1,000 Indian scouts for the Army. These scouts proved indispensable, providing what is now known as cultural understanding and local knowledge and enabling successful Army operations.³⁰ Veteran Indian-fighter George Crook recalled that he employed scouts “from the very tribe against which his operations were directed . . . not only matching the enemy’s special skills but also in the psychological impact on the enemy of finding his own people arrayed against him.”³¹ Crook noted in 1886 that “To polish a diamond there is nothing like its own dust.”³²

Tactically, the essence of the Army’s approach to campaigning was, in the words of veteran campaigner General Nelson Miles, to “find, follow, and defeat” the enemy wherever he might be.³³ During its decades on the frontier, the Army adapted, innovated, and figured out ways to defeat Native Americans.³⁴

Despite the in-the-field adaptations of the Army in the irregular Indian Wars that extended from the founding of the United States until 1890, “[Army] commanders considered Indian affairs an unfortunate distraction from the real business of their profession—a messy, morally ambiguous, and unpleasant task that offered few chances for distinction.”³⁵ Consequently, there was little desire to organize or equip the Army to deal permanently with the “irregular.”

27 Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 2013), p. 147.

28 Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 2006), p. 68.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

31 Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866–1890* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 55.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

33 Quoted in Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 69.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

35 William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784–1861* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), p. 305.

What was learned was passed on in lore.³⁶ This is not to say that this lore was not important. As Robert Utley noted, knowing the adversary—understanding the “human dimension,” in today’s parlance—was extremely important: “They had to learn, too, the customs and traits that differentiated the western Indian tribes, particularly strengths and weaknesses of military import, and how to turn them to military advantage.”³⁷

What evolved over a succession of campaigns against individual tribes in the post-Revolution Indian Wars was a pragmatic military approach of “whatever it takes.”³⁸

U.S. government policy evolved throughout the Indian Wars, but beginning in 1830, when President Andrew Jackson announced the Indian Removal Act, the policy generally focused on separating Native American populations from whites and concentrating them on reservations. Jackson explained the purpose of the Removal Act in his annual message to Congress in 1830: “It will place a dense and civilized population in large tracts of country now occupied by a few savage hunters.”³⁹ These relocations depended upon armed force provided by the Army.⁴⁰ Perhaps the most notable removal was that of the Cherokees from their ancestral homelands in the southeastern United States to land west of the Mississippi River, during which 4,000 men, women, and children died on the forced march that became known as the Trail of Tears.⁴¹ In the aftermath of the Mexican War (1846–1848), the United States acquired vast tracts of land that opened up the West to settlement. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 only spurred greater migration—and conflict with Native Americans.

36 Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848–1865* (New York: McMillan, 1967), p. 342. See also J. P. Clark, *Preparing for War: The Emergence of the Modern U.S. Army, 1815–1917* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017). In comments on this study, J.P. shared the insight that the Army of this period was “pre-doctrinal” and “that there was no true doctrine for conventional warfighting either—arguably the routine nature of constabulary operations meant they were so familiar—almost like saying that primitive peoples had no institutional knowledge of hunting.”

37 Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, p. 342.

38 Cohen, *Conquered into Liberty*, p. 338. Cohen writes that this is the unofficial motto of the United States Army. The campaigns of the Indian Wars included Miami (January 1790–August 1795); Tippecanoe (September 21–November 18, 1811); Creeks (July 27, 1813–August 9, 1814 and February 1836–July 1837); Seminoles (November 20, 1817–October 31, 1818; December 28, 1835–August 14, 1842; and December 15, 1855–May 1858); Black Hawk (April 26–September 30, 1832); Comanches (1867–1875); Modocs (1872–1873); Apaches (1873 and 1885–1886); Little Big Horn (1876–1877); Nez Percés (1877); Bannocks (1878); Cheyennes (1878–1879); Utes (September 1879–November 1880); and Pine Ridge (November 1890–January 1891). See “Listing of the Campaigns of the U.S. Army Displayed on the Army Flag.”

39 President Andrew Jackson’s Message to Congress “On Indian Removal,” December 6, 1830, Records of the United States Senate, 1789–1990, RG 46, National Archives and Records Administration, available at https://www.nps.gov/museum/tmc/MANZ/handouts/Andrew_Jackson_Annual_Message.pdf.

40 See Samuel J. Watson, *Jackson’s Sword: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1810–1821* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012); and Samuel J. Watson, *Peacekeepers and Conquerors: The Army Officer Corps on the American Frontier, 1821–1846* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2013), for authoritative examinations of the Army’s role in forcibly relocating Native Americans prior to the Civil War.

41 “Primary Documents in American History: Indian Removal Act,” The Library of Congress, updated April 25, 2017, available at <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Indian.html>.

The Indian Wars were brutal on both sides, with mass killings, torture, mutilation, indiscriminate killing, rape, and captive-taking common throughout the hundred years of conflict. A particularly horrific episode, which would shape U.S. attitudes about how to prosecute the Indian Wars, was the 1862 U.S.–Dakota War that erupted when four Dakota tribesmen killed five white settlers near Acton Township, Minnesota on August 17, 1862. Over the next six weeks, the Dakota killed some 600 white settlers (of which some 480 were unarmed civilians, and 30 percent of those were children under ten) and took over 200 hostages; 74–100 Dakota died.⁴² A letter from Major General John Pope, the commander of the Department of the Northwest, to Colonel Henry Sibley, a subordinate militia commander, shows the depth of the animus towards the Dakotas—a perspective that would typify that of many westward-moving Euro-Americans in the coming decades:

The horrible massacres of women and children and the outrageous abuse of female prisoners, still alive, call for punishment beyond human power to inflict. There will be no peace in this region by virtue of treaties and Indian faith. It is my purpose utterly to exterminate the Sioux if I have the power to do so and even if it requires a campaign lasting the whole of next year. Destroy everything belonging to them and force them out to the plains, unless, as I suggest, you can capture them. They are to be treated as maniacs or wild beasts, and by no means as people with whom treaties or compromises can be made.⁴³

On September 23, 1862, a militia force commanded by Colonel Henry Sibley defeated the Dakota under Chief Little Crow at the Battle of Wood Lake, ending the war. In the aftermath, 392 Dakota prisoners were tried for capital crimes, of which 303 were sentenced to death. President Abraham Lincoln approved only 38 for execution.⁴⁴ The sentence, death by hanging, was carried out on December 26, 1862. It remains the largest official mass execution in U.S. history.⁴⁵

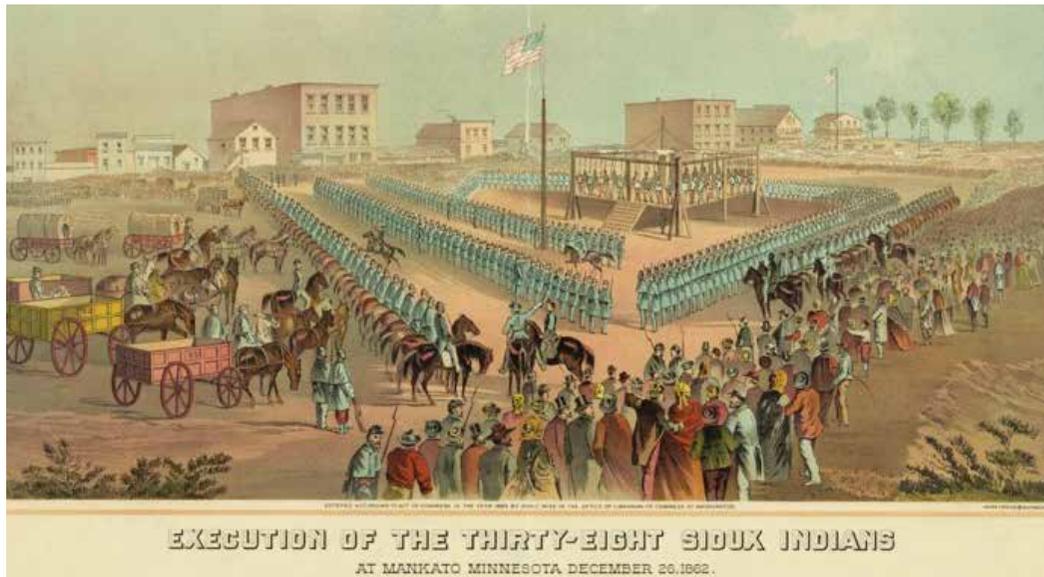
42 “The U.S.–Dakota War of 1862: Aftermath,” Minnesota Historical Society, available at <http://usdakotawar.org/history/aftermath>.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Robert K. Elder, “Execution 150 Years Ago Spurs Calls for Pardon,” *New York Times*, December 13, 2010, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/14/us/14dakota.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

FIGURE 2



An engraving by W.H. Childs depicting the scene of the mass execution of 38 Dakota Indians on December 26, 1862. Library of Congress.

The majority of the surviving Dakota were exiled from Minnesota. But the Dakota raids continued, and in July 1863 the Minnesota state adjutant-general authorized bounties for Dakota scalps. Chief Little Crow was killed and scalped by settlers. Two other Dakota chiefs, Medicine Bottle and Sakpe (Shakopee), were kidnapped on the Canadian border in January 1864, brought to Fort Snelling, Minnesota, and hanged.⁴⁶ Some 1,700 other Dakota were moved to camps near Fort Snelling, and the tribe was eventually relocated to Crow Creek Reservation in South Dakota following the abrogation or revocation of treaties between the U.S. government and the Santee Dakota.

Crow Creek and other reservations created during and after the Indian Wars were not “strategic hamlets,” as suggested by one author.⁴⁷ Reservations were ways to contain Native Americans on lands deemed not of value to whites and to force them into dependency on the

46 Little Crow’s remains became a trophy. “After identification was certain, the scalp was turned over to the State of Minnesota, where it was displayed in the adjutant-general’s office until 1868. Little Crow’s skull and some of his bones were donated to the Minnesota Historical Society. The scalp, skull, and bones were exhibited at the Historical Society until 1915. Little Crow’s remains were finally interred in 1971 in a family plot near Flandreau, South Dakota.” See “The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862: Bounties,” Minnesota Historical Society, available at <http://usdakotawar.org/history/aftermath/bounties>. Bounties were common throughout the Indian Wars, but generally established by states or localities. Scapls, or other body parts, were evidence for payment of the bounty. See, for example, “Money for Indian Scapls: Arizona and New-Mexico Settlers Propose to Destroy the Savages,” *New York Times*, October 12, 1885, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9D01E7D81138E033A25751C1A9669D94649FD7CF>; and Robert F. Heizer, ed., *The Destruction of California Indians* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 268–269, available at http://pages.ucsd.edu/~rfrank/class_web/ES-110/ETHN110articles/California/Heizer_PS.pdf. Heizer also discusses the forced indenture, kidnapping, and sale of Native Americans in California (pp. 219–229). Bounties have been used throughout American history, including most recently bounties for terrorists.

47 Paul B. Rich, “A Historical Overview of US Counterinsurgency,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 25, no. 1, 2014, p. 9.

Bureau of Indian Affairs for sustenance. Some believed, optimistically, reservations would provide a humane means to assimilate Native Americans.⁴⁸

The actions of the U.S. government and its military forces were secondary in the demise of the Native American in the West.⁴⁹ The pursuit of what was popularly called manifest destiny saw millions of white settlers moving west in the aftermath of the Mexican War—and after the acquisition by the United States of territory from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean—which made “the dispossession of the Indians that resulted . . . unstoppable.”⁵⁰ As General William Sherman observed in 1883 upon his retirement:

The Army has been a large factor in producing this result, but it is not the only one. Immigration and the occupation by industrious farmers and miners of lands vacated by the aborigines have been instrumental to that end, but the *railroad* which used to follow in the rear now goes forward with the picket-line in the great battle of civilization with barbarism, and has become the *greater* cause.⁵¹

In this onslaught of white migration, “Indian populations declined as if a biblical flood had swept them from the land. The army may have accounted for several hundred fatalities, but thousands more perished from disease, malnutrition, and murder. Next to disease, white

48 “The U.S.—Dakota War of 1862: Forced Marches and Imprisonment,” and “The U.S.—Dakota War of 1862: Exile,” Minnesota Historical Society, available at <http://usdakotawar.org/history/aftermath/forced-marches-imprisonment> and <http://usdakotawar.org/history/aftermath/exile>. President Ulysses S. Grant announced a “Peace Policy” in his first inaugural address, “to move Indians closer to white civilization (and ultimately U.S. citizenship) by housing them on reservations and helping them become farmers,” relying heavily on Christian missionaries and Army officers to serve as Indian agents. “However, these changes fell short of radically altering conditions for Native Americans in the United States. White settlers, with governmental support, continued to push Indians aside to take land, and they relied on the Army to prevent Indian attacks. At the same time, Native Americans on reservations had little chance of creating farms out of desolate pieces of land and were beset by poverty and desperation. While Grant’s approach marked an improvement in U.S. Indian policy, it is remembered more for its good intentions than for lasting changes.” See “Ulysses S. Grant: Domestic Affairs,” Miller Center, University of Virginia, available at <https://millercenter.org/president/grant/domestic-affairs>.

49 See Gregory F. Michno, *Encyclopedia of Indian Wars: Western Battles and Skirmishes, 1850–1890* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press, 2003), p. 353. Michno notes that in some 1,470 battles and skirmishes during the period 1850–1890, the “decades of the greatest number of conflicts between Indians and the U.S. military,” there were “21,586 total casualties. . . . Military personnel and civilians accounted for 6,596 (31%), while Indian casualties totaled about 14,990 (69%).”

50 Guenter Lewy, *Essays on Genocide and Humanitarian Intervention* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2012), p. 102.

51 William T. Sherman, “End of the Indian Problem,” House Executive Document no. 1, 48th Congress, 1st Session, serial 2182, pp. 45–46 (emphasis in the original, speech delivered October 27, 1883). Utley also describes the scale of the westward migration between 1866 and 1890: “In the year of Wounded Knee [1890] four transcontinental railroads spanned the West, where in 1866 there had been none. In 1890, 8.5 million settlers occupied the Indian’s former hunting grounds, where in 1866 there had been less than 2 million. The buffalo herds that blackened the Great Plains with perhaps 13 million animals in 1866 had vanished by 1880 before the rifles of professional hide hunters. These figures tell more about the means by which the Indian was subjugated than do battle statistics.” Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, p. 420.

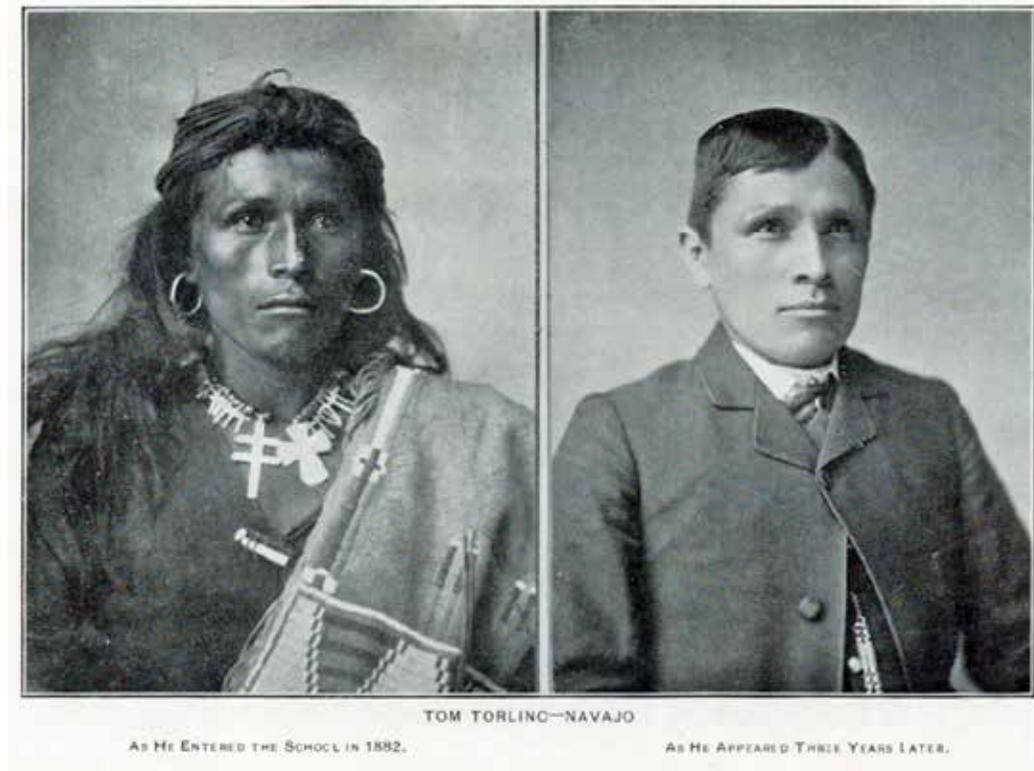
civilians with guns were the most dangerous threat to Indian survival.”⁵² Nevertheless, it was the Army, employing armed force when necessary, that placed and kept Native Americans on reservations.

Ultimately, with Native Americans confined to reservations, the U.S. government’s approach was endorsed by Captain Richard Henry Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Pratt wrote, “A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one. . . . In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.”⁵³

52 Michno, *Encyclopedia of Indian Wars*, p. 360. It is also important to distinguish between U.S. government policy during the Indian Wars and actions that are erroneously attributed to it and/or the Army. One enduring myth is that the Army was “pursuing an official policy of exterminating the buffalo.” Robert Utley refutes this, noting, “There was never any such policy. None, indeed, was necessary, for the hide hunters needed no encouragement to carry on their profitable and wholly legal business. However, both civil and military officials concerned with the Indian problem applauded the slaughter, for they correctly perceived it a crucial factor that would force the Indian on to the reservation.” Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, p. 423. There is also a persistent claim by some (e.g., Ward Churchill) that biological warfare was practiced on Native Americans. Guenter Lewy dismantles these accusations, noting that the only documented case occurred in 1763 before the creation of the United States when Sir Jeffery Amherst wrote to Colonel Henry Bouquet, “You will do well to inoculate the Indians [with small pox] by means of blankets, as well as to try every other method, that can serve to extirpate this execrable race.” He also points to the fact that President Thomas Jefferson ordered a program to vaccinate Native Americans from smallpox. Lewy, *Essays on Genocide and Humanitarian Intervention*, pp. 82, 84. Jared Diamond notes that, “Throughout the Americas, diseases introduced by Europeans spread from tribe to tribe far in advance of the Europeans themselves, killing an estimated 95 per cent of the pre-Columbian Native American population.” Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), p. 78.

53 “American Indian Boarding Schools Haunt Many,” National Public Radio, May 12, 2008, available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16516865>. See also Carolyn J. Marr, “Assimilation Through Education: Indian Boarding Schools in the Northwest,” essay, University of Washington Libraries, est. 2000, available at <https://content.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/marr.html>.

FIGURE 3



The caption reads: *Tom Torlino—Navajo. As he entered the school in 1882. As he appeared three years later.* This image appears in John N. Choate's *Souvenir of the Carlisle Indian School* (Carlisle, PA: J. N. Choate, 1902). Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA.

An expansive system of “assimilation through education” evolved, with over 100,000 Native American children attending some 460 boarding and day schools. These schools worked to erase tribal languages and cultures and replace them with English and Christianity.⁵⁴

The Indian Wars were existential for both Euro-Americans and Native Americans at their inception. At their conclusion, Euro-Americans had killed or forced remaining Native Americans onto reservations and conquered the continent from ocean to ocean. In 1898, the United States looked outward. In so doing, it would fight wars that would result in insurgencies far from its shores. The experience of the U.S. military, and the Army in particular, in the counter-guerrilla Indian Wars deeply informed the approaches it would take in these wars of empire and in prosecuting COIN.

54 “Indian Boarding Schools,” Public Broadcasting System, September 2006, available at <http://www.pbs.org/indiancountry/history/boarding.html>. See also Marr, “Assimilation Through Education.”

Expeditionary COIN After the Spanish–American War

The Indian Wars were not insurgencies, but they strongly influenced how the United States would confront such wars when it moved beyond its own shores in pursuit of a global strategy. The Indian Wars were counter-guerrilla wars of displacement and involved U.S. national expansion rather than nation building abroad. The Spanish–American War of 1898 would bring with it different challenges, including the first American experience in what has been termed “expeditionary counterinsurgency.”⁵⁵ The U.S. experience on its western frontier shaped its approach to the insurgency that erupted in the Philippine Islands.

In 1898 the United States defeated Spain in what future U.S. Secretary of State John Hay described as a “splendid little war.”⁵⁶ Cuba was granted independence, but the United States secured a naval base at Guantanamo, garnered favorable trading conditions for U.S. products, and reserved the right to intervene militarily if Cuba became unruly. The annexation of Puerto Rico further strengthened the U.S. ability to extend its economic interests in the Caribbean and protect them with military force.⁵⁷ In 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt, concerned about the possibility of European intervention in Venezuela over its debts, enunciated a corollary to the Monroe Doctrine: “The United States would intervene as a last resort to ensure that other nations in the Western Hemisphere fulfilled their obligations to international creditors, and did not violate the rights of the United States or invite ‘foreign aggression to the detriment of the entire body of American nations’.” This made the United States a “regional policeman” and provided the rationale for future interventions in Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.⁵⁸

The United States also looked to the Pacific. In the aftermath of the Spanish–American War, it acquired the Philippines from Spain for \$20 million, annexed Guam, and supported a coup against Queen Liliuokalani in Hawaii before annexing the islands in 1898.⁵⁹ The United States now had a firm foothold in the Pacific region and bases to provide military support to its new empire. In the process, it found itself with new responsibilities to establish governance in its new possessions and confronted its first off-shore insurgencies in the newly acquired Philippine Islands, a complex environment “of 7,000 islands and over

55 Charles G. Cogan, “COIN-ing a New Term: Expeditionary Counter-Insurgency,” *Huffington Post*, June 26, 2010, available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-charles-g-cogan/coin-ing-a-new-term-exped_b_626702.html.

56 “Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations: The Spanish–American War, 1898,” U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, last updated June 1, 2017, available at <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/spanish-american-war>.

57 Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansionism, 1860–1898* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 416.

58 “Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations: Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, 1904,” U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, last updated June 1, 2017, available at <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1899-1913/roosevelt-and-monroe-doctrine>.

59 “The Spanish–American War, 1898,” U.S. Department of State.

7 million people divided among a patchwork of tribal, linguistic, and religious groups, many of which disliked the other.”⁶⁰ Here the United States would endeavor to learn COIN and begin its first attempt to build a foreign nation.

The insurrection in the Philippines began when Filipino revolutionaries, led by Emilio Aguinaldo, who had been fighting the Spanish, refused to acknowledge U.S. authority over the Philippines after the Spanish–American War.⁶¹ Benjamin Foulois, a junior officer in the Philippine Insurrection and in the following Moro War that lingered until 1913, summed up the frustration of the Philippines for those who served there: “We found that a few hundred natives living off their land and fighting for it could tie down thousands of American troops, have a serious impact on the economy of the United States, and provoke a segment of our population to take the view that what happens in the Far East is none of our business.”⁶²

Aguinaldo fought a conventional war against U.S. forces until he was defeated in November 1899 by Major General Elwell Otis. Aguinaldo then fled to the mountains and began an insurgency “that would last over three years and cost the United States \$400 million and over 7 thousand casualties.”⁶³ His hope was that President William McKinley would lose the election of 1900 and his successor would grant Philippine independence; until then, he aimed not to defeat but to exhaust the Americans. When McKinley won reelection, this hope ended, and the United States was clearly committed to defeating the insurgency.⁶⁴ Again, controlling the Philippines as a base in the Pacific was the key strategic objective.

U.S. methods during the Philippine Insurrection were reminiscent of the counter-guerrilla campaigns of the Civil War and the Indian Wars in the West. Indeed, many of the commanders in the Philippines were veterans of both wars. Major General Adna R. Chaffee, commander of the Department of the Philippines in mid-1901, “had participated in the great sweep of December 1864 when Sheridan’s cavalry had put much of the Loudoun Valley to the torch in an effort to root out Mosby’s Partisan Rangers.”⁶⁵ Chaffee had also served in the Indian Wars in Texas and Arizona and in China during the Boxer Rebellion.⁶⁶ Comments by Brigadier General Theodore Schwan, commander of a brigade in the Philippine Insurrection,

60 Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 108.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

62 Benjamin D. Foulois, *From the Wright Brothers to the Astronauts: The Memoirs of Major General Benjamin D. Foulois* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968), p. 41; cited in James R. Arnold, *The Moro War: How America Battled a Muslim Insurgency in the Philippine Jungle, 1903–1913* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), p. 248. Foulois later served as chief of the U.S. Army Air Corps.

63 Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 108.

64 Robert D. Ramsey, *Savage Wars of Peace: Case Studies of Pacification in the Philippines, 1900–1902* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007), p. 115.

65 Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 133.

66 Merrill E. Gates, ed., *Men of Mark in America* (Washington, DC: Men of Mark Publishing Company, 1905), pp. 208–214, available at <https://archive.org/stream/menofmarkinamerioogate#page/n7/mode/2up>.

showed the deep imprint that the “frontier knowledge” from the Indian Wars had on the perceptions and methods of senior commanders:

To put the matter briefly, they are in identically the same position as the Indians of our country have been for many years, and in my opinion must be subdued in much the same way, but such convincing conquest as shall make them realize fully the futility of armed resistance, and then win them by fair and just treatment.⁶⁷

Even compared to the Indian Wars, the Philippines created enormous challenges of understanding. As they would do in future insurgencies, U.S. forces rotated in and out of the Philippines on tours of duty. “Armed with the confidence, can-do attitude, racism, and cultural insensitivity of Americans of that time, soldiers and commanders found themselves blind in an alien and hostile environment.”⁶⁸ Additionally, as in future American interventions and insurgencies:

Few understood the local dialects or Spanish and they were thus dependent on unreliable translators of dubious loyalty. The soldiers had little respect for native culture or society; even those with the highest motives and best intentions sought to make over the Filipinos into little brown Americans. Often referring to their enemy as *ladrones* or *insurrectos* (insurrectionists), they failed to detect the Filipinos’ passionate and often semi-mystical desire for independence.⁶⁹

Colonel Arthur L. Wagner testified in Congress about the results of this lack of understanding:

The condition of our military forces there might be compared to that of a blind giant. The troops were more than able to annihilate, to completely smash anything that could be brought against them in the shape of military force on the part of the insurgents; but it was almost impossible to get information in regard to those people. The natives were afraid to give us any information because if they did they were boloed [attacked with a machete-like weapon]. . . . It was a very embarrassing situation. . . . The island was practically in the possession of a blind giant; strong, but unable to see where to strike.⁷⁰

Once Aguinaldo embraced insurgency, U.S. forces faced a different war. From the beginning, the American policy was that advocated by President William McKinley of “benevolent assimilation.” General Otis “emphasized that the army’s role was as much to restore order and protect the population as it was to suppress armed resistance.”⁷¹ Otis also began dispersing his forces to counter Aguinaldo’s insurgency, realizing the need to control the population and isolate them from the insurgents. This evolved into what is now called a “clear, hold, build”

67 Theodore Schwan, letter to Henry Corbin, October 25, 1899, cited in Glenn Anthony May, *Battle for Batangas: A Philippine Province at War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 95.

68 Ramsey, *Savage Wars of Peace*, p. 116.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 116.

70 Statement of Colonel Arthur L. Wagner, Assistant Adjutant-General, U.S. Army, in *Affairs in the Philippine Islands*, Hearings before the Committee on the Philippines of the United States Senate, 57th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office [GPO], 1902), pp. 2850–2851; cited in Ramsey, *Savage Wars of Peace*, p. 118.

71 Linn, *The Philippine War*, p. 326.

strategy, and within two years the number of outposts grew to 639.⁷² Those leading the effort, veterans of the Indian Wars, were used to these types of small-unit dispersed operations and encouraged their subordinates to innovate and take charge.⁷³

FIGURE 4



U.S. soldiers in Manila during the Philippine Insurrection, 1899. The gun is a 3.2-inch gun, M1897. Photo by Perley Fremont Rockett. Library of Congress.

In May 1900, Major General Arthur MacArthur replaced Otis as commander of the Philippine Division. MacArthur dramatically shifted the emphasis from civic action to coercion. He also implemented the Civil War-era General Orders 100, which authorized the use of harsh measures by U.S. forces to quell the insurgency, and aggressively went after the guerrilla infrastructure. Following President McKinley's reelection, MacArthur also "increasingly turned to counterterrorism, thus offering a clear and very unpleasant alternative to those who continued armed resistance."⁷⁴

⁷² Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 113.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷⁴ Linn, *The Philippine War*, p. 326–327.

The context within which the Philippine Insurrection took place was important to its eventual outcome. Because of the U.S. Navy's presence, the insurgents were isolated on the various islands where they operated, received no external support from abroad, and had no safe haven or sanctuary. Furthermore, the U.S. military's weapons were far superior to those of the insurgents, and the insurgents had no resupply. Consequently, the number of captured firearms became a "metric of success."⁷⁵ U.S. troop strength in the Philippines only averaged 40,000 (with a peak of 70,000 in December 1900), and although only about 60 percent of that number were actually available in the field, the U.S. forces were much more effective than the insurgents.⁷⁶

The Philippine Insurrection had two major policy components: attraction and chastisement. Attraction combined benevolence, civic action, social reform, and the establishment of local government infrastructure. As one veteran officer recalled, "Reversing the policy [of] extermination applied to our American Indians, we were determined to preserve the Filipino [by] raising his standards and cultivating his friendship."⁷⁷ The policy of attraction was not, however, sufficient to end the insurgency because "despite garrisoning hundreds of posts throughout the archipelago, soldiers found they could neither offer sufficient rewards to win over their opponents nor sufficient protection to save their friends from guerrilla retaliation."⁷⁸

As the war ground on, the U.S. military increasingly escalated the policy of chastisement, declaring martial law based on the stern measures authorized in General Orders 100 and contemporary texts on military government and martial law. These measures included "the imposition of fines and communal punishments, the destruction of private property, the exile of individuals and the relocation of populations, imprisonment, and, in the case of guerrillas and their closest civilian allies, execution. During the course of the war the Army eventually resorted to all of these options."⁷⁹

75 Ramsey, *Savage Wars of Peace*, pp. 117–118.

76 Linn, *The Philippine War*, p. 325.

77 Hugh A. Drum, "Dato of the Malanos," in *The Hugh A. Drum Papers, 1898–1951* (archived material); cited in Linn, *The Philippine War*, p. 327.

78 Linn, *The Philippine War*, p. 327.

79 Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 126. Birtle notes the persistence of these harsh measures in Army doctrine: "*FM 27–10, Rules of Land Warfare*, published in 1940, permitted methods such as communal retaliation, the confiscation or destruction of property, the taking of hostages, the levying of fines, the employment of military courts to bring guerrillas and their civilian allies to justice, the issuance of identity cards, and the imposition of restrictions on speech, press, assembly, and movement." Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 254. For the text of the April 24, 1863 General Orders 100 [The Lieber Code], see Ramsey, *Savage Wars of Peace*, pp. 135–157.

Much like General William T. Sherman’s realization in his “march to the sea” during the American Civil War, when General Orders 100 was first promulgated, the U.S. military in the Philippines believed it was fighting “a hostile people, and must make old and young, rich and poor, feel the hard hand of war.”⁸⁰ Furthermore, there was a belief that:

A short and severe war creates, in the aggregate, less loss and suffering than a benevolent war indefinitely prolonged. . . . In order to combat such a population, it is necessary to make the state of war insupportable, and there is no more efficacious way of accomplishing this than by keeping the minds of the people in such a state of anxiety and apprehension that living under such conditions will soon become unbearable.⁸¹

General MacArthur made it clear to his commanders that the Filipinos were either “for us or against us.” Fear of insurgent retaliation from guerrillas was no longer a sufficient excuse to not assist the Americans.⁸² Furthermore, he believed that “one of the most effective means of prolonging the struggle, now left in the hands of the insurgent leaders, is the organized system by which supplies and information are sent to them from occupied towns.” On December 19, 1900, he instructed his commanders that the new campaign sought to “interrupt, and if possible, completely destroy this system,”⁸³ specifying:

In carrying out this policy, it is safe to assume that all prominent families, that have not by some public action or declaration committed themselves to American interests, are, either willingly, or under compulsion, engaged in, or at all events, know those, who are employed in this business; and, as a consequence, if not principals themselves, they are accessories to the entire transaction [and] . . . whatever action is necessary the more drastic the application the better, provided only that unnecessary hardships and personal indignities shall not be imposed upon persons arrested, and that the laws of war [General Orders 100] are not violated in . . . the treatment of prisoners.⁸⁴

And the hand of war was hard. Soon after announcing the implementation of General Orders 100, General MacArthur:

exiled a group of prominent Filipino leaders, terminated the policy of automatically releasing prisoners (although he still exchanged prisoners for guns), and authorized commanders to destroy towns harboring guerrillas and confiscate the property of rebel sympathizers. The Manila command likewise loosened the restraints over the judicial system by authorizing provosts to arrest and detain suspects without evidence and by permitting many condemned prisoners to be executed.⁸⁵

80 William T. Sherman, letter to Henry W. Halleck, December 24, 1864, available at <https://cwnc.omeka.chass.ncsu.edu/items/show/144>.

81 May, *Battle for Batangas*, pp. 253–256; quoted in Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 134.

82 Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, pp. 124–125.

83 “Facts About the Filipinos,” in *History of the Philippine Insurrection against the United States, 1899–1903: and documents relating to the War Department project for publishing the history*, unpublished War Department manuscript (Washington, DC: National Archives, 1968), p. 38, roll 8; quoted in Ramsey, *Savage Wars of Peace*, p. 56.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

85 Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 128.

Furthermore, “The Army countered the guerrilla’s terror with some intimidation of its own to make ‘compliance with insurgent demands . . . as dangerous as a refusal’.”⁸⁶ Andrew Birtle writes about the breadth of this escalation in harsh and destructive measures employed to defeat the insurgency:

The number of arrests increased and the number of executions soared. So too did the amount of property destruction, as officers demonstrated an increasing willingness to burn *barrios* tainted by association with the insurrection.

Indeed, devastation, not just selective retaliatory burnings but the complete destruction of sections of countryside, soon became a hallmark of the counterinsurgency campaign. . . . In their most extreme form they entailed the obliteration of entire areas deemed to be under guerrilla control or strongly sympathetic to the resistance. In such sectors the Army put to the torch homes, villages, storehouses, orchards, crops, livestock, boats, and even fishing nets. By destroying entire areas, field commanders hoped to give the surrounding regions an object lesson in American power that would encourage insurgent collaborators to reconsider their position. More important, devastation was part of a wider military strategy to beat the guerrillas into submission by eliminating all food and shelter in their base areas.⁸⁷

The U.S. forces also employed, on occasion, “retaliatory executions” and torture, most notably the “water cure” to gain information from insurgents who were equally if not more ruthless.⁸⁸ In the water cure, “The victim is laid flat on his back and held down by his tormentors. Then a bamboo tube is thrust into his mouth and some dirty water, the filthier the better, is poured down his unwilling throat.”⁸⁹ Another method was “a good hanging, hang him until he was dead or ceased to move and then take him down and pour water until he came to and repeat the remedy.”⁹⁰ Some Americans chose not to participate directly, but would instead give their prisoners to Filipino interrogators.⁹¹ This is a practice that would be repeated in later U.S. wars.

86 Ibid., p. 129.

87 Ibid., p. 129.

88 Linn, *The Philippine War*, p. 222. See also “The Water Cure Described: Soldier Tells Senate Committee How and Why the Torture Was Inflicted,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1902, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9F07E3D61130E132A25757CoA9639C946397D6CF>. In this article, L.E. Hallock, a former soldier in the Philippines, described how the water cure was administered to a “dozen natives at the town of Leon, Province of Panay . . . to secure information of the murder of Private O’Herne of Company I, who had been not only killed, but roasted and otherwise tortured before death ensued.”

89 Linn, *The Philippine War*, p. 223.

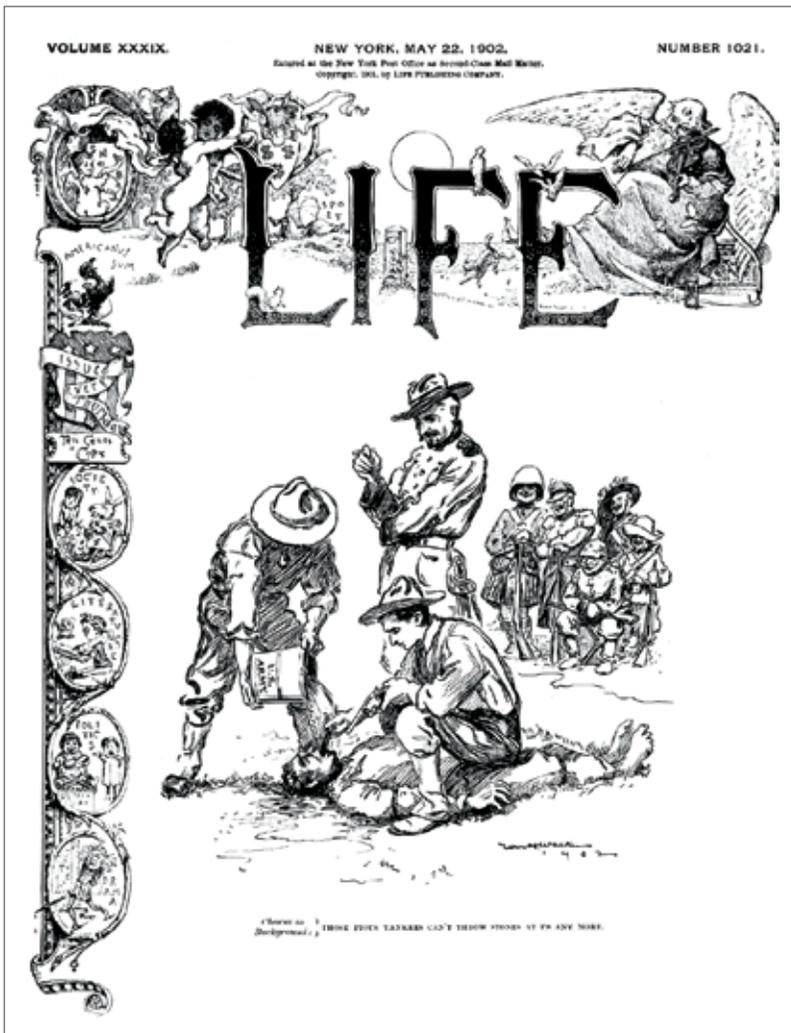
90 Ibid., p. 223. Birtle notes that Army practices were similar to those employed by U.S. law enforcement: “Although officers can justly be criticized for giving in to the frustrations of the guerrilla campaign and employing unsavory interrogation methods, many of those techniques did not differ materially from the ‘third degree’ commonly practiced by police departments in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In beating, grilling, and otherwise abusing certain captives, the Army was imitating law enforcement procedures widely employed in the United States at the same time.” Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 131–132.

91 Linn, *The Philippine War*, p. 223. Linn also notes that “it appears that the use of torture steadily increased” during the insurgency.

Birtle also notes the key role “intelligence and counterinfrastructure activities” played in the Philippines as the Army increasingly:

conducted frequent roundups of villages suspected of harboring guerrillas, created a special agency to translate captured guerrilla documents, and employed a number of techniques to monitor the movement and activities of the population. Included among these techniques were the issuance of identity cards and travel passes, the compilation of census records, and the development of intelligence files bearing, when available, photographs of key insurgent leaders.⁹²

FIGURE 5



U.S. troops administering the water cure. Caption reads: Chorus in Background: “Those Pious Yankees Can’t Throw Stones at Us Any More.” Source: *Life* 39, no. 1021, May 22, 1902.

92 Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, pp. 117–118.

These measures, coupled with land and sea blockades, were designed “to deny the guerrillas access to the villages upon which they had always depended for information, recruits and supplies.”⁹³ Thus, these actions “resembled tactics employed by soldiers during the Indian Wars and were devastating to the population.”⁹⁴ They would also be employed in the Vietnam War in the Strategic Hamlet Program.

These coercive measures against the Filipino insurgency resulted in refugees leaving the rural areas and moving into “American-controlled towns, and in some cases villagers volunteered to build stockades to keep out the increasingly desperate bands of guerrillas and bandits.”⁹⁵ Eventually, as Birtle describes:

Concentration came in various shapes and sizes, as commanders tailored it to local circumstances. Sometimes the Army forced the people to relocate, but in most cases it made relocation “voluntary.” The Army gave people little incentive to stay behind, however, as it made life miserable for those who did by classifying them as enemies and destroying their homes and crops. In one particular section of Cavite Province the Army rounded up all the families of insurgents and relocated them to a town where they could be watched. On the island of Marinduque the Army took a dual approach, first attempting to deport all males of military age, and then concentrating the entire civilian population. On the island of Mindanao, Brig. Gen. William A. Kobbe and Colonel Birkhimer experimented with a type of reverse concentration, in which they expelled all males of military age from towns along the Tagaloan River. Patterns of concentration were equally diverse in the other provinces where the Army employed population relocation during 1900 and 1901.⁹⁶

Regardless of the way in which it was done, the Army treated concentration with extreme delicacy. Stories of the horrible conditions in Spanish concentration camps in Cuba had been one of the factors that had motivated the American people to support the war with Spain.⁹⁷ President McKinley had roundly criticized Spain’s “cruel policy of concentration.” Consequently, Army commanders did not launch any significant concentration campaigns until after the November 1900 elections, and they employed euphemisms such as “colonies” and “zones of protection” to masquerade the true nature of their activities.⁹⁸

Perhaps the harshest campaign of the war was that of the 6th Separate Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Jacob H. Smith, in Samar. In the aftermath of a massacre of U.S. soldiers in the town of Balangia on Samar, General Smith told Major Littleton Waller, commander of a 315-man U.S. Marine battalion, “I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn; the more you kill and burn, the better it will please me. I want all persons killed who are capable of bearing arms in actual hostilities against the United States. . . . The interior of Samar must be

93 Ibid., p. 130.

94 Linn, *The Philippine War*, p. 309.

95 Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 130.

96 Ibid., p. 130.

97 Ibid., p. 130.

98 Ibid., p. 130.

made a howling wilderness.”⁹⁹ Smith also specified that he should “take no prisoners . . . and regard every male over ten as a combatant.” In the aftermath of the Samar campaign, General Chaffee investigated General Smith’s actions and convened courts-martial for several officers, including Smith and Waller.

The campaign of Brigadier General J. Franklin Bell, a future Army chief of staff, in southern Luzon was less controversial and viewed “throughout the Army as a model counterinsurgency operation.” Bell’s campaign was organized and “not tainted with the murky allegations of atrocities” of Smith’s operations in Samar. Nevertheless, Bell had “set out ‘to destroy everything I find outside town, all able-bodied men will be killed or captured.’ After concentrating several hundred thousand people in ‘zones of protection,’ he put the province of Batangas to the torch.”¹⁰⁰

At the end of the day, the measures employed in the policy of coercion worked. As Robert Ramsey wrote, “Many of the measures undertaken may appear harsh, but they were legal at the time and they were effective.”¹⁰¹ Ramsey also believes that Generals MacArthur and Bell “understood that attraction was necessary in the long term, but destruction of the guerrillas and their infrastructure was required first.”¹⁰²

As in the Indian Wars, the U.S. military also began recruiting and equipping local forces, creating the Philippine Scouts and Philippine Constabulary. Macabebe scouts, “a tribe whose long-standing hatred for the prerevolutionary Tagalog tribe was well known,” were also useful. “Recruiting Macabebes and similar groups had the additional benefit of undermining Filipino unity by exploiting preexisting fractures in Filipino society.”¹⁰³ In this endeavor, a pattern that would be repeated in the future began: local forces were trained in the U.S. image based on Army organization and drill regulations. Eventually, Philippine Constabulary forces assumed responsibility for public order. The Philippine Scout units—organized, trained, and equipped by the U.S. Army—prepared for conventional war in support of the U.S. forces stationed in the Philippines to defend against invasion, which came in 1941.¹⁰⁴

99 “Court Martial of Littleton Waller,” 1902, Microfilm #30313, RG 153, National Archives; cited in Christopher Thomas Dean, *Atrocity on Trial: The Court-Martial of Littleton Waller*, Master of Arts Thesis (Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, 2009), p. 89.

100 Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 134.

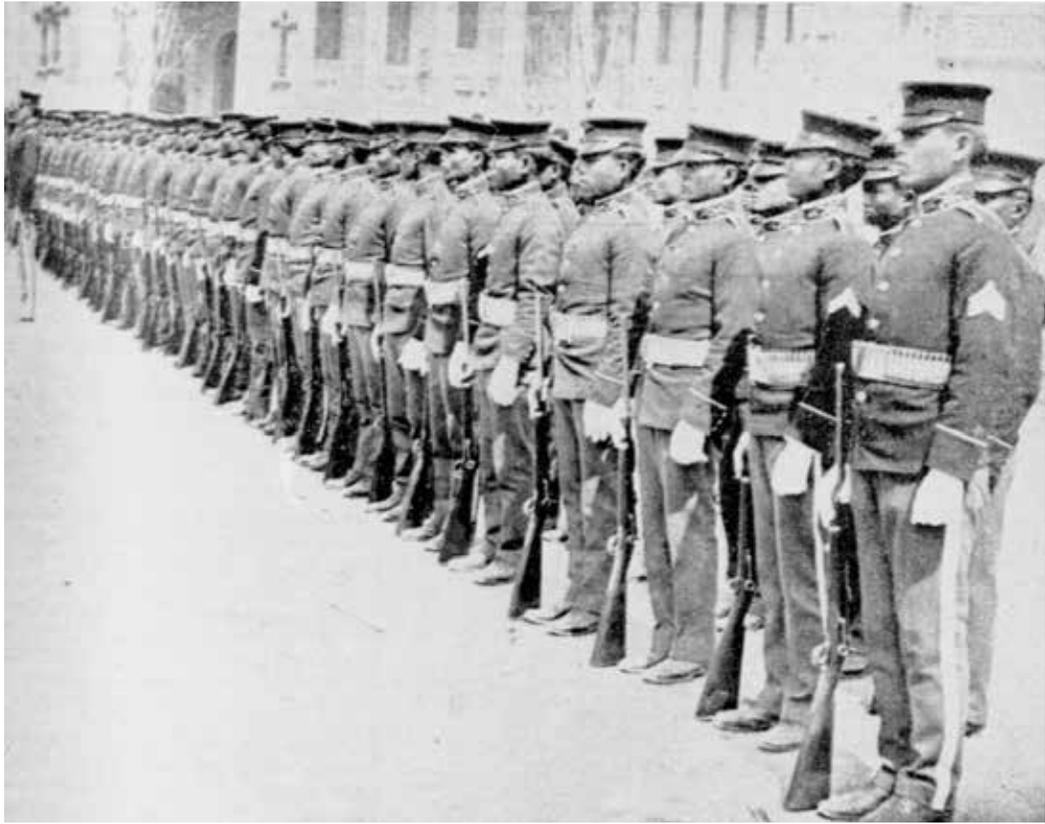
101 Ramsey, *Savage Wars of Peace*, p. 120.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

103 Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 116. Linn notes that Macabebe scouts may have taught Americans the water cure. Linn, *The Philippine War*, p. 223.

104 Arnold, *The Moro War*, p. 259; and Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, pp. 155–156.

FIGURE 6



Philippine Scouts in 1905. Library of Congress.

Eventually, the Jones Act of 1916 put the Philippines on a path to independence. It became an autonomous commonwealth in 1935 and independent in 1946.¹⁰⁵ On July 4, 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt declared the Philippine Insurrection ended. He also commented on the important role of the U.S. Army in concluding the conflict, observing that it had been successful in its efforts “to crush out a general system of guerrilla warfare conducted among a people speaking unknown tongues, from whom it was almost impossible to obtain the information necessary for successful pursuit or to guard against surprise and ambush.” The president also lauded the role of the Army’s Indian War lore in this victory: “In more than two thousand combats, great and small, within three years, it has exhibited unvarying courage and resolution. Utilizing the lessons of the Indian wars, it has relentlessly followed the guerrilla bands to their fastnesses in mountain and jungle and crushed them.”¹⁰⁶ Elihu Root, secretary of war, was more succinct: “It is evident that the insurrection has been brought to an end both

105 “Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations: The Philippine–American War, 1899–1902,” U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, last updated June 1, 2017, available at <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1899-1913/war>.

106 Theodore Roosevelt, “Granting Pardon and Amnesty to Participants in Insurrection in the Philippines,” Proclamation 483, July 4, 1902, available via the *The American Presidency Project* at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=69569>.

by making a war distressing and hopeless on the one hand and by making peace attractive.”¹⁰⁷ Root, however, had more expansive plans for the Army than counterinsurgency.

Back to Conventionality: the U.S. Military After World War I

In the aftermath of the Army’s manifest difficulties in mobilizing and deploying to fight in the Spanish–American War, Secretary Root began what have been termed the Root reforms. At their core, these reforms were designed to transform the Army from a regular force focused on constabulary duties and coastal defense into the army of a great power, prepared to fight modern nation-state war. In his 1889 annual report, Root made this new imperative very clear: “The real object of having an Army is to prepare for war.”¹⁰⁸ And the wars he envisioned differed radically from the small-unit, dispersed operations of the Indian Wars and the ongoing insurrection in the Philippines. These future wars would require “the exercise and training of the officers and men of the army in the movements of large bodies of troops by brigade, division, and corps under conditions approaching as nearly as possible those to be anticipated in executing the plans devised for their action in war.”¹⁰⁹

The Root reforms were comprehensive, addressing almost the entire status quo and culture of the Army since the Civil War: the role of the militia, Army organization, officer education, War Department reorganization, and myriad other issues. They would take time. The first test came in World War I, which revealed more areas demanding reform. The ultimate goal was to create an Army institution capable of waging modern state-on-state warfare distant from its shores.¹¹⁰ Other missions, while performed frequently, became of secondary importance to the Army.

In the years following World War I, the Armed Forces of the United States were involved in counterinsurgency and constabulary operations in China, Mexico, the Caribbean, and the Philippines. The Marine Corps captured its lessons in its *Small Wars Manual*. However, both the Army and the Marine Corps riveted their attention on conventional war following World War I.¹¹¹

107 Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 135.

108 “The Reorganization of the United States Army: Army Reorganization,” [extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1899], in Robert Bacon and James Brown Scott, eds., *The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States: Addresses and Reports by Elihu Root* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), p. 351.

109 *Ibid.*, pp. 355–356.

110 For a comprehensive and thoughtful examination of the Army during this period see Clark, *Preparing for War*.

111 Austin Long, *Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence: The U.S. Military and Counterinsurgency Doctrine, 1960–1970 and 2003–2006* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008). Long provides an analysis of the conflict between COIN doctrine and institutional culture. Long discusses the Marine Corps experience prior to World War II: “The Marines, though not afraid to use violence, never had sufficient force in these countries to use the types of coercive methods that the Army used. Furthermore, Marine Corps operations were almost always integrated with civilian agencies, particularly the State Department. (This earned the Marines the nickname ‘the State Department’s troops.’) The Marines also created or trained a variety of indigenous forces.” *Ibid.*, p. 4.

The Army focused on becoming the land force of a great power, noting in its 1923 *Field Service Regulations* the centrality of conventional operations: “The ultimate objective of all military operations is the destruction of the enemy’s armed forces by battle. Decisive defeat in battle breaks the enemy’s will to war and forces him to sue for peace.”¹¹² The Army also concentrated on major state warfare and relegated other types of wars to a “lesser included” category, preparing for “an opponent organized for war on modern principles and equipped with all the means of modern warfare” since it believed “an army capable of waging successful war under these conditions will prove adequate to any less grave emergency with which it may be confronted.”¹¹³

War Plan Orange, the top interwar U.S. planning contingency for a war against Japan in the Pacific, became the first priority for the Marine Corps, although it remained “prepared for Atlantic and Caribbean contingencies.”¹¹⁴ The Marine Corps turned to preparing for amphibious operations in support of a base-seizure mission, a mission approved in 1920 by the Joint Army and Navy Board.¹¹⁵

World War II, the Korean War, and the early years of the Cold War would “swamp the tiny boat of small wars doctrine and send it to oblivion.”¹¹⁶ In the 1960s, the United States would find itself in another large-scale conflict in Vietnam. Unlike in the Philippines, where veterans of the Indian Wars passed on the lore of small wars, there were no veterans with relevant experience—with the exception of a relatively small population of those who had conducted operations with partisans, special operations, advisory missions, and military government during the occupations of Germany and Japan.¹¹⁷ The U.S. military was a conventional force of a super power—with little institutional memory of unconventional operations—that would find itself in a very unconventional war in Vietnam in the 1960s.

Furthermore, the laws of war changed in the aftermath of World War II in response to the horrors of that conflict. The Army’s *Law of Warfare* doctrinal manual of 1940, much less General Orders 100, would no longer provide authoritative guidance because of the comprehensive changes to the Law of Armed Conflict in the Geneva Convention of 1949. In *Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*, Article 3

112 U.S. War Department, *Field Service Regulations, United States Army, 1923* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1923), p. 77.

113 *Ibid.*, pp. iii–iv.

114 Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, p. 320.

115 *Ibid.*, p. 321.

116 Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941*, p. 261.

117 *Ibid.*, p. 261. The United States was involved in many interventions and irregular wars between World War II and Vietnam. See “US Military and Clandestine Operations in Foreign Countries: 1798–Present,” Global Policy Forum, December 2005, available at <https://www.globalpolicy.org/us-westward-expansion/26024.html>. That said, they were largely in an advise-and-assist capacity, as in Greece and Philippines; short-duration conventional interventions, as in Lebanon and the Dominican Republic; or irregular warfare operations within a larger conventional conflict, as in Korea. The imperative for the U.S. Armed Forces was deterring the Soviet Union with conventional and nuclear forces.

prohibited several practices utilized in past conflicts such as the Philippine Insurrection. These included:

- a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment, and torture;
- b) taking of hostages;
- c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
- d) the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.¹¹⁸

America in Vietnam (1945–1975)

The Vietnam War forced the United States to confront a large-scale, off-shore, protracted insurgency for the first time since the Philippine Insurrection.¹¹⁹ When President John F. Kennedy assumed office in January 1961, he was determined to replace the “Massive Retaliation” doctrine of his predecessor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, with more activist policies to confront communism. In the words of Paul H. Nitze, a member of the Kennedy administration, Massive Retaliation offered only “the alternatives of either national humiliation or all-out war.”¹²⁰ Furthermore, Massive Retaliation had clearly not worked to contain communist expansion and aggression, as evident in the French loss of Indochina to the communist Vietminh, the Soviet repression of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, and, perhaps most alarming of all, the communist takeover of Cuba. In the place of Massive Retaliation, the Kennedy administration soon embraced a strategy of Flexible Response.

Flexible Response had its origins in the debates of the 1950s over the appropriate national security doctrines and capabilities needed to constrain communist expansion. In short, the United States needed a strategy to fight limited wars as well as large ones.¹²¹

The individual who articulated the military capabilities needed for limited wars was General Maxwell Taylor. In his book *The Uncertain Trumpet*, published in 1959 after his retirement,

118 International Committee of the Red Cross, *Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War* (Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross, August 12, 1949), Article 3, available at <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=A4E145A2A7A68875C12563CD0051B9AE>.

119 Much of this section on the Vietnam War is derived from David E. Johnson, *Modern U.S. Civil-Military Relations: Wielding the Terrible Swift Sword*, McNair Paper 57 (Fort McNair, Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 1997).

120 Paul H. Nitze, “A Key Moment of Crisis,” *Army*, October 1961, p. 29.

121 Two key books framed much of the discussion about limited war strategy: Henry A. Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Row for the Council on Foreign Relations, 1957); and Robert E. Osgood, *Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

Taylor wrote that Massive Retaliation offered “no alternative other than reciprocal suicide or retreat.”¹²²

Addressing Congress in March 1961, President Kennedy echoed Taylor’s strategy: “Our defense posture must be both flexible and determined. Any aggressor contemplating an attack on any part of the Free World with any kind of weapons, conventional or nuclear, must know that our response will be suitable, selective, swift, and effective.”¹²³ The president also warned of the threat posed to the security of the Free World by its “being slowly nibbled away at the periphery, regardless of our strategic power, by forces of subversion, infiltration, intimidation, indirect or non-overt aggression, internal revolution, diplomatic blackmail, guerrilla warfare, or a series of limited wars.”¹²⁴ To counter “this area of local wars,” he proposed a revamped Military Assistance Program. Additionally, he stressed “the need for a wider range of *usable* military power,”¹²⁵ stating, “Diplomacy and defense are no longer distinct alternatives, one to be used where the other fails—both must complement each other.”¹²⁶ Finally, in an abrupt departure from the Eisenhower policy of stressing economic security, Kennedy noted, “Our arms must be adequate to meet our commitments and insure our security, without being bound by arbitrary budget ceilings.”¹²⁷

The Kennedy administration thus called for a Defense Department ready “to fight two and a half wars simultaneously—major wars in both Europe and Asia and a brush-fire war elsewhere.”¹²⁸ President Kennedy, however, also believed that “non-nuclear wars and sublimated or guerrilla warfare have since 1945 constituted the most active and constant threat to free world security.”¹²⁹

Kennedy was also convinced that the U.S. military, particularly the Army, was not well equipped to deal with the problem. Consequently, he tried to force change throughout the U.S. government from the top down.

It soon became patently clear to an increasingly frustrated Kennedy that the Army, although pleased with its increase in resources, did not share his vision of what constituted usable military force. Army Chief of Staff General George H. Decker had reportedly “shrugged off preparation for counter-guerrilla warfare as something [the Army] can take in stride,” telling

122 Maxwell Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), p. 137.

123 John F. Kennedy, “Special Message to Congress on Defense Policies and Principles,” March 28, 1961, in Theodore C. Sorensen, *Let the Word Go Forth: The Speeches, Statements, and Writings of John F. Kennedy, 1947–1963* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1988), p. 239.

124 Sorensen, *Let the Word Go Forth*,” p. 240. Similar language is now being used to describe gray zone warfare.

125 Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 445 (emphasis in the original).

126 *Ibid.*, p. 236.

127 *Ibid.*, p. 237.

128 *Ibid.*, p. 568.

129 Lloyd Norman and John B. Spore, “Big Push in Guerrilla Warfare,” *Army*, March 1962, pp. 32–33.

President Kennedy that “any good soldier can handle guerrillas.”¹³⁰ Indeed, it would be hard to imagine a mainstream U.S. Army officer having any other view. The Army, since its adoption of the 1923 *Field Service Regulations*, had focused on the destruction of the enemy in battle as its principal warfighting objective. World War II and the Korean War validated this doctrine. Thus, it is understandable that the officers whose careers were forged in these crucibles would believe that this was the correct approach to adversaries in limited wars. It was also obvious that Decker—and others in the U.S. military—viewed limited wars as a distraction from the real threat: Soviet conventional military power in Europe.¹³¹

U.S. involvement in Vietnam, then part of what was known as French Indochina, began in March 1945 when the U.S. Army Air Forces Air Ground Aid Service supplied Ho Chi Minh with “communications equipment, medical supplies, and small arms in return for intelligence and assistance in rescuing Allied pilots.”¹³² Detachment 202 of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) also operated in Indochina to establish an intelligence network and to provide military supplies and advice to groups resisting the Japanese. Direct military assistance to Vietnam began with the establishment of a Military Assistance Advisory Group in September 1950 in Saigon under Army Brigadier General Francis G. Brink.¹³³ Following the departure of the French and the partition of Vietnam with the 1954 Geneva Accords, the United States began increasing its advisory and training efforts for the South Vietnamese military. During the Eisenhower administration, this amounted to some 700 advisors and \$200 million in military aid.¹³⁴ The Kennedy administration greatly increased this support. When President Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963, the United States had 16,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam.¹³⁵ By the end of 1964, there were 23,000 uniformed soldiers in South Vietnam.¹³⁶ At its core, U.S. efforts sought to provide the South Vietnamese the ability to “maintain a viable, effective, and anticommunist South Vietnamese government.”¹³⁷

130 Ibid., p. 34.

131 Ibid., pp. 34–35.

132 Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941–1960: The U. S. Army in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U. S. Army, 1985), p. 39.

133 Ibid., pp. 39–40, 115–116 (direct quote on page 39).

134 Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers: American Generals Reflect on Vietnam*, Da Capo Edition (New York: Da Capo, 1991), p. 5. This is the 3rd edition of the original: Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers: American Generals Reflect on Vietnam* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1977).

135 Ibid., p. 6.

136 Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965–1973* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U. S. Army, 1988), p. 13.

137 Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America’s Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New York: The New Press, 2013), p. 65.

FIGURE 7



Army of the Republic of Vietnam soldiers and an American advisor in Vietnam. DoD Photo.

In the early 1960s, Army doctrine reflected a conventional view about irregular warfare and counterinsurgency that was consistent with how it had viewed these types of operations since the Indian Wars. The May 1961 version of FM 31-15, *Operations Against Irregular Forces*, discussed the need for civil-military cooperation, intelligence, propaganda, and civic action, but it was clearly focused on the importance of dealing with the adversary: “The ultimate objective of operations against an irregular force is to eliminate the irregular force and prevent its resurgence.”¹³⁸ The manual also warned that the initial “force assigned to combat an irregular force must be adequate to complete their elimination.”¹³⁹

As the 1960s progressed, the U.S. military worked to understand the implications of the insurgencies in the post-World War II context of decolonization. Andrew Birtle details these extensive efforts in the realms of doctrine, organization, education, and interagency efforts in his book, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976*.¹⁴⁰ Central to U.S. policy was “the notion that the job of defeating an insurgency rested primarily upon the indigenous government, not the United States.”¹⁴¹ There was, however, recognition “that U.S. officials would be confronted with indigenous elites who benefited from the status quo and who would exhibit ‘deep-seated emotional, cultural, and proprietary resistance to any

138 *FM 31-15: Operations Against Irregular Forces* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1961), p. 4.

139 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

140 Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 2006), pp. 223-290.

141 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

change that diminishes power and privilege, regardless of how unrealistic and short-sighted this stubbornness may seem objectively.’”¹⁴²

The United States looked to foreign examples of successful COIN efforts, particularly in Malaya, Algeria, and the Huk Rebellion in the Philippines.¹⁴³ The U.S. military, particularly the students at the School of Special Warfare at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, held special interest in Algeria. They had French instructors, most notably Paul Aussaresses, a key figure in France’s war in Algeria, and they studied the French experience.¹⁴⁴ Aussaresses later recalled of his time at Fort Bragg, “I taught about the conditions in which I did a job not normal in classical warfare, the techniques of the Battle of Algiers, arrests, intelligence, torture.”¹⁴⁵

Years later Brigadier General John Johns and Colonel Carl Bernard, both retired Army officers who had studied with Aussaresses, recalled that they had read galley proofs of Colonel Roger Trinquier’s monograph *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, which detailed how the French had fought in Algeria and how they had broken the insurgency. Johns and Bernard also recalled that Trinquier’s ideas had “a considerable impact on all the green berets who left for Vietnam.” Bernard sent Trinquier’s work to Robert Komer, whose Phoenix Program replicated many of the approaches the French had taken in Algeria.¹⁴⁶ He believed Trinquier’s work was formative to the program: “Starting with that book Project Phoenix was conceived.”¹⁴⁷

142 Ibid., p. 239. The internal quote is from *United States Overseas Internal Defense Policy* (Washington DC: Office of the President of the United States, September 1962), available at http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pcaac471.pdf. William Westmoreland recalled that, “Like most Americans who served in South Vietnam, I had at first only vicarious experience in counterinsurgency warfare. . . . My colleagues and I in Vietnam were for a long time on what I called a ‘learning curve.’ There was no book to tell us how to do the job.” William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), p. 240.

143 A 1962 symposium on counterinsurgency gathered COIN experts with experience in Algeria, China, Greece, Kenya, Laos, Malaya, Oman, South Vietnam, and the Philippines to “distill lessons and insights from past insurgent conflicts that might help to inform and shape the U.S. involvement in Vietnam and to foster the effective prosecution of other future counterinsurgency campaigns.” Stephen T. Hosmer and Sibylle O. Crane, *Counterinsurgency: A Symposium, April 16–20, 1962*, new edition (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006 [1963]), p. iii). Paul B. Rich wrote that David Kilcullen, one of the most influential COIN strategists in the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, notes the importance of this conference both to the development of COIN in the 1960s and as the “intellectual foundations for the later post-9/11 revival of ‘classical COIN’.” Rich, “A Historical Overview of U.S. Counterinsurgency,” pp. 17–18.

144 Marie-Monique Robin, “Escadrons de la mort: L’école française [The Death Squads: The French School],” documentary segment, 2003, translated transcription available at https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/misc.activism.progressive/U4h-Yc_HQo4. The accuracy of the sections of the transcript citing General Johns and Colonel Bernard were verified with General Johns via email on December 15, 2014.

145 Ibid.

146 Ibid.; Paul Aussaresses, *The Battle of the Casbah: Counterterrorism and Torture, 1955–1957*, translated by Robert L. Miller (New York: Enigma Books, 2002), pp. xxvi–xxvii; and “French Torture Mastermind Paul Aussaresses Dies Peacefully at 95,” *The Daily Beast*, December 4, 2013, available at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/12/04/french-torture-mastermind-paul-aussaresses-dies-peacefully-at-95.html>.

147 Robin, “Escadrons de la mort.”

Trinquier's monograph was translated into English in 1964. It included a foreword by Bernard Fall, author of *Street Without Joy: The French Debacle in Indochina*, who wrote that Americans had much to learn from the French:

American readers—particularly those who are concerned with today's operations in South Vietnam—will find to their surprise that their various seemingly “new” counterinsurgency gambits, from strategic hamlets to large-scale pacification, are mere rehashes of old tactics to which helicopters, weed killers, and rapid-firing rifles merely add a new dimension of speed and bloodiness without basically changing the character of the struggle—nor its outcome, if the same political errors that the French have made are repeated. And the careers of Trinquier and of his numerous comrades still in the French Army prove that France has an ample reserve of counterinsurgency specialists whose qualifications are second to none.¹⁴⁸

The situation in South Vietnam under the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem was increasingly dire. His government's Strategic Hamlet Program, begun in 1962, aimed to protect the rural population from the Viet Cong (VC) by concentrating them in heavily fortified villages. This was a subterfuge. Strategic hamlets were in actuality instruments of control rather than pacification. Additionally, areas the government could not control were made “open zones” and subject to open air and artillery fire to drive their populations into the strategic hamlets. Consequently, the rural populations were increasingly disaffected with the government, and security outside the cities worsened.¹⁴⁹

The Viet Cong were becoming increasingly aggressive and competent, inflicting defeats on South Vietnamese forces in the field. Particularly alarming was the January 23, 1963 defeat of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) 7th Division at Ap Bac, which demonstrated the poor training and lack of fighting quality of the South's military forces.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, the VC terror campaign was very effective; 6,000 government officials were killed, and 30,000 civilians were kidnapped.¹⁵¹

The internal situation worsened after the October 1963 coup (which the United States had tacitly supported) killed President Diem. By late 1964, the North Vietnamese began sending regular army combat units into South Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh Trail.¹⁵² President Lyndon

148 Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, English edition (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), available at <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/carl/download/csipubs/ModernWarfare.pdf>. This monograph is a translation of the original French, *La Guerre Moderne* (Paris: Éditions de la Table ronde, 1961). Fall's quote is from the preface of the English edition, written in October 1963.

149 Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 25. Lewy also notes that the Diem regime's claim of establishing 3,225 strategic hamlets with one-third of the population of South Vietnam was false—“many of these hamlets existed on paper only and were part of the misinformation the GVN was feeding the Americans.” Ibid.

150 Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 137.

151 Gregory A. Daddis, *Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 59.

152 Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*, p. 65.

B. Johnson, fearing the collapse of South Vietnam, escalated the war, declaring, “I am not going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went.”¹⁵³

Before moving on to a discussion of how the United States prosecuted the war once it decided to escalate, it is important to understand the context within which the decision was taken. Vietnam was significantly different from other post-World War II insurgencies (Malaya, the Philippines, Indochina, Algeria, and Kenya) that formed the basis of thinking about how to counter them. The war in Vietnam involved main force units, both VC and North Vietnamese Army; physical sanctuary in Laos and Cambodia; and strong external financial and material support from China and the Soviet Union. Additionally, given the president’s desire to limit the war so as not to conflict with his Great Society programs or risk Chinese or Soviet direct intervention, the ground war was limited to South Vietnam. This latter consideration was not without basis, given that in 1965 conventional wisdom held that North Vietnam was a client of an expansionist communist monolith, much as North Korea had been viewed in 1950.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, there was justifiable concern that the Chinese, who shared a border with North Vietnam, might enter the war if the United States invaded the North, a view supported by the CIA in mid-1965:

The Chinese would intervene *only* “if U.S. ground forces invaded North Vietnam in such strength as to control the country,” and “almost certainly if U.S. forces approached the Chinese frontier.” It is significant the CIA *did not* believe the Chinese would intervene militarily with ground forces “if the U.S./GVN [Government of Vietnam] were winning the war in South Vietnam,” or “if U.S. air attacks began to damage the industrial and military sector of North Vietnam.”¹⁵⁵

The Johnson administration crafted a strategy “based on the central assumption that if the Communists sustained enough military punishment they would finally relent, forsaking (at least temporarily) their war effort.”¹⁵⁶ Central to the strategy was the belief that the North Vietnamese had a breaking point that U.S. bombing could push them to reach.¹⁵⁷ In short, if the communists gave up in the South, they could be independent in the North.¹⁵⁸

153 Herbert Y. Schandler, “America and Vietnam: The Failure of Strategy, 1965–67,” in Peter Braestrup, ed., *Vietnam as History: Ten Years After the Paris Peace Accords* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1984), p. 23.

154 Johnson, *Modern U.S. Civil-Military Relations*, pp. 28–29.

155 Larry Berman, “Waiting for Smoking Guns: Presidential Decision-making and the Vietnam War, 1965–67,” in Braestrup, *Vietnam as History*, p. 18 (emphasis in the original).

156 John E. Mueller, “The Search for the ‘Breaking Point’ in Vietnam: The Statistics of a Deadly Quarrel,” *International Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4, December 1980, p. 499.

157 *Ibid.*, p. 499.

158 *Ibid.*, p. 499.

Deputy Under Secretary of State George Ball later recalled that as the United States began taking over the war, there was a “feeling of overwhelming confidence—almost of omnipotence—many took it for granted that we could, with a limited commitment of resources, enable the Government of Vietnam to hold the Viet Cong insurgency and forestall Hanoi’s threatened intervention.” Because the United States “had x-times the resources of men, wealth, and material as the North Vietnamese, all we needed to prevail was to find an effective means to apply them.” Ball also recalled that the “concentration on quantitative measurements meant that all unquantifiable elements were omitted from the equation of decision.”¹⁵⁹ In short, “How could a tiny, backward Asian country not have a breaking point, not have a price when opposed by the might of the United States?”¹⁶⁰

Unlike previous counterinsurgencies or irregular wars, the United States had a new capability that enabled it to take the war to North Vietnam without ground forces: air power. Thus, two wars were prosecuted simultaneously—a ground war with air support in the South and an air war in the North.

By the time of General William C. Westmoreland’s tenure as commander of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), the focus of the ground war had shifted to the destruction of enemy forces, and resources were organized to that end.¹⁶¹ All other efforts were increasingly displaced as resources were organized to contribute to the effort to destroy the enemy. This also included the reorientation of Special Forces units from their previous role—controlling and gaining the support of indigenous minorities so that they would not fall to the communists—to an offensive role of destroying the Viet Cong.¹⁶² This is not to say that advising or pacification were abandoned, only that these efforts were clearly secondary in an effort to defeat VC and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units.¹⁶³

159 *The Lessons of Vietnam*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 99th Congress, 1st Session, April 29, 1985 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1986), p. 21.

160 Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1979), p. 343. Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford, Robert McNamara’s replacement, recalled similarly that, “When the military was told that we were going in there and save South Vietnam, I think it felt that it was not going to be a particularly difficult task. Here were a lot of little people running around in black pajamas in North Vietnam, and here we came in, the greatest nation in the world, with the most enormous firepower and with bombing that could wipe them out.” *The Lessons of Vietnam* (1986), p. 37.

161 Johnson, *Modern U.S. Civil-Military Relations*, p. 32.

162 Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961–1971* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1973), p. 77.

163 There has been considerable debate about General Westmoreland’s approach to the war. See Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*; Gentile, *America’s Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*; Lewis Sorley, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011); and John M. Carland, “Winning the Vietnam War: Westmoreland’s Approach in Two Documents,” *The Journal of Military History* 68, no. 2, April 2004, pp. 553–574.

FIGURE 8



President Johnson and General Westmoreland in Vietnam a month before the Tet Offensive. U.S. Air Force Photo.

Not surprisingly, advisor duty, previously sought out as the only way to get combat experience in a peacetime Army, became less desirable as the best officers sought duty in combat units, knowing these jobs were career-enhancing.¹⁶⁴ Advisors also had little preparation for the “acute culture shock from being dropped into a completely alien environment,” a situation not helped by their preparation, because they had only cursory Vietnamese language and culture training from the Military Assistance Training and Advisory course at Fort Bragg.¹⁶⁵

Tour length was a constant issue, not only with advisors but also throughout the U.S. military (particularly in the Army, which dominated Westmoreland’s headquarters). A normal tour of duty in Vietnam was one year, but Army officers generally served in their specific assignments for six months.¹⁶⁶ A 1970 study on professionalism, commissioned by Westmoreland after he became Army chief of staff, detailed the pernicious climate this created in Vietnam. Aside from making it difficult to learn their jobs, the short time in a job created demands for a can-do attitude among officers trying to work in an environment of “zero defects,” “ticket punching,”

164 Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years*, pp. 510–511.

165 Clarke also notes that “Many advisers were newly appointed lieutenants, captains, and majors with comparatively little experience, even with American units.” *Ibid.*, pp. 510.

166 *Ibid.*, pp. 510.

and a “preoccupation with ‘measurable trivia’.”¹⁶⁷ For officers, particularly commanders, the imperative to look good in a short time in an important job resulted in careerism. The imperative was to establish a “performance image rather than on achieving positive results.”¹⁶⁸ This all too often resulted in inflated body count and pacification reports that led to optimistic assessments of progress in the war, as well as corrosive effects on the integrity of the military institution.¹⁶⁹

Enlisted soldiers and non-commissioned officers usually spent the full year of their tour in their positions. They often resented their commanders because the “quick rotation of officers meant that many unit commanders were less knowledgeable [sic] about jungle warfare than most of their men (amateur officers could and did get their troops wounded and killed).”¹⁷⁰ As an Army-commissioned study conducted by the BDM Corporation and released in 1980 noted, “Too many of the young leaders and soldiers carried out their duties with more determination and bravery than tactical skill—not their fault.”¹⁷¹ Thus, while the Vietnam War has been called a war fought for twelve years, one year at a time, it was in reality a war whose officers fought it six months at a time.

As Westmoreland began building up the forces in South Vietnam to execute his strategy, President Johnson approved the use of air power against North Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs recommended to the president a systematic, intense bombing campaign, reminiscent of those employed in World War II and the Korean War, against 94 targets as the way to knock North Vietnam out of the war.¹⁷² Air Force Chief of Staff Curtis LeMay later recalled, “He could have bombed the North Vietnamese back into the ‘Stone Age’ by destroying the ninety-four targets.”¹⁷³ LeMay remained a true believer long after the war, late asserting, “We could have ended [the war] in any ten-day period you wanted to, but they never would bomb the target list we had.”¹⁷⁴

167 U.S. Army War College, *Study on Military Professionalism* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1970), p. 28.

168 Kinnard, *The War Managers* (1991), p. 111.

169 U.S. Army War College, *Study on Military Professionalism*, p. B-29. During the Vietnam War, the U.S. military relied on “mostly conscripts and draft-motivated ‘volunteers’ for enlisted personnel.” Bernard Rostker, *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006), p. iii. When the draft ended in 1973, the U.S. military became a volunteer force. Rostker’s book describes this in detail.

170 C. Dale Walton, *The Myth of Inevitable U.S. Defeat in Vietnam* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 52.

171 BDM Corporation, *A Study of the Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam: Omnibus Executive Summary* (McLean, VA: BDM Corporation, 1980), p. VI–8.

172 Richard H. Kohn and Joseph P. Harahan, eds., *Strategic Air Warfare: An Interview with Generals Curtis E. LeMay, Leon W. Johnson, David A. Burchinal, and Jack J. Catton* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1988), p. 127; Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), p. 77; and Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 174–210, 314–331.

173 Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power*, p. 77.

174 Kohn and Harahan, *Strategic Air Warfare*, p. 125.

President Johnson did not approve the 94-target plan, but instead chose to use bombing as a way to signal the North Vietnamese to stop their aggression in the South. In this air campaign of graduated escalation, dubbed Operation Rolling Thunder, Johnson maintained tight control and began personally selecting targets in March 1965.¹⁷⁵ Rolling Thunder ended on November 1, 1968, after it failed to get the North Vietnamese to quit the war.¹⁷⁶

The principal service opposed to Westmoreland's approach of taking the war to the enemy was the Marine Corps. General Victor Krulak advocated for establishing enclaves that would gradually "extend their areas of operations, like spreading oil, as pacification efforts bore fruit and resources became available."¹⁷⁷ Westmoreland's view was that "U.S. forces had to 'forget about the enclaves and take the war to the enemy'."¹⁷⁸

The situation in the South continued to deteriorate as Rolling Thunder was unable to force the North Vietnamese to capitulate. General Westmoreland believed he "could not experiment with the time-consuming tasks of pacification and political reform, nor . . . did the RVN [Republic of Vietnam] possess the stability requisite for such measures."¹⁷⁹ President Johnson also wanted measurable results to demonstrate progress: "soldiers killed, northern targets destroyed, reduced infiltration."¹⁸⁰ In July 1965, President Johnson approved General Westmoreland's request for a 35-battalion force of some 175,000 troops—"a major threshold had been crossed."¹⁸¹ The president also ominously noted, "Additional forces will be needed later, and they will be sent as requested."¹⁸² Westmoreland understood what the president's approval meant: "It was a proviso for free maneuver of American and allied units throughout South Vietnam. Thus the restrictive enclave strategy with which I had disagreed from the first was finally rejected."¹⁸³ Westmoreland began the big unit war in the South to close with and destroy the enemy. U.S. force levels increased until they peaked at almost 550,000 in the spring of 1969.¹⁸⁴ The U.S. also took over the war, relegating the

175 Ibid., p. 64.

176 Johnson, *Modern U.S. Civil-Military Relations*, p. 36. By the end of 1967, all but 5 of the 94 targets on the Joint Chiefs' target list had been struck.

177 Buzzano, *Masters of War*, p. 248. The Marines also employed small units, situated in villages. John Southard, *Defend and Befriend: The U.S. Marine Corps and Combined Action Platoons in Vietnam* (Lexington KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

178 Buzzano, *Masters of War*, p. 249.

179 Ibid., pp. 245–246.

180 Ibid., p. 253.

181 Herbert Y. Schandler, "America and Vietnam: The Failure of Strategy," in Ronald Haycock, ed., *Regular Armies and Insurgency* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 90. Schandler's biography includes duty as a special advisor to General Westmoreland on pacification programs and a contributor to the *Pentagon Papers*. Ibid., p. 98.

182 Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, p. 143. Westmoreland is quoting from President Johnson's comments at a July 28, 1965 press conference.

183 Ibid., p. 144.

184 Kinnard, *The War Managers* (1991), p. 6.

ARVN to a secondary role until the policy of Vietnamization began in the administration of President Richard M. Nixon.¹⁸⁵

The United States eventually negotiated a peace treaty with the North Vietnamese on January 27, 1973, and by March 1973 all U.S. troops were withdrawn from Vietnam. Ironically, Air Force officers maintained that the termination of the 1972 North Vietnamese offensive and the final air campaign, Operation Linebacker II, forced the North Vietnamese to negotiate an end to the war. General William W. Momyer, who had directed part of the Rolling Thunder campaign and had chafed under the micromanagement from Washington, wrote, “In a concentrated 11-day test [Linebacker II], our air strategy persuaded a determined adversary with a remarkably elaborate air defense system that overt aggression could not be sustained in the presence of unrestricted U.S. airpower.”¹⁸⁶ In short, unconstrained air power could have won the war in 1965.¹⁸⁷

FIGURE 9



B-52s bombing over Vietnam. U.S. Air Force Photo.

185 Schandler, “America and Vietnam: The Failure of Strategy,” 1979, p. 92.

186 William W. Momyer, *Air Power in Three Wars* (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 1978), p. 34

187 Johnson, *Modern U.S. Civil-Military Relations*, p. 60.

The means employed in Vietnam between the turn to conventional operations and the decision to hand the war back to the South Vietnamese included targeted assassinations, executions, forced population transfers, destruction of villages, scorched earth tactics, road controls, the use of identification cards, and body searches.

Project Phoenix, the program to go after the VC shadow government, was, in the words of its founder Robert Komer, designed as a precision operation: “The operational concept at the cutting edge is analogous to a ‘rifle shot’ rather than a ‘shotgun approach.’ . . . Instead of cordon and search operations, it will stress quick reaction operations aimed at individual cadre or, at most, small groups. Cutting off the heads of the infrastructure at local levels will tend to degrade the whole structure.”¹⁸⁸ Mark Moyar, in his assessment of Phoenix, writes that the program was very effective, with the Allies arresting, killing, or capturing a significant portion of the shadow government between 1967–1972, and many more neutralized during the 1968 Tet Offensive.¹⁸⁹ He also provides a table that, while likely inaccurate, is reflective of the scope of the Phoenix Program between 1968 and 1972: 22,013 rallied (defected); 33,358 captured; 26,369 killed; for a total of 81,740 “neutralizations.”¹⁹⁰ An additional 200,000 VC defected by 1972 in the Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) program.¹⁹¹ Moyar also notes, “Most GVN leaders allowed or even encouraged their subordinates to torture or kill prisoners. U.S. military and CIA leaders, on the other hand, wanted to prevent both American and GVN personnel from indulging in these practices.”¹⁹² U.S. officers, much like in the Philippines, got their information from their less inhibited South Vietnamese counterparts. Vietnamese forces would frequently carry out executions of known VC captives rather than having them released from GVN detention shortly after capture. Similarly, brutality and terror were common and intentional on the communist side.¹⁹³ Finally, with the establishment of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), efforts began to put in place a national identification card fingerprinting system, with police issuing tamperproof identification cards to

188 Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in Vietnam*, revised edition (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), p. 53.

189 Ibid., p. 390.

190 Ibid., p. 236.

191 Jeremy Patrick White, *Civil Affairs in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009), p. 10, available at <http://csis.org/publication/civil-affairs-vietnam>.

192 Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey*, p. 99.

193 Ibid., pp. 93, 396. Nick Turse and Deborah Nelson have detailed the contents of the papers of the Army’s “Vietnam War Crimes Working Group,” which was established after the My Lai Massacre. They note the substantiation of “seven massacres from 1967 through 1971 in which at least 137 civilians died. Seventy-eight other attacks on noncombatants in which at least 57 were killed, 56 wounded and 15 sexually assaulted. One hundred forty-one instances in which U.S. soldiers tortured civilian detainees or prisoners of war with fists, sticks, bats, water or electric shock. Investigators determined that evidence against 203 soldiers accused of harming Vietnamese civilians or prisoners was strong enough to warrant formal charges. These ‘founded’ cases were referred to the soldiers’ superiors for action. Ultimately, 57 of them were court-martialed and just 23 convicted.” Nick Turse and Deborah Nelson, “Civilian Killings Went Unpunished: Declassified Papers Show U.S. Atrocities Went Far Beyond My Lai,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 2006, available at <http://www.latimes.com/news/la-na-vietnam6aug06-story.html>. See also Deborah Nelson, *The War Behind Me: Vietnam Veterans Confront the Truth About U.S. War Crimes* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

all South Vietnamese over the age of fifteen. Such a system—in the view of Robert Komer, the head of CORDS—was essential to efforts to identify VC infrastructure and enable the Phoenix Program.¹⁹⁴ Additionally, Vietnamese police ran searches at checkpoints on roads and canals to control movement, restrict supplies going to the communists, and catch VC suspects.¹⁹⁵ The system was only partially effective, given the corruption of the GVN. The police accepted bribes, and captured VC often bought their release. They would then retaliate against those involved in their capture.¹⁹⁶

FIGURE 10



Interment for 300 unidentified victims of the communist occupation of Hue in 1968. U.S. Army Photo.

Throughout the Vietnam War the United States and the GVN forced the relocation of civilians and designated the cleared areas free-fire zones (after December 1965, specified strike zones), particularly between 1966 and 1970. The purpose of these relocations was three-fold: “(1) deny the enemy manpower, food and revenue; (2) to clear the battlefield of innocent civilians, establish SSZs [specified strike zones] and make possible the freer use of

194 Richard A. Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), p. 117.

195 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

196 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

firepower; (3) to score a political victory by making people vote with their feet for the GVN.¹⁹⁷ Pacification programs continued, but Westmoreland's large-scale military operations and the population relocations worked at cross purposes to them. The GVN lost authority in the countryside because of the way the war was conducted.¹⁹⁸ Eventually, military activity resulted in the displacement of some 7 million Vietnamese.¹⁹⁹

From 1962–1970 the United States conducted a high-technology scorched earth campaign to destroy crops and defoliate jungles using herbicides, most famously the carcinogen Agent Orange. The defoliation mission constituted 90 percent of the effort, with the purpose of “improving aerial observation and inhibiting enemy movement during daylight hours.”²⁰⁰ A formerly classified report by General W. B. Rosson (commander, U.S. Army Pacific) for then Chief of Staff of the Army General Westmoreland emphasized, “Militarily, both defoliation and crop destruction programs in support of the counterinsurgency effort had demonstrated their values by: reducing the tactical advantage accruing to the enemy through the use of natural concealment; and by denying subsistence to the enemy, thus reducing his mobility and compounding his logistical problems.”²⁰¹

U.S. forces also destroyed villages, although not wantonly as portrayed in the press or movies like *Platoon*. The two most famous of these episodes occurred at Cam Ne in August 1965 and Ben Tre in February 1968. At Cam Ne a CBS television crew filmed U.S. Marines using cigarette lighters to light thatched huts on fire. Morley Safer reported on “the burning of from 120 to 150 houses and the leveling of the village” on the *CBS Evening News*. The Marine Corps’ “after-action report spoke of 51 structures and 38 trenches, tunnels and prepared positions destroyed.”²⁰² At Ben Tre, Peter Arnett of the *New York Times* famously reported on “the decision by allied commanders to bomb and shell the town regardless of civilian casualties, to rout the Vietcong” during the Tet Offensive. Arnett’s quote from a U.S. major at the scene came to epitomize the war: “It became necessary to destroy the town to save it.”²⁰³

197 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, p. 226.

198 Schandler, “America and Vietnam: The Failure of Strategy,” 1979, p. 93.

199 Gentile, *America’s Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*, p. 76.

200 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, p. 259. From 1962–1970, the U.S. effort defoliated 4,747,587 acres and destroyed 481,897 acres of crops. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

201 William B. Rosson, *Assessment of Influence Exerted on Military Operations by Other than Military Considerations*, reprint (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1993 [1970]), p. I-25. This declassified report provides valuable insights into the views of the military leadership still prosecuting the Vietnam War.

202 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, p. 53.

203 “Major Describes Moves,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 1968, p. 14.

The VC frequently used villages as bases and supply hubs, and civilians were used for labor. Nevertheless, American tactics virtually guaranteed civilian casualties and damage to villages. As one officer wrote, “More concern must be given to the safety of villages. Instances were noted where villages were severely damaged or destroyed by napalm or naval gunfire, wherein the military necessity of doing so was dubious.”²⁰⁴

U.S. forces relied on massive firepower throughout the war. A report by the U.S. Army Combat Developments Command, *Dynamics of Fire and Maneuver*, concluded that:

the employment of fire and maneuver from June 1966 to June 1968 was profoundly affected by the overall goals of US strategy of attrition. These goals, which included the lowest possible casualty rates for US forces, place special and unusual constraints on maneuver and especially the maneuver of infantry. Since the US forces possessed enormous firepower in their supporting arms, an alternative was to employ fire in massive quantities and to give it primacy over maneuver, particularly in dense jungle and against strongly fortified positions.²⁰⁵

The available firepower was massive, ranging from the weapons of individual soldiers to the use of B-52 bombers in close air support missions and area bombings of “suspected enemy locations” as large as eight square kilometers.²⁰⁶ Even after the Vietnamization of the war, available air power was significant: “tactical air sortie rates of 21,000 per month and B-52 sortie rates of 1,600 per month.”²⁰⁷

204 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, After Action Report #1, STARLIGHT, August 27, 1965; cited in Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, p. 55.

205 United States Army Combat Developments Command, *Dynamics of Fire and Maneuver (FIRMA III) Final Report* (Fort Belvoir, VA: United States Army Combat Developments Command, 1969), p. 27.

206 Robert M. Kipp, “Counterinsurgency from 30,000 Feet: The B-52 in Vietnam,” *Air University Review* 19, no. 2, January/February 1967, p. 13.

207 Rosson, *Assessment of Influence Exerted on Military Operations by Other than Military Considerations*, p. V-54.

FIGURE 11



A USAF F-100 of the 90th Tactical Fighter Squadron leaves the target area after dropping napalm on a suspected Viet Cong target in South Vietnam, March 1966. U.S. Air Force Photo.

Israeli Major General Moyshe Dayan provided an insightful appreciation of the American way of war in Vietnam:

The Americans carry out their counterattacks and pursuits in the jungles not with infantry but with firepower. . . . The problem faced by an American infantry unit engaging the Vietcong is not how to storm the enemy positions but how to discover where they are. The storming and assault will be done by the 155s [artillery] and aerial bombs. These are not restricted to jungle paths and are not vulnerable to ambush. The most effective weapons the Americans have for this function are their heavy bombers and they can operate no matter what the weather or visibility.²⁰⁸

U.S. forces sought out the enemy in search and destroy operations that were highly destructive and produced collateral damage and refugees. As one brigade commander recalled, “The awesome firepower-artillery, air strikes, and ARA [aerial rocket artillery from helicopter gunships] that had saved our lives in the unpopulated Ia Drang Valley now, despite our best

208 Kipp, “Counterinsurgency from 30,000 Feet,” p. 17–18. Rosson notes that, “Strategic air employed in SEA [Southeast Asia] has provided means of bringing massive fire power to bear against enemy base areas and troop concentrations inaccessible to friendly ground troops.” He also noted the utility of B-52 strikes, called ARC LIGHT, in conjunction with ground forces, stating, “The added firepower was necessary to cope with the enemy’s ever-increasing commitment of troops and materiel.” Rosson, *Assessment of Influence Exerted on Military Operations by Other than Military Considerations*, p. V-53.

efforts, began taking a toll of innocent civilians killed and maimed, villages destroyed, and farm animals slain.²⁰⁹ Much of the firepower was expended in unobserved H&I (harassment and interdiction) fires against known or “suspected” enemy locations and infiltration routes.²¹⁰ Again, these operations ran counter to the pacification efforts, but they were deemed necessary to the continued attrition of NVA conventional forces and VC main force units.

Firepower, particularly air power, kept the South Vietnamese in the war by preventing their defeat by the NVA during the 1972 Easter Offensive by North Vietnam.²¹¹ Many former Vietnamese military and civilian leaders believed that air power, especially B-52s, could have saved the day again in 1975.²¹²

The materiel used by American forces also made immense strides during the war. Helicopters provided lift for maneuver, medical evacuation, and, with the advent of gunships, accompanying firepower. Unmanned aerial vehicles, wire-guided anti-tank missiles, unattended ground sensors, night vision equipment, precision-guided munitions, electronic and kinetic countermeasures against surface-to-air missiles systems, air-to-air-missiles, improved tactical radars, improved conventional munitions for artillery, fixed-wing gunships, and a host of other technologies and weapons improved the ability to find and attack targets. Most if not all of these technologies were developed in the context of improved capabilities for the broader Cold War. Vietnam, however, offered a test bed for in-combat innovation, and the new technologies added to the capabilities of the forces in that war.²¹³ Nevertheless, as the 1980 multi-volume BDM Corporation study noted, despite U.S. technical and firepower advantages and the fact that “only in a small minority of the battles in Vietnam were the US forces outfought,” the Americans “were often outthought and outmaneuvered. . . . The enemy usually retained the initiative as to where and when, and how often to fight; until late 1969, roughly 85% of the ground contacts were initiated by the enemy.”²¹⁴ The report philosophized on the implications of the American approach:

Our side pinned its hopes on the science of war; his—on the art. We concentrated on the material and physical end of the spectrum and, until late, he on the mental and psychological. Our approach was generally direct and his more often indirect. Although the modern American “Way of War” had its genesis in our Civil War, it really gained momentum in World War II; the protracted limited war in Vietnam displayed the overlooked shortcomings of that “Way of War” which in large measure still exist. Or has the battlefield of the future become so visible and so

209 Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young: Ia Drang—The Battle That Changed the War in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 342.

210 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, p. 99.

211 Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power*, p. 153.

212 Stephen T. Hosmer, Konrad Kellen, and Brian M. Jenkins, *The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders* (New York: Crane, Russak, and Company, 1980), p. 257.

213 Thomas G. Mahnken, *Technology and the American War of War Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 89–117.

214 BDM, *A Study of the Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam: Omnibus Executive Summary*, p. EX-11.

certain that smart weapons will overwhelm smart strategists? Are cleverly and soundly conceived deception/psychological/unconventional operations mere nice-to-have adjuncts (or nuisances) or are they potentially powerful force multipliers? What has really been learned and/or forgotten about countering a sophisticated and pervasive “People’s War”? If, as this study suggests, the American “Way of War” has become imbalanced, what can or should be done to reconstruct a more rational balance between the science and art forms?²¹⁵

These questions remained largely unanswered until the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

As already noted, the United States did engage in “hearts and minds” approaches. There were extensive pacification efforts—“Reconstruction, Civic Action, Agrovilles, Strategic Hamlets, New Life Hamlets, Hoc Tap (Cooperation), Chien Thang (Victory), Rural Construction, Rural Reconstruction, and Revolutionary Development”—but they were all secondary to dealing with security issues and episodic until the creation of CORDS. “In fiscal year 1968 almost \$14 billion was spent for bombing and offensive operations but only \$850 million on pacification and various aid programs.”²¹⁶ Robert “Blowtorch Bob” Komer, who headed CORDS, pushed the GVN on land reform as well as economic, healthcare, and democratic institution development.²¹⁷ By 1970, a combination of CORDS, the Phoenix Program, and Chieu Hoi programs, coupled with devastating VC losses in the Tet Offensive, resulted in estimates that 93 percent of the population of South Vietnam “reported living in ‘relatively secure’ villages.”²¹⁸ Nevertheless, as one former CORDS analyst pointed out, “CORDS was a great program and a good model—with one caveat. Under the Hamlet Evaluation System [HES], we collected lots of data indicating the security of the regions and provinces but nowhere did we find any evidence or indication of popular support of the [national-level] government.”²¹⁹

HES was emblematic of the insatiable demand for data on progress in the war by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. In the conventional war, progress was measured by body count; in pacification, the HES survey data from “thousands of Vietnamese villages” was supposed “to assess, among other things, the degree to which a given community was under Saigon government or Communist control. The HES provided exactly the kinds of metrics a good

215 Ibid., p. EX-11 (emphasis in the original).

216 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, p. 89.

217 White, *Civil Affairs in Vietnam*, p. 10. For a brilliant assessment of pacification efforts, see Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972).

218 White, *Civil Affairs in Vietnam*, p. 10. This “relatively secure” metric is used to show the success of CORDS. *FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5: Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2006), pp. 2–13.

219 Ross Coffey, “Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq,” *Military Review*, March/April 2006, p. 32. The author cites an interview he had with Ambassador David Passage.

counterinsurgency programme needs, measuring concrete economic and social indicators and attitudes towards the Saigon and Viet Cong administrations.”²²⁰

Komer eventually recognized the limits of the pacification efforts, recalling, “Even after 1967, pacification remained a small tail to the very large conventional military dog. It was never tried on a large enough scale until too late.”²²¹ He also understood why: “Perhaps the most important single reason why the U.S. achieved so little for so long was that it could not sufficiently revamp, or adequately substitute for, a South Vietnamese leadership, administration, and armed forces inadequate to the task.”²²² The 1980 BDM Corporation report for the Army on the lessons from Vietnam similarly noted, “American commitments to assist such governments [GVN] must be made with the recognition that the act of commitment and US advice cannot change the nature of the client regime or the society of the host county.”²²³ Nevertheless, as Frank Hunt notes, “Even if fundamental transformation had occurred, it would have taken too long and exhausted the patience of the American public.” And the data were “hopelessly optimistic” because “trying to get villagers embroiled in a civil war to tell surveyors what they really thought, rather than whatever they thought would keep officials (on both sides) off their backs, was a quixotic endeavor.” Nevertheless, “The pressure to generate encouraging results . . . was intense.”²²⁴ Good metrics were one of the principal measures of not only program progress, but also of individual performance for career success.

The daily press briefings given by the military in Saigon at MACV Headquarters, derisively known as the “5 O’clock Follies,” relied on statistics in attempts to show progress and manage the message:

Partly as a result of reporters’ demands for precision, briefers began to deal in body counts and other statistics that eventually proved to be of dubious value. . . . Explains Keyes Beech of the *Chicago Daily News*: “They seldom bore any resemblance whatever to the facts in the field.” On March 16, 1968, a mimeographed release included this passage: “In an action today, American Division forces killed 128 enemy near Quang Ngai City. Helicopter gunships and artillery missions supported the ground elements throughout the day.” Thus did the Follies announce the infamous action at My Lai.²²⁵

220 “Afghan Metrics and Vietnam,” *The Economist*, August 13, 2009, available at http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2009/08/afghan_metrics_and_vietnam. For a comprehensive analysis of how metrics gave a false impression of the Army’s progress in Vietnam, see Gregory A. Daddis, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

221 Coffey, “Revisiting CORDS,” p. 32.

222 *Ibid.*, p. 32. For a very candid assessment of U.S. performance in Vietnam, see R.W. Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.–GVN Performance in Vietnam* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1972).

223 BDM, *A Study of the Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam: Omnibus Executive Summary*, p. V-15.

224 “Afghan Metrics and Vietnam,” 2009.

225 “The Press: Farewell to the Follies,” *Time*, February 12, 1973, available at <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,903831-1,00.html>.

FIGURE 12

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara pointing to a map of Vietnam at a press conference. Marion Trikosko April 26, 1965. U.S. News & World Report Magazine Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.

Even if the United States had pacified South Vietnam and that government had the support of its people, the South still faced an existential threat from North. The United States had invested considerable resources in creating a South Vietnamese military that was largely a mirror image of the U.S. military. During the 1972 North Vietnamese invasion, the ARVN held its own in no small part because of American airpower that the North could not counter. Absent this airpower edge and other critical U.S. capabilities, the South fell to the North in 1975.²²⁶

No More Vietnams (1975–2006)

President Nixon made two key decisions that shaped how the United States would approach the international security environment and Vietnam. First, he announced the Nixon Doctrine in July 1969, replacing Kennedy administration policies of confronting communist expansion wherever it occurred. In essence, Nixon ended the use of American ground forces to stop wars of national liberation.²²⁷ Second, with the realization that there was no “communist monolith,”

²²⁶ Hosmer, Kellen, and Jenkins, *The Fall of South Vietnam*, p. 257–260.

²²⁷ Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, p. 596.

Nixon adopted a “one and a half war” strategy, which replaced the previous strategy of being prepared for two and a half wars.²²⁸

In this new strategic environment, the United States focused on conventional threats and abandoned COIN as it focused on the Cold War and, beginning with the Carter Doctrine, East Asia and the Persian Gulf Region.²²⁹ The Air Force, as noted earlier, saw no need to change, citing “Linebacker II as proof that bombing would work in limited war.”²³⁰ The other Services turned to demonstrating their relevance in the high-stakes Cold War with the Soviet Union. The Army, the Service most deeply committed in Vietnam and most subject to resource cuts in its aftermath, almost immediately moved past the war.

General William DePuy, the commander of TRADOC (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command) after Vietnam, was one of the principal architects of the Army’s refocus on NATO. He later recalled that three key realities demanded a “substantial renaissance in tactical theory and practice throughout the Army”:

- The Vietnam War—combat with light and elusive forces—was over.
- The defense of Central Europe against large, modern, Soviet armored forces once again became the Army’s main, almost exclusive, mission.
- The Arab–Israeli War vividly illustrated the lethality of modern weapons, the high value of crew proficiency, and the skill of tactical commanders.²³¹

228 Johnson, *Modern U.S. Civil-Military Relations*, pp. 51–52.

229 Ibid., p. 54.

230 Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power*, pp. 209.

231 William E. DePuy, “FM 100-5 Revisited,” *Army*, November 1980, p. 12.

FIGURE 13



General William DePuy. U.S. Army Photo.

General Donn Starry, DePuy’s eventual successor as TRADOC commander and a key figure in developing the Army’s new AirLand Battle doctrine, was equally clear: “After getting out of Vietnam, the Army looked around and realized it should not try to fight that kind of war again elsewhere.”²³² He also believed the Army should avoid its tendency to dwell on understanding the “last war [Vietnam]” and “to look ahead, not back.”²³³ This view prevailed, and as the 1980 BDM report presciently noted, “It is doubtful if the US has yet learned how to defeat—in a reasonable time and an acceptable cost—a well-organized and led ‘People’s War’: the institutional knowledge gained in Indochina have been discarded or degraded, as have been the interest and incentives.”²³⁴ The 1976 *FM 100-5: Operations* that was the Army’s first doctrinal expression of its post-Vietnam direction returned to the “lesser included”

232 Donald B. Vought, “Preparing for the Wrong War?” *Military Review* 57, no. 5, May 1977, p. 32.

233 Donn A. Starry, “A Tactical Evolution—FM 100-5,” *Military Review* 58, no. 8, August 1978, p. 3.

234 BDM, *A Study of the Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam: Omnibus Executive Summary*, p. VI-7.

model that had long undergirded its institutional essence, stating that the manual “presents principles for accomplishing the Army’s primary mission—winning the land battle.” And that battle was going to be in Europe: “Battle in Central Europe against forces of the Warsaw Pact is the most demanding mission the US Army could be assigned.” Furthermore, *FM 100-5* emphasized that “the principles set forth in this manual . . . apply also to military operations anywhere in the world.” Nowhere was there any mention in *FM 100-5* of Vietnam, the political dimensions of warfare, or counterinsurgency. Finally, *FM 100-5* also asserted that this focus on conventional war in Europe was appropriate to other challenges the Army might face. Thus, “The fundamental lesson for the military that emerged from the Vietnam War was crystal clear—‘no more Vietnams’.”²³⁵

The history of the first 200 years of U.S. experience in irregular warfare and COIN, seen through the prism of the Army, was neatly summed up by historian Russell Weigley:

Whenever after the Revolution the American army had to conduct a counterinsurgency campaign—in the Second Seminole War of 1835–1842, the Filipino Insurrection of 1899–1903, and in Vietnam in 1965–1973—it found itself almost without an institutional memory of such experiences, had to relearn appropriate tactics at exorbitant costs, and yet tended after each episode to regard it as an aberration that need not be repeated.²³⁶

History, although not repeating itself, would at least rhyme in the 21st century.

235 David Johnson, “Failure to Learn: Reflections on a Career in the Post-Vietnam Army,” *War on the Rocks*, January 24, 2014, available at <http://warontherocks.com/2014/01/failure-to-learn-reflections-on-a-career-in-the-post-vietnam-army/>.

236 Weigley, “American Strategy from Its Beginnings through the First World War,” p. 411.

21st Century U.S. COIN

Relearning COIN After “Winning” in Afghanistan and Iraq

Between the end of the Vietnam War and 2003, the United States built a formidable conventional military that seemingly prevailed in every use. Although there were discussions about MOOTW [Military Operations Other Than War], Stability and Support Operations, and Low Intensity Conflict, the prevailing attitude was that espoused in the Army’s last *FM 100-5: Operations*, published in 2001: “The doctrine holds warfighting as the Army’s primary focus and recognizes that the ability of Army forces to dominate land warfare also provides the ability to dominate any situation in military operations other than war.”²³⁷ Furthermore, the Army emphasized the primacy of its role: “*Fighting and winning the nation’s wars is the foundation of Army service—the Army’s nonnegotiable contract with the American people and its enduring obligation to the nation.*”²³⁸

²³⁷ *FM 3-0: Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2001), p. vii. There were successful, small-scale unconventional operations in many locations (e.g., El Salvador and Colombia) mostly using Special Forces and generally classified as Foreign Internal Defense. There were clear indications that senior U.S. officers were not prepared for MOOTW in Somalia and Bosnia. General Eric Shinseki, commander of the Stabilization Force (SFOR) and a future Army chief of staff, believed that in the absence of a coherent Army doctrine for large-scale stability operations, commanders found themselves in a “roll-your-own situation.” His successor in SFOR, General Montgomery Meigs, recalled, “I got nothing . . . for this mission. I visited a lot of folks, but the Army didn’t sit me down and say, ‘Listen, here is what you need to know’.” David E. Johnson, *Preparing Potential Senior Army Leaders for the Future: An Assessment of Leader Development Efforts in the Post–Cold War Era* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2002), p. 13.

²³⁸ *FM 3-0: Operations*, p. 1-3 (emphasis added).

Nevertheless, as in Vietnam, there were competing theories of victory (air versus ground). Proponents of these competing theories clashed in the early days of the war in Afghanistan and during the 2003 invasion of Iraq for ascendancy within the Department of Defense; the superiority of the theory would enhance the relevance of the proponent service and, thus, their budget arguments.²³⁹ In the early aftermath of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the Air Force stressed in its 2003 doctrinal manual on strategic attack that the lessons of recent conflicts, including early operations in Afghanistan and Iraq “proved the efficacy of strategic attack. . . . In these operations, air and space assets conducting strategic attack proved able to deny enemy access to critical resources, defeat enemy strategies, and decisively influence enemy decisions to end hostilities on terms favorable to US interests. *Today’s Air Force possesses an independent war-winning potential distinct from and complementary to its ability to decisively shape surface warfare.*”²⁴⁰ Indeed, the rapid collapse of the Taliban to the U.S.-enabled Northern Alliance in Afghanistan seemed to many to offer a third theory of victory: an “Afghan model of ‘special forces (SOF) plus precision munitions plus an indigenous ally is a widely applicable template for American defense planning’.”²⁴¹

The growing insurgency in Afghanistan and the descent of Iraq into chaos within months of its liberation made both wars ground-centric from a military perspective. Ironically, the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq probably more closely resemble the Philippine Insurrection than the cases generally discussed in U.S. COIN, e.g., Algeria, Malaya, and Vietnam. After winning the initial conventional campaign and removing the regime—the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq—both wars evolved into violent insurgencies and long-term occupations. As in the Philippines, a civil-military effort adapted to the changing conditions that the protracted insurgencies created and involved a broad range of nation-building and security efforts.

Iraq was the more violent of the two conflicts and had the highest strategic consequences for the administration of President George W. Bush. Although Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had famously corrected General Peter Pace, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for even using the word “insurgency” to describe the situation in Iraq in 2005, there was a growing realization across the U.S. government that the wheels were coming off.²⁴² There was also an emerging consensus that the approach of General George W. Casey, commander of

239 See David E. Johnson, *Learning Large Lessons: The Evolving Roles of Ground Power and Air Power in the Post-Cold War Era* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007), p. 92–93.

240 *AFDD 2-1.2, Strategic Attack* (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2003), p. 1 (emphasis added).

241 Stephen Biddle, *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2002). For a discussion of inter-service friction over warfighting concepts, see Johnson, *Learning Large Lessons*.

242 Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), pp. 74–126; and John A. Nagl, *Knife Fights: A Memoir of Modern War in Theory and Practice* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014).

the Multi-National Force—Iraq, of turning the war over to the Iraqis—“standing down as they stand up”—was not working.²⁴³

President Bush, in an address to the nation on January 10, 2007, declared that “the situation is unacceptable to the American people—and it is unacceptable to me.” He also broke publicly with General Casey’s plan: “Our past efforts to secure Baghdad failed for two principal reasons: There were not enough Iraqi and American troops to secure neighborhoods that had been cleared of terrorists and insurgents, and there were too many restrictions on the troops we did have.” Bush announced a new approach: “Our troops will have a well-defined mission: to help Iraqis clear and secure neighborhoods, to help them protect the local population, and to help ensure that the Iraqi forces left behind are capable of providing the security that Baghdad needs.” Securing would require more U.S. troops, and the key to Bush’s new approach was a dramatic increase in U.S. troop strength—what became known as the surge.²⁴⁴ President Bush had already made a change at the top of the Department of Defense, replacing Rumsfeld with Robert M. Gates in December 2006. Gates replaced General Casey with General David Petraeus in January 2007. Even before Petraeus’ confirmation, there had been significant adaptation on the ground in Iraq. Lieutenant General Raymond T. Odierno, commander of the Multi-National Corps—Iraq, was at odds with Casey over the strategy in Iraq and began planning how to secure Iraqi cities, particularly Baghdad, rather than withdraw from them, as Casey had instructed Odierno to do when he assumed command. Additionally, there was broad adaptation by commanders to the insurgency. What had been missing was an institutional response that reflected a dramatic shift in the “institutional essence”²⁴⁵ of the U.S. Armed Forces, particularly the Army and Marine Corps, from “close with and destroy the enemy” to “protect the population”—along with the means (sufficient troops) to change conditions on the ground.²⁴⁶

243 Ricks, *The Gamble*, p. 128. For accounts of the early stages of the war in Iraq, see Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006); and Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Press, 2006).

244 The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “President’s Address to the Nation,” January 10, 2007, available at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html>.

245 Morton Halperin’s definition of “organizational essence” is what “institutional essence” refers to here. Halperin notes, “Organizations have considerable freedom in defining their missions and the capabilities they need to pursue these missions. The organization’s essence is the view held by the dominant group in the organization of what the missions and capabilities should be. Related to this are convictions about what kinds of people with what expertise, experience, and knowledge should be members of the organization.” Morton H. Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1974), p. 28.

246 Ricks, *The Gamble*, p. 122.

FIGURE 14



Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and General David Petraeus, Multi-National Force—Iraq Commanding General, talk at the Iraqi Ministry of Defense in Baghdad, Monday September 15, 2008. DoD photo by Tech. Sgt. Jerry Morrison.

The new strategy would ostensibly use the 2006 Army/Marine Corps manual *FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5: Counterinsurgency* (hereafter referred to as *FM 3-24*), crafted in an effort led by then-Lieutenant General Petraeus when he was in command of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and Marine Lieutenant General James N. Mattis and his successor, Lieutenant General James F. Amos, from the Marine Corps Combat Development Command at Quantico, Virginia.²⁴⁷ This concept of population-centric COIN became the way in which the new means of additional troops would be employed to reach policy ends in the wars in Iraq and then Afghanistan. In short, the manual and the new leadership in Iraq attempted to change “the shared worldview and values as well as the ‘proper’ methods, tools, techniques, and approaches to problem solving.”²⁴⁸

247 For insider views on the conceptualizing and writing of the 2006 COIN manual, see Conrad C. Crane, *Cassandra in Oz: Counterinsurgency and Future War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016); and Nagl, *Knife Fights*. A short description of the development of *FM 3-24* (2006) is in Nagl’s preface to the University of Chicago version of the manual, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. xiii–xx.

248 Johnson, *Modern U.S. Civil-Military Relations*, pp. vii. Changing doctrine is similar to Kuhn’s examination of why scientific paradigms shift—or do not—in response to new challenges to accepted theories. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edition (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 175.

In the words of Sarah Sewell, then-director of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard University's Kennedy School—and co-sponsor of a workshop with General Petraeus on “Developing a New U.S. Counterinsurgency Doctrine” in February 2006—*FM 3-24* “is paradigm shattering.”²⁴⁹ Conrad Crane, in his recent book on his experience as the lead author of *FM 3-24*, says this was the intent:

FM 3-24 was designed as a major demonstration of the military's ability to adapt under fire, and it arrived to great acclaim. General Petraeus' information campaign leading up to its release worked to perfection. No other military field manual has ever caused a stir like the finished *FM 3-24*.²⁵⁰

There is a broad and ever-expanding literature on Afghanistan and Iraq and U.S. COIN doctrine—much of it polarized in the COINdinita and COINtra camps. The COINtras, most notably Gian Gentile and Douglas Porch, base much of their critiques of U.S. COIN on the selective use of history to support the arguments in *FM 3-24*.²⁵¹ Before moving on to the COIN methods employed in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is worth examining the key premises laid out in *FM 3-24*, given how it became the way in which the U.S. military said it was going to operate in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In many ways, *FM 3-24* is a concept rather than doctrine if one accepts the definition offered by historian I.B. Holley:

Where a concept is a hypothesis—an inference that suggests that a proposed pattern of behavior *may possibly* lead to a desired result, a doctrine is a generalization based on sufficient evidence to suggest that a given pattern of behavior *will probably* lead to the desired result. Where a concept is tentative and speculative, a doctrine is more assured. . . . Perhaps the best definition holds doctrine as that mode of approach that repeated experience has shown usually works best.²⁵²

FM 3-24 is distinctively American in its linear engineering approach, despite acknowledging the inherent complexity in COIN. The manual assumes that the desired end state for a COIN campaign can be designed using Logical Lines of Operations (LLO) that, if successfully executed, ineluctably lead to success. LLOs, as described in *FM 3-24*, are not rigid, but the logic behind the LLOs is inexorable progress over time through the execution of a synchronized, highly detailed plan:

249 *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (2007), p. xxxv.

250 Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, p. 123.

251 See, for example Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*; Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Joshua Rovner, “The Heroes of COIN,” *Orbis*, Spring 2012; Rich, “A Historical Overview of US Counterinsurgency”; and Gventer, “Keep the Change: Counterinsurgency, Iraq, and Historical Understanding.” For a critique of Gentile and Porch, see David H. Ucko, “Critics Gone Wild: Counterinsurgency as the Root of All Evil,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, May 2014.

252 I.B. Holley Jr., *Technology and Military Doctrine: Essays on a Challenging Relationship* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2004), p. 21.

Progress along each LLO contributes to attaining a stable and secure environment for the host nation. Stability is reinforced by popular recognition of the HN [host nation] government’s legitimacy, improved governance, and progressive, substantive reduction of the root causes of the insurgency.²⁵³

The execution of a synchronized, highly detailed LLO-based plan is also an imperative:

Operations designed using LLOs typically employ an extended, event-driven timeline with short-, mid-, and long-term goals. These operations combine the effects of long-term operations, such as neutralizing the insurgent infrastructure, with cyclic and short-term events, like regular trash collection and attacks against insurgent bases.²⁵⁴

FM 3-24 offers the example of five LLOs to demonstrate how to achieve the end state of positively affecting a population’s support for the host nation government: combat operations/civil security operations, host nation security forces, essential services, governance, and economic development—all supported by information operations.²⁵⁵ The information operations LLO, like much of the discussion of all LLOs, proceeds from a basic assumption that saying they must be done well means they will be done well. This is most evident in the statement that information operations must “discredit insurgent propaganda and provide a more compelling alternative to the insurgent ideology and narrative.”²⁵⁶ There is no consideration of whether or not a Western non-Muslim occupier can “provide a more compelling alternative to the insurgent ideology and narrative” to a Muslim audience. This point highlights a fundamental flaw in *FM 3-24*: what the concept says must be done is conflated with what can be done. Aspirations become capabilities.

Aside from the discussion of how to design a campaign around LLOs, the manual specifies two necessary preconditions for a COIN campaign to succeed. First, there is a historically based force requirement: “Twenty counterinsurgents per 1,000 residents is often considered the minimum troop density required for effective COIN operations; however as with any fixed ratio, such calculations remain very dependent upon the situation.”²⁵⁷ Second, COIN requires a whole-of-government approach, because of the need for “civilians to perform civilian tasks.”²⁵⁸ Thus the U.S. COIN approach requires both capacity and capability.

Security force capacity

As already mentioned, *FM 3-24* established a COIN force requirement for 20 counterinsurgents per 1,000 residents. The intellectual basis for this number likely comes from

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253 *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (2006), p. 5-3.

254 *Ibid.*, p. 5-4.

255 *Ibid.*, p. 5-3.

256 *Ibid.*, p. 5-2.

257 *Ibid.*, p. 1-13.

258 *Ibid.*, p. 2-9.

James Quinlivan's 1995 article, "Force Requirements in Stability Operations."²⁵⁹ Conrad Crane addresses why this ratio was included in *FM 3-24*. Although noting that the Marine Corps did not want a fixed number in the manual, "knowing no two COIN situations are the same and fearing any numbers we mentioned would become dogma,"²⁶⁰ the metric was nevertheless included in the manual at General Petraeus' insistence for leverage with politicians:

Unknown to us, Lieutenant General Petraeus was beginning to think about congressional testimony for his coming assignment to command in Iraq, and he and Pete [Mansoor] had realized they would need to justify adequate force levels there. The ratio set a standard to justify resources for COIN and would force an administration or Congress who thought an operation could be accomplished with fewer resources to explain how fewer troops could accomplish the mission. As was to come up in the hearings and as Petraeus had been cautioned, the ratios the new insertion envisioned were unlikely to be achieved in Iraq.²⁶¹

Crane continues, noting:

Those numbers are highly suspect, and the most systematic analysis generally comes up with a lower figure. I managed to add a caveat ("however, as with any fixed ratio, such calculations remain very dependent upon the situation"), but the damage was done. The Marines' fears proved well founded, and many pundits, critics, and decision makers have touted that number as a doctrinal requirement for COIN.²⁶²

Crane cites the security force to population ratio contained in John McGrath's U.S. Army Combat Studies Institute study, *Boots on the Ground: Troop Density in Contingency Operations*, published before the surges in Iraq or Afghanistan, as the source for more reliable estimates.²⁶³ McGrath believed "about 13.26 troops per 1,000 inhabitants provides a more historically based guideline. Moreover, the figure of 13.26 includes any other operational forces including indigenous police and military forces, as well as contractors."²⁶⁴

The surges in Iraq and Afghanistan show that the number of boots on the ground mattered. The surge in Iraq "achieved a 50 per 1,000 ratio in Iraq, with 30 million people being protected by 600,000 counterinsurgents (160,000 coalition troops, 340,000 Iraqi Security Forces, and 100,000 Sons of Iraq)."²⁶⁵ It was sufficiently successful to allow U.S. forces to depart in 2011. In Afghanistan, there were 396,000 security forces at the height of the buildup, which approached McGrath's metric. Indeed, to meet the 20 per 1,000 ratio, the surge would

259 James T. Quinlivan, "Force Requirements in Stability Operations," *Parameters*, Winter 1995, available at <http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/parameters/Articles/1995/quincliv.htm>.

260 Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, p. 95.

261 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

262 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

263 *Ibid.*, p. 287.

264 John J. McGrath, *Boots on the Ground: Troop Density in Contingency Operations*, Global War on Terrorism Occasional Paper 16 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006).

265 Crane, *Cassandra in Oz*, p. 288.

have required 568,000 security forces.²⁶⁶ Current conditions in Afghanistan show that the Obama surge was unsuccessful in establishing security to a degree that the United States could withdraw its military forces.

Insufficient civilian capability

Although *FM 3-14* acknowledged that COIN requires a whole-of-U.S.-government approach, it faced the reality that “participants best qualified and able to accomplish nonmilitary tasks are not always available. The realistic division of labor does not match the preferred division of labor. In those cases, military forces perform those tasks. Sometimes forces have the skills required; other times they learn them during execution.”²⁶⁷ The manual also elaborates the skills needed: cultural understanding; “functional skills needed for interagency and HN coordination (for example, liaison, negotiation, and appropriate social or political relationships);” and “knowledge of basic civic functions such as governance, infrastructure, public works, economics, and emergency services.” But the manual did not offer a source for these skills, other than to enjoin commanders to “identify people in their units with regional and interagency expertise, civil-military competence, and other critical skills needed to support a local populace and HN government.”²⁶⁸

The military fills the void

Satisfying these two imperatives, capacity and capability, would be a constant issue in both Iraq and Afghanistan, particularly with an active Army smaller than the number of troops deployed at the high point of the Vietnam War. This was because the U.S. military, although it expanded during the two wars, had a fixed capacity well below what would be necessary to provide the security force to population levels specified in *FM 3-24* in Afghanistan and Iraq. Furthermore, because of a lack of civilian capacity, military personnel would have to do jobs across the LLOs for which they were not prepared:

The challenges the U.S. government agencies face in filling requirements in Afghanistan and other hazardous duty locations (e.g., Iraq) are partly a result of the fact that they have never had the excess capacity or resources inherent in U.S. Armed Forces, which are maintained as a hedge against existential uncertainty. There have never been battalions of ambassadors-in-training preparing for future threats. The reality is that the State Department “has fewer officers than positions, a shortage compounded by the personnel demands of Iraq and Afghanistan.”²⁶⁹

266 David E. Johnson, “What Are You Prepared to Do? NATO and the Strategic Mismatch between Ends, Ways, and Means in Afghanistan—and in the Future,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 34, no. 5, May 2011, p. 390.

267 *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (2006), p. 2-9.

268 *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (2006), p. 2-9.

269 Johnson, “What Are You Prepared to Do?” pp. 394, 395; Quote from U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Statement of Jess T. Ford, Director, International Affairs and Trade: Persistent Staffing and Foreign Language Gaps Compromise Diplomatic Readiness* (Washington, DC: GAO, 2009), p. 394. Other departments within the U.S. federal government rely on, and incentivize, volunteers to fill positions in Afghanistan and Iraq; only the U.S. military has mandatory deployments.

In many cases, contractors were used to make up for government shortages. Finally, complicating the capacity and capability issues were two other realities that the United States had faced in Vietnam: the insurgents had external sources of supply and sanctuary outside the country.²⁷⁰

Efforts to better prepare American advisors for duty in Iraq and Afghanistan increased with the opening of a program at Fort Riley, Kansas to train Military Transition Teams. This sixty-day training program, reminiscent of the Military Assistance Training and Advisory course at Fort Bragg during the Vietnam War, was elementary at best and covered “survival skills and tactics, individual- and crew-served weapons and equipment, communications, combat life-saver skills and cultural awareness.”²⁷¹ Additionally, as during the Vietnam War, advisory duty was seen as less career-enhancing than service in a conventional unit.²⁷²

270 This is in contrast to the successful expeditionary COIN effort in the Philippines.

271 Shaina Howard, “Army Secretary Views MiTT Training at Fort Riley,” U.S. Army press release, November 3, 2006, available at http://www.army.mil/article/501/Army_Secretary_views_MiTT_training_at_Fort_Riley/.

272 John A. Nagl, “In Era of Small Wars, U.S. Army Must Embrace Training Mission,” *World Politics Review*, February 5, 2013, available at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/print/12693>. An attempt was also made to increase understanding for operations in Afghanistan when the Department of Defense started the AFPAK (Afghanistan/Pakistan) Hands Program in November 2009. The program sought to create a cadre of experts on Afghan and Pakistani cultures to support 280 positions in the theater. Here, as with advisors, the aspirations of the program are hard to square with the preparation of its members: “Initial training consists of sixteen weeks of language and cultural training and then recurring assignments in Afghanistan and Pakistan, supplemented by additional in-country training.” Johnson, “What Are You Prepared to Do?” p. 393.

FIGURE 15



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ditson Abraham and his fellow soldiers from the U.S. Army's 0832 Military Transition Team are training Iraqi army soldiers on dismounted tactical movement techniques during training at Tanmiya, Iraq, on February 14, 2008. DoD photo by Sgt. Timothy Kingston, U.S. Army.

Furthermore, as in Vietnam, tour lengths in Afghanistan and Iraq worked against attaining deep understanding of the operational, much less cultural, environments. U.S. Army tour lengths, based on unit rotations for brigade combat teams, began at 12 months, extended to 15 months to meet the capacity demands of the Iraq surge, and are now nine months. U.S. Marine tours have been seven months in duration. Many of the coalition partners had even shorter tours (e.g., British soldiers served six-month tours).²⁷³ Patrick Hennessey, a British officer advising the Afghan National Army (ANA), captured what this rotation meant to those being advised by Western armies:

I understand how difficult it must be for them to have brand new mentors every six months. To have to wait again for us to catch up and get the novelty and excitement out of our systems and I'm saddened myself at the realization that we are just a cog in the machine, but at our last supper when the boys finally join me down in the Afghan compound there's an amazing sense of melancholy [that] we're off and I believe their protests that they will miss us and that we have been a good mentoring team.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Johnson, "What Are You Prepared to Do?" p. 393. In May 2013, the British government announced that starting in October 2013 it was extending tours for soldiers in Afghanistan from six to eight months and up to nine months for a "relatively small number" of British troops. "Longer Afghanistan Tours for British Soldiers," *BBC News*, May 14, 2013, available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-22520249>.

²⁷⁴ Patrick Hennessey, *The Junior Officers' Reading Club: Killing Time and Fighting Wars* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), p. 275.

This constant turbulence made it difficult, if not impossible, to sustain coherence in long-term security and development programs, particularly in developing competent indigenous security forces capable of operating independently of external support. Hennessy’s searing insight about the abilities of the ANA—as well as their political import to the countries countering insurgencies there—is very important not only to the war in Afghanistan, but to an understanding of the inability of the Iraqi military to stand alone against ISIS:

I think I knew at that moment that we couldn’t win. The ANA, no matter how much we mentored and enabled, were ludicrous . . . as utterly dependent upon us for our booming air power as we were on them for the veneer of credibility and slender exit strategy which sustained the whole mission.²⁷⁵

21st Century U.S. COIN Methods

The methods of U.S. COIN in Afghanistan and Iraq emphasized hearts and minds approaches and the importance of creating legitimate governments with popular support. As General Petraeus stressed, the operative concept was “clear, hold, and build,” rather than just clearing insurgents.²⁷⁶ This proved difficult, given the deep ethnic divisions in Iraq and the highly dispersed tribal population in Afghanistan. Additionally, enormous funds have been invested in both countries by the United States and other donor nations in the form of aid, support to programs, construction, and forming and equipping their armed forces.

There have also been population transfers in Iraq, mostly incidental to the conflict, and brutal ethnic separations—particularly after the massive increase in sectarian violence following the February 22, 2006 bombing of the al-Askari shrine.²⁷⁷ The war caused large numbers of refugees and internally-displaced persons. For example, in 2009 Syria had some 1.5 million Iraqi refugees.²⁷⁸ The one instance of large-scale forced relocation by U.S.–coalition forces was during the November 2004 battle in Fallujah. Civilians in Fallujah were told to leave or be treated as combatants. Some 70 to 90 percent of the 300,000 residents fled²⁷⁹ before the battle, which was a block-to-block fight employing massive amounts of firepower.²⁸⁰

275 Ibid., p. 238.

276 Peter R. Mansoor, *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 107.

277 Ibid., p. 28.

278 DoD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, report to Congress (Washington, DC: DoD, March 2009), available at https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Measuring_Stability_and_Security_in_Iraq_March_2009.pdf.

279 Dexter Filkins and James Glanz, “With Airpower and Armor, Troops Enter Rebel-Held City,” *New York Times*, November 8, 2004, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/08/international/o8CND_IRAQ.html?_r=1&ex=1114401600&en=2bb5b33cda9ccdd9&ei=5070.

280 David E. Johnson, M. Wade Markel, and Brian Shannon, *The 2008 Battle of Sadr City: Reimagining Urban Combat* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), p. 110.

Identity cards with sophisticated biometric technology were used in Afghanistan and Iraq to limit voter fraud.²⁸¹ Additionally, checkpoints and searches were common. During the surge in Iraq, U.S. forces used T-walls (large 12-foot tall and 5-foot wide wall sections made of reinforced concrete, each weighing between 12,000–14,000 pounds) to create what amounted to gated communities. The greatest threat to civil peace in Baghdad was vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). These large car bombs would rapidly enter crowded areas and kill large numbers of people. Walling off areas, particularly troubled neighborhoods in places where large numbers of people congregated (e.g., mosques and markets) resulted in dramatic reductions in the deaths caused by these weapons. Although checkpoint guards were still at risk, this was far less destabilizing than a successful VBIED attack that killed or wounded scores of Iraqi civilians at a time.²⁸² One brigade commander from the 82nd Airborne Division used a method dubbed “fighting with concrete,” emplacing over 49 kilometers of T-walls in his sector during its 15-month tour in Iraq from 2006–2007, creating what he called “safe communities.”²⁸³

281 Jeffrey E. Stern, “Afghanistan’s Growing Identity (Card) Crisis,” *Foreign Policy*, January 21, 2014, available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/01/21/afghanistans-growing-identity-card-crisis/>; and Anjali Sharma, “Giesecke & Devrient Contracted to Supply Passports to Iraq,” *RFID Ready News*, October 10, 2013, available at <http://www.rfid-ready.com/201310108466/giesecke-devrient-contracted-to-supply-passports-to-iraq.html>.

282 Johnson, Markel, and Shannon, *The 2008 Battle of Sadr City*, p. 10.

283 *Ibid.*, p. 14. See also John Spencer, “The Most Effective Weapon on the Modern Battlefield is Concrete,” *Modern War Institute*, November 14, 2016, available at <http://mwi.usma.edu/effective-weapon-modern-battlefield-concrete/>.

FIGURE 16



Emplacing T-walls in Baghdad during the 2008 Battle of Sadr City. Photo courtesy of the 4th Infantry Division, U.S. Army.

These walls were not without controversy. Some compared them to what the Israelis were doing; others charged they “were dividing neighbor from neighbor and choking off normal communications.”²⁸⁴ U.S. and Iraqi forces also created fortified combat outposts and joint security stations throughout key city areas. Active patrolling further enhanced security and kept insurgents and death squads moving. Insurgent communications enabled U.S. forces to monitor and frequently intercept them.²⁸⁵

The situation in Afghanistan is different because most of the population is not concentrated in large cities. However, checkpoints and barriers are used in urban areas and on roads for much the same reasons as in Iraq.²⁸⁶ Active patrolling and presence in rural areas, where possible, with much lower security force to population ratios in Afghanistan, was also a method employed when the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) had large numbers of forces. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, local militia have been paid and armed to

284 Ricks, *The Gamble*, p. 173.

285 Ibid., pp. 190–194.

286 For a description of the HESCO dirt-filled barrier system used widely in Afghanistan, see <https://www.hesco.com/products/defensive-barriers/mil/>.

provide local, village-level security in programs that harken back to the Strategic Hamlet Program in Vietnam.²⁸⁷

General Petraeus famously noted when he assumed command of the Multi-National Force—Iraq that “we would not be able to kill or capture our way of this industrial-strength insurgency that confronted us in Iraq.”²⁸⁸ There was one big exception in both Iraq and Afghanistan for high-value targets. In 2007, Petraeus encouraged Lieutenant General Stanley A. McChrystal, commander of the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command and the Counterterrorism Special Operations Task Force in Iraq “to be relentless in the pursuit of al Qaeda and other Sunni Arab extremist leaders, bomb makers, financiers, and propaganda cells—and to do the same with key Iranian-supported Shi’a Arab extremists as well.”²⁸⁹

The hunting of high-value targets was not new to McChrystal; his Task Force 714 had been going after “the deck of cards” composed of high-value former Baathist leaders since the collapse of the Saddam Hussein regime and had been instrumental in capturing Saddam and his two sons, Uday and Qusay, and killing radical Islamist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.²⁹⁰ Subsequently, McChrystal’s special operators produced dramatic results: “The targeted operations—as many as ten to fifteen per night—removed from the battlefield a significant proportion of the senior and midlevel extremist group leaders, explosives experts, planners, financiers, and organizers in Iraq.”²⁹¹ All was not killing. Petraeus later recalled, “We preferred to capture insurgent and militia leaders, as their interrogation inevitably generated intelligence that led to improvements in our understanding of the enemy networks and generated actionable intelligence for follow-on targeted operations.”²⁹²

It is difficult to ascertain the specifics of the programs for finding and killing or capturing high-value targets in Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere, which have been an ongoing effort in U.S. COIN and counterterrorism operations, given that they are classified. What is apparent,

287 See Seth G. Jones and Arturo Muñoz, *Afghanistan’s Local War: Building Local Defense Forces* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010). In an examination of 130 post-World War II insurgencies, Seth Jones notes “that governments turn to militia when state security forces are weak and policymakers believe militia can help pacify key areas of the country, especially rural areas where state control is minimal or non-existent.” Seth G. Jones, *The Strategic Logic of Militia* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012), p. v.

288 Mansoor, *Surge*, p. xii.

289 *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

290 Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2013), pp. 101–111. The United States has a “Rewards for Justice” program that pays large sums for information on individuals who “plan, commit or attempt terrorist attacks against U.S. targets.” U.S. government employees are not eligible to participate, nor are employees of other governments. The statute covering the program “contains a clause for ‘favorable resolution’ of such cases that can be applied when a military strike results in the death of the suspect.” The program paid rewards of \$30 million for the deaths of Uday and Qusay. Scott Stewart, “Why U.S. Bounties on Terrorists Often Fail,” *STRATFOR Global Intelligence*, April 12, 2012, available at <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/why-us-bounties-terrorists-often-fail>.

291 Mansoor, *Surge*, p. xv.

292 *Ibid.*, p. 293. See also Ann Scott Tyson, “McChrystal Faces Raft of Issues as New Commander in Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, May 13, 2009, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/12/AR2009051203679.html?sid=ST2009051301546>.

however, is that these programs are highly sophisticated and effective, using integrated intelligence from across multiple agencies, special operators, and high technology such as unmanned aerial vehicles or drones.²⁹³ When Petraeus took command in Afghanistan, after McChrystal's resignation, he stepped up the killing or capturing of Taliban leaders, tripling the number of night raids.²⁹⁴ The military has tacitly accepted that killing or capturing insurgent leaders and assaulting their cellular networks is a key means of degrading insurgencies, not just in Iraq and Afghanistan, but in other countries such as Yemen and Somalia. These operations are of a type that Roger Trinquier and Robert Komer would recognize and likely envy.

Measuring Success

The Department of Defense has consistently used metrics to demonstrate progress in COIN, despite their potential inaccuracy and questionable nature. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the former U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, had worked for the U.S. Agency for International Development in the Mekong Delta on the rural pacification program during the Vietnam War. At a press conference in August 2009, Holbrooke outlined the plan for using metrics in Afghanistan; it seemed like a throwback to Vietnam:

Holbrooke emphasized the difference between inputs—what his team is bringing to and doing in Afghanistan—and outputs—the actual results of those efforts. For example, the administration won't be focusing simply on how many Afghan troops are trained but also on how many missions they can handle on their own. While the actual measurements of these outputs are unclear, an administration official tells me there are approximately 50 categories that will be used to understand the results of the new strategy.²⁹⁵

Congress requires reports on progress in Afghanistan, as it did on Iraq prior to the U.S. departure. These reports are publicly available; several are cited in this report. The breadth of these efforts is seen in the section headings of the June 2010 Iraq report: Political Stability, Economic Activity, Security Environment, Transferring Security Responsibility, Assessed Capabilities of the Iraqi Forces, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense, and Iraqi National Counter-Terrorism Force. What is apparent in the majority of the reports is the attempt to use metrics to demonstrate progress—progress which is assessed as proceeding, despite challenges. The red, green, and amber stoplight assessments eventually “fade to green.” Two examples are the reporting on the state of readiness of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the metric of Enemy Initiated Attacks (EIA) in Afghanistan.

293 For his description of the kill or capture programs, see McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*.

294 Paul Dixon, *The British Approach to Counterinsurgency: From Malaya and Northern Ireland to Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), p. 260.

295 “Afghan Metrics and Vietnam,” 2009. This article points out, “It is a mistake to imagine that America failed in Vietnam because it did nothing right, and that we will therefore do better in Afghanistan. What is disturbing about the comparison of Afghanistan to Vietnam is not that everything America did in Vietnam was stupid. It is that a lot of the things America did in Vietnam were pretty darn smart, and they still didn't work.”

The June 2010 quarterly report to Congress, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, gave an optimistic, if somewhat cautious, report on the state of the ISF on the eve of U.S. departure that showed the results of U.S. training, advising, and assisting efforts:

The ISF have executed their security responsibilities extremely well, maintaining historically low levels of security incidents. All operations are conducted by, with, and through the ISF, while U.S. Forces continue to advise, train, assist, and equip the ISF to improve their capabilities and capacity. Meanwhile, USF-I [U.S. Force—Iraq] is on track to complete the transition to stability operations by September 1, 2010. The ongoing implementation of the SFA [Strategic Framework Agreement] this reporting period sets the stage for long-term cooperative efforts as Iraq develops into a sovereign, stable, self-reliant partner in the region and as the United States transitions roles and responsibilities from U.S. Forces to the GoI [Government of Iraq], the U.S. Embassy Baghdad, and other non-USF-I entities.²⁹⁶

In reality, the ISF suffered from many of the same deficiencies as those of South Vietnam after the U.S. withdrawal. They were organized on a U.S. model, and absent U.S. support in the form of enablers, particularly air power, they collapsed in the face of ISIS. ISIS is not the North Vietnamese Army, and the reintroduction of U.S. trainers, advisors, and fire support (mostly air power) turned the tide.

Retired Lieutenant General Dan Bolger’s recent book, *Why We Lost*, raises troublesome connections to Vietnam in the way metrics have been used to exaggerate progress. A key metric in Afghanistan was EIAs. Bolger notes that in a 2013 report, Anthony Cordesman “shows how ISAF selectively claimed percentage decreases in hostile attacks from April 2008 to October 2012.”²⁹⁷ In a section of the report titled “Spin, Missing Data, and a Return to the ‘Follies’,” Cordesman wrote:

There has been a steady shrinking in the metrics and analysis provided on the full range of civil-military progress in the war over the last two years as the pressure for a rapid Transition has risen. The end result has—as is noted in the introduction—been a return to the “good news” emphasis of the “follies” in Vietnam, support—as the previous analysis has shown—by Vietnam quality metrics and making EIAs the modern equivalent of the body count.²⁹⁸

Bolger wrote about the reporting that, “You had the sick feeling in your stomach you were looking at the hamlet evaluations from outside Da Nang, circa 1967.”²⁹⁹

Gregory Daddis’ assessment about the use of metrics in Vietnam further confirms what Bolger and Cordesman describe:

296 DoD, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, report to Congress (Washington, DC: DoD, June 2010), p. x, available at https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/June_9204_Sec_Def_signed_20_Aug_2010.pdf.

297 Daniel P. Bolger, *Why We Lost: A General’s Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), pp. 390–391.

298 Anthony H. Cordesman, *The War in Afghanistan at the End of 2012: The Uncertain Course of the War and Transition* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012), p. 24.

299 Bolger, *Why We Lost*, p. 391.

The United States Army failed in Vietnam in part because its metrics for success masked important operational and organizational deficiencies. Flawed measurements validated imperfect counterinsurgency methods and provided MACV with a false sense of progress and effectiveness. These measurements were symptomatic of a larger failure in thinking about the war's deepest issues.³⁰⁰

Constraints on U.S. and Western Irregular Warfare and COIN Approaches

There is no question that the constraints on what are acceptable methods in COIN have changed significantly over time. Regarding contemporary U.S. COIN methods, the record is clear that there has been a considerable attempt by U.S. forces to minimize harm to civilians and reduce collateral damage, particularly after the promulgation of *FM 3-24*. Indeed, the manual notes, almost by exception, that:

There may be times when an overwhelming effort is necessary to destroy or intimidate an opponent and reassure the populace. Extremist insurgent combatants often have to be killed.³⁰¹

This is because of the axiomatic statement by the doctrine that:

In any case, however, counterinsurgents should calculate carefully the type and amount of force to be applied and who wields it for any operation. An operation that kills five insurgents is counterproductive if collateral damage leads to the recruitment of fifty.³⁰²

Indeed, the manual offers several paradoxes, reminiscent of Sun Tzu's pithy prescriptions, to guide counterinsurgent actions:

- Sometimes, the more you protect your force, the less secure you may be.
- Sometimes, the more force is used, the less effective it is.
- The more successful the counterinsurgency is, the less force can be used and the more risk must be accepted.
- Sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction.
- Some of the best weapons for counterinsurgents do not shoot.
- The host nation doing something tolerably is normally better than us doing it well.
- If a tactic works this week, it might not work next week; if it works in this province, it might not work in the next.

³⁰⁰ Daddis, *No Sure Victory*, p. 223.

³⁰¹ *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (2007), p. 45.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

- Tactical success guarantees nothing.
- Many important decisions are not made by generals.³⁰³

Whether these statements are axiomatic or not, they reflect the U.S. and, generally, Western way of warfare in a 24/7 news cycle with instant information, essentially from any soldier or insurgent with a mobile device, to the world via social media. These constraints, some beyond the strictures of the Law of Armed Conflict, also make it seemingly unthinkable for U.S. military forces to even consider the methods used successfully in the U.S. Indian Wars, the Philippines, Kenya, Malaya, and Algeria (e.g., separating civilians from insurgents by concentration, denying materiel and food to the insurgent, etc.). Indeed, a recent analysis by the Modern War Institute at West Point of “one of the few militarily successful counterinsurgencies of the modern era”—the defeat of the Tamil Tigers by the Sri Lankan government after a war that lasted from 1983–2009—finds that:

It may be difficult, if not impossible, for countries to win at COIN if they follow international norms. These norms prohibit the deliberate targeting and forced displacement of civilian populations. To be sure, there are inherent contradictions in COIN, even population-centric COIN, which requires some baseline level of coercion to physically clear and rebuild insurgent strongholds.³⁰⁴

Furthermore, unfavorable incidents—the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal, the Haditha killings in Iraq, the Blackwater killings of civilians, and others—all affected policy, given that they were widely reported in the press. Although legal action was taken in these cases, it was post-outrage news. Again, these types of activities are impossible to hide in a world of instant information, and the policy of the United States has been to act to curb them. The ongoing debate about “enhanced interrogation techniques” and the 2014 U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report, *Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program*, shows that there is a debate over what measures are appropriate.³⁰⁵ Whether the Iraqis and the Afghans (or contractors) follow the example of their Western partners is open to question.

Another perhaps ironic indicator of the changes in the nature of U.S. COIN practices is the use of what amounts to a reverse of the body count metric in Afghanistan. Reducing civilian casualties is a key objective for the ISAF and the Afghan government. The April 2014 *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* highlighted that insurgents caused the majority of civilian casualties—5,482 casualties, or 88 percent, compared to 3 percent

303 Ibid., pp. 1-26–1-28. These same paradoxes are in the 2014 version of *FM 3-24. FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, C1: Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2014), pp. 7-1–7-4.

304 Lionel Beehner, Liam Collins, Steven Ferenzi, and Mike Jackson, *The Taming of the Tigers: An MWI Contemporary Battlefield Assessment of the Counterinsurgency in Sri Lanka* (West Point, NY: Modern War Institute, 2017). This document analyzes the defeat of the Tamil Tigers and identifies several implications.

305 U.S. Senate, *Report of The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence: Committee Study of The Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program*, 113th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, DC: GPO, December 9, 2014), available at <http://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/publications/CRPT-113srpt288.pdf>.

by Afghan security forces and 2 percent by the ISAF.³⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the report also noted, “However unpopular, Taliban attacks, intimidation tactics, and propaganda enable the insurgency to project influence in rural areas.”³⁰⁷

Furthermore, the evolution of technology since the Vietnam War has made the precise application of force much more feasible, as targets are more accurately located through sophisticated intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). Gone are the Vietnam days, for many reasons, of indiscriminate H&I fires. This is not to say that U.S. forces will not use violence as they operate to protect the people. In the Battle of Sadr City in Baghdad over a six-week period in March–April 2008, U.S. Army forces killed over 700 Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM) militia and fired 818 120mm rounds from M1 tanks and 12,091 25mm rounds from Bradley Fighting Vehicles. U.S. forces also employed Hellfire missiles against JAM rocket positions and 500-pound guided bombs to destroy buildings where JAM snipers sheltered.³⁰⁸

Interestingly, enabling a host country, as the United States has with Iraq in the fight against the Islamic State, largely places the burden for protecting civilians on the host. Rules of engagement on the ground are largely determined by the host country’s force, which also sustains the vast majority of the casualties. This in turn makes U.S. public support less problematic. That said, when U.S. forces (e.g., air support) cause significant civilian casualties, regardless of the circumstance, there can still be a backlash. This was the case with a coalition strike that caused scores of civilian casualties in Mosul in March 2017, which temporarily shut down operations, even in the face of Islamic State depredations.³⁰⁹

U.S. Strategic Culture Is Part of the Problem

Countries do not generally start wars they believe they will lose. The United States, however, is unique: The inability to imagine anything but success in any strategic environment has been the essence of U.S. strategic culture, particularly since World War II. This is not necessarily hubris, but a national sense of optimism, what some have termed “American exceptionalism,” and the conviction that “inside everyone is an American yearning to be free.” There is little difference between Clark Clifford’s recollection of the dismissal of the North Vietnamese by U.S. policymakers—as “little people running around

306 DoD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, report to Congress (Washington, DC: DoD, April 2014), available at http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/April_1230_Report_Final.pdf.

307 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

308 Johnson, Markel, and Shannon, *The 2008 Battle of Sadr City*, pp. 11–14. For a broader discussion of the increasing constraints on the use of military force in any type of conflict, see Bryan Frederick and David Johnson, *The Continued Evolution of U.S. Law of Armed Conflict Implementation: Implications for the U.S. Military* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015).

309 Tim Arango and Helene Cooper, “U.S. Investigating Mosul Strikes Said to Have Killed Up to 200 Civilians,” *The New York Times*, March 24, 2017, available at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/24/world/middleeast/us-iraq-mosul-investigation-airstrike-civilian-deaths.html?_r=0.

in black pajamas” who would not be able to long resist “the greatest nation in the world, with the most enormous firepower and with bombing that could wipe them out”—and Donald Rumsfeld’s remark in November 2002 on the eve of Operation Iraqi Freedom—“I can’t tell you if the use of force in Iraq today would last five days, or five weeks, or five months, but it certainly isn’t going to last any longer than that.”³¹⁰ In Vietnam and Iraq, these early expectations of quick success were soon dispelled, but by then the political imperatives not to lose resulted in doubling down. In Vietnam, public and political patience was eventually exhausted. In Iraq, during the surge, the United States created a security situation that enabled it to leave in 2011. Although it is back supporting the government of Iraq with advisors, fire support, and other capabilities, it is not embroiled on the ground in direct combat.

Why have we not been ready for large-scale insurgencies when they begin?

The seeming unpreparedness of the United States for COIN is the result of how the United States has designed its military and civilian agencies since the American Revolution: military forces designed to fight conventional wars and civilian departments with little if any excess capacity beyond their day-to-day operations. As Conrad Crane wrote, “When I describe the U.S. government to foreign officers at the Army War College, I tell them to envision a fiddler crab with one large claw labeled ‘Department of Defense’ and a small claw labeled ‘the mythical interagency.’ . . . The fact still remains that there are more musicians in the Department of Defense than foreign service officers in the State Department.”³¹¹ As a result, the U.S. military in every large-scale insurgency in its history has been forced to adapt to COIN with forces organized, trained, and equipped for conventional warfighting. They have struggled to learn on the job, because only they have the capacity for the tasks that some consider the province of other departments in the U.S. government, such as the State Department.

These challenges are only further complicated by the fact that U.S. military forces, other than special forces, rarely, if ever, have more than a cursory understanding of the cultures and languages of the places in which they are trying to execute COIN operations. Short-term rotations supporting expeditionary COIN obviate acquiring the doctrinally required knowledge to any appreciable degree.

The future does not look much better. The capacity guidelines in the 2006 *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency* have rarely been achievable because of the size of the all-volunteer U.S. military and the size of the populations in the countries where the United States has recently been engaged. Furthermore, as James Quinlivan presciently wrote in 1995, “The populations of many countries are now large enough to strain the ability of the

310 *The Lessons of Vietnam* (1986), p. 37; and “Rumsfeld: No World War III in Iraq,” CNN, November 15, 2002, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/US/11/15/rumsfeld.iraq/>.

311 Conrad Crane, “Observations on the Long War,” *War on the Rocks*, September 10, 2014, available at <http://warontherocks.com/2014/09/observations-on-the-long-war/>.

American military to provide stabilizing forces unilaterally at even modest per capita force ratios. . . . And we must finally acknowledge that many countries are simply too big to be plausible candidates for stabilization by external forces.”³¹² Apparently indirectly admitting to this capacity dilemma, the 2014 revision of *FM 3-24: Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* makes no mention of the minimum troop densities required for effective COIN.³¹³

While U.S. conventional forces have been attempting to execute COIN doctrine without sufficient capabilities or capacity, a modern-day Phoenix Program is degrading the competence of insurgent and terrorist organizations by killing or capturing their leaders. Thus, while the conventional force executed COIN based on the more humane theories of French military officer David Galula, the special operations force attacked leadership networks following the direct-action methods of Roger Trinquier and Robert Komer. This is not unlike what the Israelis term “mowing the grass”:

“Mowing the Grass,” Israel’s strategy in the twenty-first century against hostile non-state groups, reflects the assumption that Israel finds itself in a protracted intractable conflict. The use of force in such a conflict is not intended to attain impossible political goals, but a strategy of attrition designed primarily to debilitate the enemy capabilities.³¹⁴

Insufficient force size also has deleterious effects. Given the protracted nature of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the relatively fixed size of the militaries engaged, tour lengths have been a year or less (except during the Iraq surge), and most militaries have used unit rotations rather than individual replacements. Thus, these wars have been fought one year—or less—at a time with the resultant displacement of local knowledge as units come and go. Success in combat assignments—as during the Vietnam War, or any other war for that matter—is crucial for career advancement, and there is pressure to show results. I have heard more than one mid-grade officer discuss their tours in Afghanistan and Iraq and cynically recall, “Everything was broken in our area when we arrived; we developed a plan, and over the course of the year our stoplight chart showed us going from red to green; we departed and got awards for our achievements; the next unit arrived and said everything was broken.”

Two further observations about the American way of expeditionary COIN bear noting, because they will likely repeat themselves in the future. First, there is a pervasive American trait that demands continued, if not immediate, success for the support of non-existential conflicts. Thus, patience is politically abnormal and the American tendency is to treat “not winning” as “losing.” There is little tolerance for Carl von Clausewitz’s admonition:

312 James T. Quinlivan, “Force Requirements in Stability Operations,” *Parameters*, Winter 1995, p. 68.

313 *FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, C1: Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (2014).

314 Efraim Inbar and Eitan Shamir, “Mowing the Grass’: Israel’s Strategy for Protracted Intractable Conflict,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 73, no. 1, 2014, available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01402390.2013.830972>.

Wearing down the enemy in a conflict means using *the duration of the war to bring about a gradual exhaustion of his physical and moral resistance*. If we intend to hold out longer than our opponent we must be content with the smallest possible objects, for obviously a major object requires more effort than a minor one.³¹⁵

Second, as Hew Strachan wrote, there is an inevitable strain on civil-military relations between a military committed to victory and a body politic making trade-offs with other priorities. Absent a threat to national survival, politicians are reluctant to escalate or stay as long as it takes.³¹⁶ It is not politically feasible, as Max Boot recommends, to “make a long-term commitment”³¹⁷ to see things through to the end, particularly if the costs in blood and treasure exceed the perceived political benefits.

The United States is No Longer Doing COIN, So Why Does It Matter?

The United States is no longer prosecuting large-scale COIN anywhere, and the appetite for what it has become synonymous with—nation building—has waned after the experience of Afghanistan and Iraq.³¹⁸ Indeed, the process of withdrawing COIN capacity began during the Obama administration, as seen in this statement in the *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*: “Our forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale prolonged stability operations.” Nevertheless, this document promises to “preserve the expertise gained during the past ten years of counterinsurgency and stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan” and to “protect the ability to regenerate capabilities that might be needed to meet future demands.”³¹⁹

The U.S. history with large-scale, expeditionary irregular warfare and COIN after the Philippine Insurrection is not encouraging—and could easily repeat itself, unless positive steps are taken to understand, learn from, and institutionalize the lessons of Afghanistan and Iraq. The post-Vietnam U.S. military returned to conventionality—its institutional preference—shifting its focus to NATO and deterring the Soviet Union. As already discussed, there was no incentive to do otherwise, given the Nixon Doctrine. The same thing could happen now with the shift in service priorities to address increased challenges from China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. These state adversaries create significant capacity and capability challenges for all the Services in what has been a tough budgetary environment. Furthermore, U.S. conventional forces are still engaged in combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, mainly as trainers

315 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 93 (emphasis in the original).

316 Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 206–207.

317 Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, revised edition (New York: Basic Books, 2014), p. 368.

318 Kate Brannen, “The Knives Are Out for Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster,” *Foreign Policy*, May 9, 2017, available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/05/09/the-knives-are-out-for-hr-mcmaster-trump-bannon-nsc/>.

319 Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014* (Washington, DC: DoD, March 2014), p. viii, available at http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf.

and advisors, and deployed globally in support of Theater Security Cooperation Plans, which exacerbate capacity issues for state-actor challenges.

The message was clear to the U.S. military services under the Obama administration: No more Afghanistans or Iraqs. And this extended to Syria. The reorientation of priorities is understandable, given budget and force reductions under the 2011 Budget Control Act and the challenges posed by a rising China and a resurgent Russia. It is yet to be seen where the Trump administration will focus its security policy. Nevertheless, future U.S. leaders who attempt to regenerate the “needed capabilities” to counter an insurgency will face the same challenge as their predecessors—that of refocusing a U.S. military increasingly designed for regular wars into one capable of prosecuting irregular wars.

What Have We Learned and What Do We Do Going Forward?

U.S. irregular warfare over the past 250 years, as recounted above, has had mixed results. The key question is what these experiences offer as lessons for now and the future. Particularly important is the question: What will the United States do to attempt to understand its experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, particularly in assessing the efficacy of COIN to address irregular threats? This question is extremely important given the state of the world and the proliferation of irregular threats (e.g., ISIS, Boko Haram, the Taliban, al Qaeda, and Hezbollah) that are destabilizing regions of strategic importance to the United States. If the U.S. expeditionary COIN approach has not worked as advertised by its advocates—and staying forever is not an option—then what approaches need to be developed?

Issue: Not preparing for post-major combat transitions can lead to insurgency

U.S. history is replete with examples of successful combat operations that lacked subsequent plans for security and governance. This was the case in the aftermath of the Spanish–American War, in the Philippine Insurrection, after the toppling of Saddam Hussein’s regime, and in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Perhaps the only modern example of where the United States was successful in this regard was in post-World War II Germany and Japan. In Germany, establishing security was of paramount concern because “the Allies feared that renegade guerrilla groups of German military forces would re-form into small units and launch attacks against Allied forces.”³²⁰ Some 1,622,000 American soldiers initially occupied the American sector that contained 16 million Germans. By 1946, with security firmly established,

320 James Dobbins et al., *America’s Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2003), p. 4.

there were 200,000 U.S. soldiers in Germany.³²¹ Similarly, the critical variable in the success of the surge in Iraq was the increase in troops to establish security.

Anticipating a security vacuum in the aftermath of the defeat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, the United States planned for active measures and organizations to establish governance in occupied territories. There was recognition and acceptance of a reality that seems to have been forgotten since, as documented in the Army’s history of the occupation of Germany: “Military government, the administration by military officers of civil government in occupied enemy territory, is a virtually inevitable concomitant of modern warfare.”³²² Indeed, one author noted that, since the occupations following World War II, “The capabilities required to carry out military government were shunned and neglected by DoD and the Army at large until the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq made it terribly clear that history was repeating itself: the United States was quite unprepared for the responsibilities of administering Iraq and supporting the government of Afghanistan, and the ad hoc means we devised once again ‘ranged from inadequate to near disastrous’.”³²³

This requirement to be prepared for occupation and military governance has been a primary function of the U.S. Army since the Key West Agreements on the roles and functions of the U.S. Armed Forces following the creation of Department of Defense in 1947. Secretary of Defense James Forrestal’s 1948 memorandum, “Functions of the Armed Forces and the Joint Chiefs of Staff,” specified that a primary function of the U.S. Army is “to provide forces, as directed by proper authority, for occupation of territories abroad, to include initial establishment of military government pending transfer of this responsibility to other authority.”³²⁴ This language is repeated verbatim in the August 1, 2002 DoD Directive 5100.01, “Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components,” which states that the Army is “to provide

321 Ibid., p. 10.

322 Earl F. Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany 1944–1946* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1975), p. 3. Ziemke further notes, “The US Army conducted military government in Mexico in 1847 and 1848; in the Confederate states during and after the Civil War; in the Philippines, Porto (Puerto) Rico, and Cuba after the Spanish–American War; and in the German Rhineland after World War I. In each instance, neither the Army nor the government accepted it as a legitimate military function. Consequently, its imposition invariably came as a somewhat disquieting experience for both, and the means devised for accomplishing it ranged from inadequate to near disastrous.” Ibid., p. 3. For a discussion of the World War II U.S. Army Civil Affairs program, see Harry L. Coles and Albert K. Weinberg, *Civil Affairs: Soldiers Become Governors* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1964). For thoughtful and in-depth analysis of the challenges the United States has faced in the aftermath of past conflicts, see Nadia Schadlow, *War and the Art of Governance: Consolidating Combat Success into Political Victory* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017).

323 David Stott Gordon, “Military Governance: The Essential Mission of Civil Affairs,” in Christopher Holshek and John C. Church Jr., eds., *2014–2015 Civil Affairs Issue Papers: The Future of Civil Affairs* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2015), p. 90.

324 OSD, *Functions of the Armed Forces and the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (Washington, DC: DoD, April 21, 1948), available at <http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll11/id/729>.

forces for the occupation of territories abroad, including initial establishment of military government pending transfer of this responsibility to other authority.”³²⁵

The capabilities and capacity for occupation and governance—as well as plans for how to employ them if they had existed—were not available after the invasions of Afghanistan or Iraq, and their absence spawned insurgencies. Furthermore, only the military component of the U.S. government has the capacity to prepare for and execute these functions, particularly under conditions where security has not been established. The whole of government has a role to play, but as shown in Afghanistan and Iraq, other national security agencies do not have sufficient capacity to execute these functions. And as noted earlier, it is an open question whether countries with large populations and land areas can be stabilized with the number of security forces available if they slide into instability. This makes the provision of security and the reestablishment of governance before the onset of instability imperative.

Recommendation

The U.S. military has developed Joint and Service doctrine for COIN; more effort is needed on how to prevent insurgency in the aftermath of operations that by their very nature create security and governance voids. The Army recognizes the requirement to consolidate gains post-conflict, noting in *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World*, “The Army also prepares for security operations abroad including initial establishment of military government pending transfer of this responsibility to other authorities.”³²⁶ Furthermore, the establishment of the Institute for Military Support to Governance (IMSG) at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School in 2013 was an important step in turning concepts into doctrine and organizational capability. The mission of the IMSG is to facilitate:

the generation and sustainment of civil sector expertise required for Unified Action Military Support to Governance missions and activities by researching, analyzing, and informing associated policies, authorities, doctrine, education, and training through a collaborative effort with community of interest partners and stakeholders to enable Joint Force Commanders to execute transitional military authority and support to civil administration tasks.³²⁷

These are both positive steps that must be adequately resourced and sustained to ensure the United States has the capabilities and capacity to prevent insurgencies in future conflicts. This is a tall order given the desire to move beyond Afghanistan and Iraq.

³²⁵ DoD, “Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components,” Department of Defense Directive 5100.01, August 1, 2002. The 2010 revision of this directive makes a minor change to the language: “Occupy territories abroad and provide for the initial establishment of a military government pending transfer of this responsibility to other authority.” DoD, “Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components,” Department of Defense Directive 5100.01, December 21, 2010.

³²⁶ U.S. Army, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1: (Fort Eustis, VA: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2014), p. 10.

³²⁷ See the Special Operations Center of Excellence Institute for Military Support to Governance (IMSG) website, available at <http://www.soc.mil/SWCS/IMSG/index.htm>.

Issue: Large-scale irregular warfare and COIN are a brutal business that requires coercion

Perhaps the central lesson from the U.S. history of irregular warfare is that it is a hard and bloody business that necessarily requires coercion to succeed. As General William T. Sherman noted in his memoirs, “War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it.”³²⁸

Many of the precepts in U.S. COIN doctrine, for understandable reasons, are written from the perspective that avoiding civilian casualties, assuming risk to the COIN force, and minimizing the use of force are the keys to success. In practice, these tenets have little basis in reality—as reflected in the Iraq and Afghanistan operations.

The underlying basis for the success of the surge in Iraq was that it created conditions that eventually allowed the United States to hand off security operations to the Government of Iraq. This included the destruction of contending factions by conventional and special operations forces, which required less restrictive rules of engagement, increased U.S. deployments—and killing. Quite simply, protecting the people required the destruction of the insurgents who were threatening them. It also meant supporting an Iraqi government that we knew was corrupt and sectarian. Otherwise, there would be no Iraqi government. As Ali Alawi, a former Iraqi government official, noted in 2007, “The Americans who are supporting this political class, I believe really have no choice. This is a group they have been saddled with, or supported in power, and [they] must grin and bear it.”³²⁹ In 2007, as the surge was beginning, this corrupt and sectarian government was what was possible. It was good enough to enable the surge (with U.S. forces, Government of Iraq security forces, and Sons of Iraq militia) to suppress the terrorist and militia threat and create conditions that were good enough, enabling the United States to depart. Importantly, however, when ISIS created a security dilemma that Iraq could not solve on its own, the United States provided the necessary support to roll back this threat. This was a sustainable least bad outcome. The United States did not do this in South Vietnam in 1975, and that state collapsed. The lesson here is that not winning is not losing; losing is losing.

In Afghanistan, the Obama administration attempted to replicate the success in Iraq using a three-pronged approach: “a military effort to create the conditions for a transition; a civilian surge that reinforces positive action; and an effective partnership with Pakistan.”³³⁰ General McChrystal, who planned and led the Afghan surge, noted during his nomination hearings as the head of ISAF, “The measure of effectiveness will not be the number of enemy killed, it

328 William T. Sherman, *The Memoirs of W.T. Sherman: All Volumes* (Oxford, UK: Acheron Press, 2012), p. 464.

329 Aram Roston and Lisa Myers, “‘Untouchable’ Corruption in Iraqi Agencies,” *NBC News*, July 30, 2007, available at http://www.nbcnews.com/id/20043428/ns/nbc_nightly_news_with_brian_williams-nbc_news_investigates/t/untouchable-corruption-iraqi-agencies/#.WV5Hz4TyUUm.

330 DoD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan and United States Plan for Sustaining the Afghanistan National Security Forces*, report to Congress (Washington, DC: DoD, April 2010), p. 11.

will be the number of Afghans shielded from violence.”³³¹ Consequently, rules of engagement were very restrictive. Furthermore, McChrystal promised an Afghan “government in a box,” consisting of Afghan government and police forces, that were “ready to roll in” after ISAF forces conducted initial operations (Operation Moshtarak–Dari for “Together”) to rid Marjah of the Taliban.³³²

The Afghan surge failed because there were insufficient security forces or civilians for the effort. Reporter Dion Nissenbaum explained:

There aren’t enough U.S. and Afghan forces to provide the security that’s needed to win the loyalty of wary locals. The Taliban have beheaded Afghans who cooperate with foreigners in a creeping intimidation campaign. The Afghan government hasn’t dispatched enough local administrators or trained police to establish credible governance, and now the Taliban have begun their anticipated spring offensive.³³³

The experiment in nation building in Afghanistan failed, and it is difficult to imagine another surge with sufficient resources to replicate the Iraq of 2011 in Afghanistan. The question, then, is what is the least bad option in Afghanistan? Perhaps it is going back to the first principle of why we went to Afghanistan in 2001: to eliminate it as a haven for terrorist attacks on our homeland. In Afghanistan, what is good enough is a government that can successfully protect itself and take the fight to the Taliban with minimal U.S. support. Whether the Kabul government is corrupt or not representative is secondary to its ability to prevent Afghanistan from again becoming a terrorist haven. That would be good enough.

General Sherman also knew he was fighting not only an enemy army, but “a hostile people, and must make old and young, rich and poor, feel the hard hand of war.”³³⁴ And he was clear about his objective: “My aim then was to whip the rebels, to humble their pride, to follow them to their inmost recesses, and make them fear and dread us.”³³⁵

Sherman’s perspective epitomized the U.S. approach in the Indian Wars and to the Philippine Insurrection. It also is reflected in the ongoing special operations, targeted killings, and kill-or-capture approaches that contributed to success in Iraq during the surge. These operations attempt to minimize civilian casualties, but those who harbor or live with terrorists may themselves feel the hard hand of war. In the words of Alan M. Dershowitz,

331 Ann Scott Tyson, “Gen. McChrystal Signals a New Approach in Afghanistan,” *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2009, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/02/AR2009060203828.html>.

332 Dexter Filkins, “Afghan Offensive Is New War Model,” *New York Times*, February 12, 2010; and Rod Nordland, “Afghanistan Strategy Focuses on Civilian Effort,” *New York Times*, June 8, 2010. Quote from Filkins.

333 Dion Nissenbaum, “McChrystal Calls Marjah a ‘Bleeding Ulcer’ in Afghan Campaign,” *McClatchy Newspapers*, May 24, 2010, available at <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24583621.html>.

334 Sherman, *The Memoirs of W.T. Sherman*, p. 782.

335 *Ibid.*, p. 576.

Targeted assassinations are intended to limit collateral damage by focusing specifically on the combatant. Every reasonable effort should be made to avoid collateral damage. Sometimes it is impossible to eliminate completely all risk to noncombatants. In such cases, the military value of the target must be weighed against the likelihood and degree of collateral damage. The rule of proportionality should be the guiding principle.³³⁶

High-value targets live in isolation for fear of discovery and assassination, greatly minimizing their ability to control their terrorist networks, as was the case with Osama bin Laden after his escape from Afghanistan. These operations also disrupt terrorist organizations and degrade their competence. Thus, mowing the grass has a tactical and operational role. It is unlikely, however, that it can do more than disrupt. Which, again, could be good enough given what other options would require.

Recommendation

Iraq, Afghanistan, and ongoing counterterrorism operations have untapped lessons about what works and what does not in confronting irregular adversaries and insurgents. Quite frankly, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, this important post-conflict analysis did not happen because the country and the U.S. military wanted to move on.³³⁷

These lessons are also important as the United States grapples with how to compete with so-called gray zone conflicts. As noted earlier in the discussion of U.S. counterinsurgency “doctrine,” it is more conceptual and aspirational than doctrinal, because it is hypothesis-based rather than a rigorous examination and application of what has worked in the past. Indeed, lessons from past experiences (Malaya, Algeria) have been shaped to fit the narrative of U.S. COIN concepts. Stability, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism operations since the end of the Cold War provide comprehensive cases of what has and has not worked.

The most recent U.S. COIN doctrinal publications are still rife with assumptions. Perhaps the most fundamental is the “approach to counterinsurgency” stated in the 2013 *Joint Publication 3-24: Counterinsurgency*: “The joint force needs to adapt approaches based on the following considerations: political control, the population centric nature of COIN, assessing relevant actors, and understanding the OE [operational environment].”³³⁸ Imbedded in this statement is a belief that expeditionary forces, on relatively short rotations, can attain the implied level of understanding to realize the necessary level of adaptation.

336 Alan M. Dershowitz, “In Targeted Killings, the Rule of Proportionality Should Be the Guiding Principle,” *The New York Times*, February 10, 2014, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/11/14/how-can-targeted-killings-be-justified/in-targeted-killings-the-rule-of-proportionality-should-be-the-guiding-principle>. See also Greg Jaffe, “Tracking Airstrikes’ Civilian Toll from Afar,” *The Washington Post*, May 14, 2017, pp. A1 and A14. This article discusses the efforts by Airwars, a small non-profit group, to track how many civilian deaths the U.S.-led air campaign in Syria and Iraq is causing. Their estimate is “at least 3,200 civilians—more than nine times the 352 deaths acknowledged by the U.S. military.”

337 The analysis of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom is just beginning. One of the first useful studies is Hooker and Collins, eds., *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*.

338 U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: DoD, 2013), p. x.

Thus, existing doctrines, concepts, and capabilities need a rigorous examination to address important questions going forward. For example: Why did Iraq fall apart after Saddam Hussein was deposed, and was this inevitable? What capabilities and capacities were needed to establish security and enable the transition to a new government? Is nation building, to U.S. standards, possible in a foreign culture?

Successful irregular warfare campaigns in U.S. history share several key characteristics: the adversary was ruthlessly and violently pursued and separated from indigenous support; there were sufficient forces (in capacity and capability) to establish security; the adversary had no sanctuary or significant external support (or was denied that support); and a viable (not necessarily democratic) government could govern absent large-scale U.S. direct involvement once security was restored. If these conditions are not met, failure is likely, as it was in Vietnam, and potentially in Afghanistan. Where they are met, as during the Indian Wars, the Philippine Insurrection, and Iraq, success is possible, with one proviso: continued U.S. support may be required for an extended time.

Historically, U.S. strategic culture holds an expectation of attainable objectives when framing a policy. Given recent experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, those objectives should be designed to produce the least bad outcome, rather than laudable but difficult to attain nation-building and social reform goals. The principal reason the United States intervenes militarily should be centered on a security challenge to the United States. We should firmly understand this purpose and search for the “art” of the possible rather than pursue the “science” of nation building or social engineering. As we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, we are not capable of building other peoples’ nations, but we can help provide the security conditions under which it can be done. That is a perfectly acceptable least bad outcome—and a kind of victory.

South Korea is a case in point of success, as long-term U.S. assistance ultimately allowed that state to become democratic. In the aftermath of the Korean War, the United States maintained a significant security presence on the Korean Peninsula to guarantee the peace. We also supported the strongman Syngman Rhee, who was decidedly not democratic. In May 2017, the South Koreans elected Moon Jae-in, a former activist and human rights attorney, as their new president. This was a process of democratization that took decades, and along the way, the South Korean system frequently did not meet U.S. democratic or human rights norms. But it has succeeded and provides a positive endorsement for supporting the evolution of a state toward democratic norms, rather than forcing a template of reform upon the state receiving U.S. assistance, especially when that reform may be beyond the art of the possible.

Finally, U.S. policies, as noted in the Modern War Institute’s report on the Sri Lankan campaign against the Tamil Tigers, need to focus on first-order objectives dealing with U.S. interests and security threats when prosecuting irregular warfare. The report uses the example of compliance with U.S. human rights policies as a key wicket to allow our support:

When it comes to counterinsurgency, there are unintended consequences of our human rights policies. U.S. policy prohibits the State and Defense Departments from assisting foreign militaries that have committed human rights violations. This stance might perversely allow those foreign militaries to act with greater impunity. When the United States refuses to provide aid or assistance to a state, the natural next step is for the state to seek assistance from another source . . . (like Russia or China) that are willing to provide assistance regardless of blatant human rights abuses.³³⁹

Furthermore, as was the case in Vietnam, the United States rarely has enough leverage on the government upon which it is relying for legitimacy to force change. As Richard Hunt wrote about U.S. pacification and reform efforts in Vietnam, “American leverage was ineffective in reforming programs, owing to the combination of reluctance to assume control of the South Vietnamese and Saigon’s resistance to proposals that made it appear to be a puppet of the United States.”³⁴⁰ U.S. efforts in Afghanistan to curb corruption, end poppy production, change societal norms, etc. are similar. We are there in support of our national interests, and our hosts know it. We forget that central fact at our own peril.

Reinhold Niebuhr’s cautionary prayer is worth reflecting upon in this regard: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”³⁴¹

Although it is difficult for many to acknowledge, the surge did in fact create the conditions for providing sufficient security for an Iraqi government to form, albeit one that was not envisioned in 2003. Was this the result of a new COIN approach, or a combination of aggressive military and special operations activity?³⁴² What arrangements are needed going forward, after the defeat of ISIS, to train, advise, and enable the Government of Iraq?

The U.S. Army is creating six Security Force Assistance Brigades and establishing a Military Advisor Training Academy at Fort Benning, Georgia at the Maneuver Center of Excellence to meet these types of demands. This is a positive effort to learn from and institutionalize a key lesson from Afghanistan and Iraq: preparing the host nation’s security sector to stand on its

339 Beehner, Collins, Ferenzi, and Jackson, *The Taming of the Tigers*, pp. 39–40.

340 Hunt, *Pacification*, p. 30.

341 Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, edited by Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 251.

342 See Michael Boyle, “What Moqtada al-Sadr’s Return Means for America,” *The Guardian*, January 11, 2011. Ironically, Muqtada al-Sadr, the principal coalition adversary in the 2008 Battle of Sadr City, provided Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki sufficient parliamentary seats in 2011 to form a government. It is also likely that Maliki found it politically impossible to negotiate a status of forces agreement (SOFA) to allow U.S. forces to remain in Iraq after 2011.

own.³⁴³ Nevertheless, Security Force Assistance Brigades will require host nation approval to deploy, lest the abrupt U.S. departure from Iraq in 2011 repeat itself.

Final Thoughts

U.S. irregular warfare efforts over the past 250 years have had mixed results. The key question is what do these experiences offer as lessons for now and in the future? Because COIN is hard and messy, our natural temptation is to pivot away quickly and forget what we have learned; that instinct must be actively resisted.³⁴⁴ One of the most important lessons from this long experience is also clear: Absent substantial institutional efforts to preserve the tacit knowledge gained by the U.S. Armed Forces during post-9/11 irregular warfare and COIN operations, that knowledge and experience could become, as after the Indian Wars, the Philippine Insurrection, and the Vietnam War, nothing more than painfully learned but fading lore.

343 Charlsy Panzino, "Fort Benning to Stand Up Security Force Brigades, Training Academy," *Army Times*, February 16, 2017, available at <https://www.armytimes.com/articles/fort-benning-to-stand-up-security-force-brigade-training-academy>. See also Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "Iraq PM: No U.S. Combat Troops to Stay in Iraq After ISIS," *World Politics Review*, May 5, 2017. This article notes, "Talks about keeping U.S. troops in Iraq were ongoing . . . and that any American troops who stay on once IS militants are defeated will be advisers working to train Iraq's security forces to maintain 'full readiness' for any 'future security challenges'."

344 Thanks go to Hal Brands for this insight.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFDD	Air Force Doctrine Document
AFPAK	Afghanistan/Pakistan
ANA	Afghan National Army
ARA	Aerial Rocket Artillery
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
BDM	Braddock Dunn & McDonald
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIVCAS	Civilian Casualties
COIN	counterinsurgency
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
CSBA	Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments
DoD	Department of Defense
EIA	Enemy Initiated Attacks
FID	Foreign Internal Defense
FIRMA	Fire and Maneuver
FM	Field Manual
GoI	Government of Iraq
GVN	Government of Vietnam
H&I	harassment and interdiction
HES	Hamlet Evaluation System
HN	host nation
IMSG	Institute for Military Support to Governance
IS	Islamic State
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
JAM	Jaish al-Mahdi
LLO	Logical Lines of Operation
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MATA	Military Assistance Training and Advisory
MCWP	Marine Corps Warfighting Publication

LIST OF ACRONYMS

MITT	Military Transition Team
MOOTW	Military Operations Other Than War
MWI	Modern War Institute
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NVA	North Vietnamese
OE	Operational Environment
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PM	Prime Minister
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SEA	Southeast Asia
SFA	Strategic Framework Agreement
SFOR	Stabilization Force
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
SSZ	Specified Strike Zone
TRADOC	U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command
USF—I	U.S. Force—Iraq
VBIED	Vehicle-Born Improvised Explosive Device
VC	Viet Cong



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