

Adapting Short of Doctrine: US Military Counterinsurgency in Iraq March 2004 to December 2006

A Monograph

by

MAJ Darrell E. Fawley
US Army



School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

2017

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved</i> <i>OMB No. 0704-0188</i>		
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 8-05-2017		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) JUN 2016-MAY 2017	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Adapting Short of Doctrine: US Military Counterinsurgency in Iraq March 2004-December 2006			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) Major Darrell Fawley			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301			8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Advanced Military Studies Program			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT This study argues that officers who have a broad base of developmental, educational, and training experiences will likely be able to apply critical and creative thinking while drawing on their experience, history, theory, and doctrine to develop effective operational approaches in situations for which doctrine and training have not specifically prepared them. In order to show this, this paper explores the development of operational approaches to the insurgency in Iraq from March 2004 until the publication of the US Army Field Manual 3-24, <i>Counterinsurgency</i> , in December 2006. The monograph delves into the education, training, and development of Army General George Casey, Marine Majors Generals James Mattis and Richard Natonski, and Army Colonels H.R. McMaster and Sean MacFarland. It further looks at the foundations of doctrine and examines what doctrine was available to these officers. From there, the paper describes the development of each of these officers' operational approach and its effectiveness. The paper concludes by drawing linkages between the education, training, and development of these officers and their ability to adapt to the insurgency in Iraq prior to the publication of an updated manual for counterinsurgency.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Iraq; OIF; Operation Iraqi Freedom; Multi-National Force-Iraq; 1 st Marine Division; George Casey; James Mattis; Richard Natonski; H.R. McMaster; Sean MacFarland; counterinsurgency					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	62	Major Darrell Fawley

Monograph Approval Page

Name of Candidate: MAJ Darrell E. Fawley, III

Monograph Title: Adapting Short of Doctrine: US Military Counterinsurgency in Iraq
March 2004 to December 2006

Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
Thomas Bruscano, PhD

_____, Seminar Leader
Eric Laforest, COL

_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
James C. Markert, COL

Accepted this 25th day of May 2017 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Prisco R. Hernandez, PhD

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Abstract

Adapting Short of Doctrine: US Military Counterinsurgency in Iraq March 2004 to December 2006, by MAJ Darrell E. Fawley, III, US Army, 54 Pages

This study argues that officers who have a broad base of developmental, educational, and training experiences will likely be able to apply critical and creative thinking while drawing on their experience, history, theory, and doctrine to develop effective operational approaches in situations for which doctrine and training have not specifically prepared them. In order to show this, this paper explores the development of operational approaches to the insurgency in Iraq from March 2004 until the publication of the US Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, in December 2006. The monograph delves into the education, training, and development of Army General George Casey, Marine Majors Generals James Mattis and Richard Natonski, and Army Colonels H.R. McMaster and Sean MacFarland. It further looks at the foundations of doctrine and examines what doctrine was available to these officers. From there, the paper describes the development of each of these officers' operational approach and its effectiveness. The paper concludes by drawing linkages between the education, training, and development of these officers and their ability to adapt to the insurgency in Iraq prior to the publication of an updated manual for counterinsurgency.

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Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my wife, Lindsey, for her support in my educational pursuits and her encouragement. Next, I would like to thank my monograph director, Dr. Thomas Brusino, for his guidance and help developing this project from an idea to a final form. I would also like to thank my seminar leader, Colonel Eric Laforest, for his help editing and providing feedback. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Dean Nowowiejski who encouraged me to continue pursuing research into Iraq based on my Command and General Staff Officer's Course thesis.

Acronyms

ADRP	Army Doctrinal Reference Publication
CENTCOM	US Central Command
COIN	Counterinsurgency
FM	Field Manual
LTG	Lieutenant General
MCDP	Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication
MCWP	Marine Corps Warfighting Publication
MNF-I	Multi-National Force-Iraq
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command

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Introduction

After a sweeping victory over the forces of Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the spring of 2003, the US military and its coalition partners took over the task of stabilizing Iraq. US government decisions led to the removal of a majority of Saddam-era Iraqi government officials leaving a void. US Central Command (CENTCOM) commander General Tommy Franks retained command of the invasion; however, once military forces captured Baghdad, Franks handed military command to Lieutenant General (LTG) Ricardo Sanchez and his V Corps headquarters. While the task of governance ostensibly fell under the control of Presidential Envoy to Iraq L. Paul Bremer and the newly created Coalition Provisional Authority of Iraq for which he was the administrator, military units quickly found themselves providing government services as part of their attempt to stabilize the country. Additionally, an insurgency began to brew that further complicated the situation. It soon became clear that the coalition needed a more robust headquarters and staff to deal with the changing situation. In response, the coalition created the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) headquarters out of Sanchez's V Corps and President George W. Bush appointed US Army Vice Chief of Staff General George Casey to lead this newly created headquarters.

Casey arrived in theater in June 2004 and directed his staff to study the problem in Iraq. The commander and his staff determined the coalition faced an insurgency and developed a plan to counter it.¹ During this time, subordinate units at the division and brigade level also studied the problem and developed plans to counter the insurgency they faced.² Despite the efforts of commanders at all levels, by 2006 Iraq seemed to be in a dire situation. This prompted Casey's subordinate for tactical operations, LTG Peter Chiarelli to tell Casey that the last chance to turn

¹ George W. Casey, Jr., *Strategic Reflections: Operation Iraqi Freedom, July 2004-February 2007*, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2012), 22.

² Under Casey and subsequent commanders, division headquarters served as multi-national divisions named for the region of Iraq they controlled. The division headquarters generally had several units under it that were not organic to it modified table of organization and equipment.

around the situation in Baghdad was to extend the tour of the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team. With approval from US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Casey retained the unit in Iraq for four more months. With some members having already returned to their home station in Alaska, the extension became a national news item and prompted question about the security situation in the country.³

Around this time, the commander of the US Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, LTG David Petraeus directed the development of a new US Army field manual for counterinsurgency. Petraeus had already served two tours in Iraq, as a division commander during and in the months following the invasion and later as the commander of the coalition's indigenous forces training mission. He had achieved some notoriety for his work in Mosul. The development of the field manual, which would become Army Field Manual 3-24 and Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, titled *Counterinsurgency*, gained much attention in the press.⁴ This media attention combined with the seemingly deteriorating situation in Iraq helped develop a narrative that prior to the publication of the field manual in December 2006, the US military did not understand counterinsurgency. Petraeus replaced Casey two months after publication of the manual; by the time he left Iraq eighteen months later, the security situation appeared to have dramatically improved. This furthered the narrative that the military did not understand counterinsurgency prior to Petraeus' efforts. Few have challenged this narrative.

Many works have focused on the successes of Petraeus and the failures of Casey. Fred Kaplan's *The Insurgents* paints Casey as a counterinsurgency illiterate who initially embraces the concept and then rejects it. Kaplan, in contrast, paints Petraeus and his band of "coindinistas" as

³ Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 17.

⁴See Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American War of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013) for a description of the development of the manual.

the true intellectual foundation for counterinsurgency understanding in the military.⁵ Thomas Ricks produced two works on the subject. The first, *Fiasco*, is a look at the evolution of the insurgency in Iraq and American efforts to counteract it. *Fiasco*, though, touches mostly on Casey's predecessor and does not delve into the development of Casey's operational approach. However, it remains hopeful of his success. Ricks' follow up, *The Gamble*, picks up partway through Casey's tenure and focuses much of the first part of the book on the deteriorating security situation. Ricks then focuses on the development of counterinsurgency doctrine and Petraeus's success.⁶ David Cloud's and Greg Jaffe's *The Fourth Star* follows the careers of Casey, Petraeus, CENTCOM commander John Abazaid, and Chiarelli. The authors regard Casey as a tactically-focused infantry officer who does things by the book, whereas they see Petraeus as an unconventional officer who is an innovative thinker.⁷ Linda Robinson's *Tell Me How This Ends* offers Casey as a commander whose reluctance to use counterinsurgency brings Iraq to the brink of civil war and offers Petraeus as the man the military needed to turn the situation around.⁸ Bing West, in *The Strongest Tribe*, essentially says that Casey had no strategy and that subordinate American forces were doing whatever they wanted.⁹

In essence, the literature generally describes Casey as a stereotypically hard headed, dull infantry officer who sees war conventionally and who was unfit for command in Iraq. By contrast, authors paint Petraeus as an unconventional, innovative and bright officer who sees the situation in Iraq for what it is and develops the measures to effectively counter it. Aside from Casey's memoir,

⁵ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*.

⁶ Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq 2003 to 2005* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006); Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009).

⁷ David Cloud and Greg Jaffe, *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army* (New York: Brown Publishers, 2009).

⁸ Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*.

⁹ Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics and the Endgame in Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2008).

there has not been an effort to explore Casey's own approach to counterinsurgency or that of his subordinates. While there is evidence that many US commanders and their staffs not only understood the situation they faced but developed sound operational approaches to deal with the problem, this subject has not been explored. Thus, the employment of operational art for the purpose of countering an insurgency during Casey's tenure remains an understudied field. The primary purpose of this study is to determine how commanders at different levels were able to develop operational approaches to the problem of insurgency in Iraq without the benefit of a current, consolidated doctrine. In doing so, this study will analyze the career education and development of these commanders prior to their command's in Iraq. The study will further explore how these commanders and their staffs used theory and history as the basis of an operational approach and how they may have used current and older doctrine to inform their decisions.

In order to explore these inquiries, this study will examine the development of the operational approaches of different level headquarters during this period to determine how they adapted prior to the consolidated doctrine that the Army and Marine Corps would publish in December 2006. First, the study will examine in depth of training and education that leaders received prior to their deployments to Iraq beginning with their commissioning sources. The focus will be institutional learning and doctrine available to them as they progressed from commissioning to the rank they held at the time of their command and developmental experiences throughout their careers. This study will also examine the personal study habits of these officers that developed their ability to frame the problem and think critically and creatively about it. The study will then look at the theater level, focusing on Casey and his staff, the division level, focusing on 1st Marine Division and the brigade level, focusing on 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment and 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division (both Army units). This monograph will examine how each of these headquarters developed their operational approaches. As part of these assessments, the study will look at the effect of each approach. Since results in counterinsurgency are difficult to judge in

isolation, the goal will be only to demonstrate recognizable outcomes of the approaches rather than to assign a degree of success to the commanders.

This study assumes that the current US Army definition of operational art is consistent with the methods commanders applied during the timeframe in questions. Thus, the study will use the definition of operational art as defined and described in Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*. This publication defines operational art as “the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose.”¹⁰ Although this manual did not exist during the events in question, the concept did. Thus, the definition will allow for a common understanding. Where there may be differences in Marine Corps doctrine, the study will cite that service’s doctrine. The study also assumes that the commanders of these units were familiar with concepts taught while they were in US military institutional education. Thus, it will use the officer’s attendance as proof of exposure to the material where applicable.

This study argues that officers who have a broad base of developmental, educational, and training experiences will likely be able to apply critical and creative thinking while drawing on their experience, history, theory, and doctrine to develop effective operational approaches in situations for which doctrine and training have not specifically prepared them. The results of this study may be applicable to future military leaders who find themselves faced with situations where current US military doctrine falls short. US Army Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet 525-3-1, *Win in a Complex World* foresees a future where the military cannot predict accurately its operating environment or adversaries.¹¹ Military leaders must focus their preparations and cannot train for every contingency. Thus, it is likely that in the future military leaders will find themselves in charge

¹⁰ Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Print Office, 2012), 4-1.

¹¹ Army Training And Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-1, *Win in a Complex World* (Washington, DC: Government Print Office, 2014), 10-14.

of units in an environment for which current doctrine and training is inadequate. However, it is unlikely that any future situation will be so revolutionary that a competent staff and commander are unable to use theory and history along with past and current doctrine to develop a sound operational approach to the problem they face. Therefore, understanding how past units have done this will help these commanders and staffs to quickly adjust to an unfamiliar environment, adversary and situation. Further, this study should inform officers' understanding of the value of service and joint education and the relevance of a broad range of developmental and operational experiences and personal study.

Chapter 2 will first examine the education and training leaders received during their career that prepared them for the situation in Iraq. The chapter will look at doctrine as well to determine how it may have influenced the thinking of commanders and staffs. Chapter 3 will then examine the development of operational approaches by Casey (commanding MNF-I) Major Generals James Mattis and Richard Natonski (commanding 1st Marine Division in succession), Colonel H.R. McMaster (3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment), and Colonel Sean MacFarland (1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division). Chapter 4 will draw conclusions and make recommendations.

Educational, Training and Doctrinal Foundations

This study focuses on five officers who entered the military during the Cold War and served throughout the post-Cold War era prior to arriving in Iraq. Each of these officers followed a career path that took them through a commissioning source and then through a career of developmental experiences and education designed to prepare them broadly for the challenges of command. Along the way, each received and participated in diverse training. Stipulating that education prepares one broadly for the unknown, training for the known or anticipated, and development prepares one for both, then each officer's career path potentially had the most profound impact on his ability to adapt to the situation in Iraq.

Casey received his commission in 1970. Mattis received his commission in 1972 and Natonski in 1973. MacFarland graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1981 and McMaster followed suit three years later. These officers had a diverse range of military experiences prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom. While none of the officers served in Vietnam during the War, Natonski participated in non-combatant evacuation operations in Cambodia (Operation Eagle Pull) and South Vietnam (Operation Frequent Wind) before its collapse. He would later serve as an observer to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in the Middle East. Mattis, MacFarland and McMaster fought in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Natonski worked humanitarian relief operations for Haitian migrants in Cuba before serving in Somali during Operations Restore Hope and Continued Hope in 1993. Casey and MacFarland both served in Bosnia-Herzegovina following the Dayton Peace Accords. Mattis deployed to Afghanistan as part of the initial forces there for Operation Enduring Freedom. He and Natonski additionally were part of the initial 2003 invasion of Iraq leading the 1st Marine Division and 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, designated Task Force Tarawa, respectively. Natonski stands out as the officer with the most relevant career experiences when considering operational history. He participated in a range of stability operations throughout his career. Casey and MacFarland also had operational experiences in stability environments. McMaster and Mattis, the two who seem to receive the most positive press from their time in Iraq, had the least non-offensive operational experience. However, as this study will demonstrate, both officers had education and training to prepare them for what they would face.¹²

Casey was certainly familiar with the concept of counterinsurgency even if he was not well versed or practiced in it prior to his year in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Army published an update to

¹² “General George Casey’s Biography,” *Military Connection*, accessed 22 February 2017, www.militaryconnection.com/george-casey-bio; “Jim Mattis Biography,” US Department of Defense, accessed 38 March 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/About/Biographies/Biography-View/Article/1055835/james-mattis>; “Lieutenant General Richard F. Natonski Biography,” accessed 28 March 2017, <http://archive.is/yZdw>; “LTG Sean MacFarland Biography,” US Department of Defense, accessed 28 March 2017, <http://www.hood.army.mil/leaders/bios/CG.pdf>; “Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster Biography,” US Army Capabilities Integration Center, accessed 28 March 2017, <http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cact/LtGenMcMasterBio.pdf>.

its Vietnam-era counterinsurgency field manual, Field Manual 31-16, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, in 1967 while Casey was a cadet at Georgetown University.¹³ The son of a major general serving in Vietnam, it is likely that Casey kept an eye on developments in that country and had some dialogue with his father during this time.¹⁴ The version of the Army's capstone manual, Field Manual 100-5, *Operations of Army Forces in the Field*, at the time of Casey's commissioning did not address counterinsurgency *per se*, as the Army viewed counterinsurgency as a whole-of-government mission. However, one chapter dealt with internal defense and development as well as stability operations.¹⁵ Also, the manual had a section on fighting guerillas, which is not synonymous with insurgent but is a favored form of insurgent warfare.¹⁶ The 1976 field manual, published when Casey was a captain, would largely ignore these subjects.

Additionally, while the Army curtailed counterinsurgency instruction in the 1970s, during Casey's attendance of the basic and advanced infantry officer courses, students still received instruction on the subject. According to Andrew Birtle, the Infantry School offered "several dozen hours" of course work on the subject until 1978.¹⁷ Casey attended the course between 1974 and 1975.¹⁸ He did not attend the Command and General Staff College or the War College during his career. For his intermediate level education, Casey attended the Armed Service Staff College (now known as the Joint Forces Staff College) where he received training in the operational level of war from a joint perspective. Later, Casey participated in a War College fellowship at the Atlantic Council, a Washington, DC based think tank. These educational experiences compliment Casey's

¹³ Austin Long, *The Soul of Armies: Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Military Culture in the US and UK* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 128.

¹⁴ Casey's father died in helicopter accident in Vietnam on 7 July 1970 around the time Casey's commissioning.

¹⁵ Walter Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine: From the American Revolution to the War on Terror* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2011), 190-1

¹⁶ Ingo Trauschweizer, *The Cold War U.S. Army: Building Deterrence for Limited War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 179.

¹⁷ Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976*, 480.

¹⁸ "General George Casey's Biography."

two civilian degrees in international affairs, a bachelor's from Georgetown University and a master of arts from Denver University. All of Casey's military education instilled him a broad understanding of war and warfare. Casey also had some career experiences that provided him an opportunity to practice political-military cooperation. In the late 1980s he served as the Congressional Program Coordinator in the Office of the Chief of Legislative Liaison and late 1990s he served as the Deputy Director for Politco-Military Affairs in the J-5 (Strategic Plans and Policy) of the Joint Staff. Despite many works painting a picture of him as a non-intellectual stereotypical infantryman, Casey's educational foundation and career demonstrate that he was intellectually curious, well versed in the international environment and strategic context of military operations, and able to work with political leaders.¹⁹

Mattis graduated from Central Washington University in 1972 and Natonski graduated from the University of Louisville in 1973, within six years of the time the Marine Corps updated its counterinsurgency manual, Fleet Marine Force Manual 8-2, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, in December 1967. The manual, replacing Fleet Marine Force Manual-21, was 50 percent larger than its predecessor of the same name.²⁰ It is unclear what of this doctrine Natonski or Mattis knew. Given the Marine Corps' small wars culture, it is nearly certain both had exposure with this doctrine. Natonski, however, clearly had the most experience with non-kinetic military operations. He had a broad base of experience in a wide range of operations focused on the populace. Mattis and Natonski both wrote student papers while at their service schools. Those that survive demonstrate that these officers considered a diverse range of warfighting topics.²¹ These papers

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Long, *The Soul of Armies*, 130.

²¹ James Mattis, "Amphibious Raids: An Historical Imperative for Today's Marines," Student Paper, US Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 1985; James Mattis, "Security Element for Infantry Battalion Headquarters," Student Paper, US Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 1985; Richard Natonski, "Cold Weather Combat: What Is The Marine Corps Doing About It?," Student Paper, US Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 1988.

demonstrate a thoughtful nature, innovative thinking and a desire to develop solutions based on historical study.

While Mattis's career assignments and operational experience did not bring him into contact with stability operations or counterinsurgency, he made up for this in self-education. Mattis was highly influenced by military history having committed to a career-long self study of his profession. Marine Major Michael Valenti, who interviewed the general for a thesis titled "The Mattis Way of War," writes that "Perhaps one of the greatest influences on General Mattis's operational art and leadership is the value he places on the importance of independent study and learning." He further writes, "General Mattis has used history as an intellectual stepping stone for his operational design and art."²² In a 2003 e-mail about the importance of reading, Mattis indicated that his self-study has prepared him for counterinsurgency. He wrote, "Ultimately, a real understanding of history means that we face NOTHING new under the sun. For all the '4th Generation of War' [war that blurs the line between conflict and politics and combatants and civilians] intellectuals running around today saying that the nature of war has fundamentally changed, the tactics are wholly new, etc, I must respectfully say... 'Not really'..."²³ This demonstrates that Mattis valued a broad education as a means of preparing officers for the future.

In 2007, following Mattis's assumption of command of US Marine Forces, CENTCOM, the general published a required reading list for Marines and sailors deploying to his area of responsibility. The list is heavy with counterinsurgency works published in 2006 or later but also contains books such as Bing West's *The Village* and Andrew Krepenivich's *The Army in Vietnam*.²⁴ The former details the Marine Corps Combined Action Platoons employed in Vietnam that placed

²² Michael Valenti, "The Mattis Way of War: An Examination of Operational Art in Task Force 58 and 1st Marine Division," (MMAS Thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2014), 60-1.

²³ Jill Russell, "With rifle and bibliography: General Mattis on professional reading" (7 May 2013), *Strife Blog*, accessed 22 February 2017, <http://www.strifeblog.org/2013/05/07/with-rifle-and-bibliography-general-mattis-on-professional-reading/>. Emphasis in the original.

²⁴ "LtGen James Mattis' Reading List," *Small Wars Journal*, accessed 22 February 2017, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/ltgen-james-mattis-reading-list>.

Marine squads into platoons with indigenous forces for population control and civic action. In the latter, the author argues that the US failed in Vietnam by not embracing counterinsurgency methods. Among others, these two books are instructive of his mindset and the lessons he pulled from history. The list also includes the *Small Wars Manual*, a collection of lessons learned and doctrine developed in the wake of small unit Marine operations in the early 20th century. Last officially published in 1940, the manual focused on low intensity conflicts and actions short of war. Mattis read this prior to 2004.²⁵ Therefore, while the general did not have any tangible experience in counterinsurgency or stability operations, he not only had a broad base of education provided to him as Marine officer but a career-long dedication to self-study. Further, Mattis had three career experiences fighting in war and this certainly prepared him even if the form of warfare was different in 2004.

MacFarland and McMaster likely never received intensive training or education on counterinsurgency as cadets. The United States Military Academy got rid of its mandatory counterinsurgency course in 1974 before either entered the school.²⁶ However, both were cadets when the Army issued Field Manual 100-20, *Low Intensity Conflict* in 1981 and both were junior officers when the Army updated Field Manual 31-16 as Field Manual 90-8, *Counterinsurgency Operations*.²⁷ Also, both officers were cadets at a time when most of their military and academic instructors were veterans of Vietnam. It is almost certain that they received some sort of informal instruction on counterinsurgency.²⁸ While a cadet, MacFarland began a life of reading military history.²⁹ Similarly, as junior officers, MacFarland and McMaster served with many Vietnam

²⁵ Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle of Fallujah* (New York: Bantam Books, 2005), 49-50.

²⁶ Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976*, 480.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 482-3.

²⁸ See Rick Atkinson, *The Long Gray Line: The American Journey of West Point's Class of 1966* (New York: Owl Books, 1989) for a discussion of Vietnam War veterans teaching at the United States Military Academy.

²⁹ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 245.

veterans, especially among their non-commissioned officers providing them some understanding of counterinsurgency at least as it related to Vietnam. McMaster's regimental commander during Operation Desert Storm was then-Colonel L. Don Holder, a veteran of Vietnam. McMaster further wrote a doctoral dissertation on the Vietnam War, which he published as the book *Dereliction of Duty* in 1997.³⁰ Therefore, he was familiar with the Army's most recent large-scale counterinsurgency struggle by the time he arrived in Iraq. Admittedly, his book focuses on the strategic and policy levels and focuses on the roots of the war. However, even at these levels, civilians and military leaders debated matters of counterinsurgency. Regardless, it demonstrates McMaster's intellectual curiosity and the furthering of his understanding of war.

MacFarland is not a graduate of the US Army War College but rather the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. He is also a graduate of the School of Advanced Military Studies, indicating he received a broad base of education in operational art and history. As journalist Fred Kaplan concluded when analyzing the colonel's career and self-study, "In short, [counterinsurgency] was not at all a new subject to MacFarland."³¹ MacFarland wrote two monographs while at the School of Advanced Military Studies. One focused on the applicability of Soviet doctrine to US Army concepts.³² The other argued that current Army doctrine in the form of Air-Land Battle was not likely to be sufficient for future operations and was not suited for low-intensity operations (the category counterinsurgency generally falls into).³³ In addition, MacFarland earned a master's in aerospace engineering from Georgia Tech. Like the rest of the officers in this study, MacFarland had a broad base of military and civilian education that allowed him to understand war, forms of warfare, and the strategic context of war.

³⁰ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998).

³¹ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 245.

³² Sean MacFarland, "Tactical Deep Maneuver: Incorporating the Forward Detachment Concept into U.S. Doctrine" (MMAS thesis, Command and General Staff College, 1994).

³³ Sean MacFarland, "Non-Linear Operations: A New Doctrine for a New Era" (MMAS thesis, Command and General Staff College, 1994).

Each of these officers came up through the ranks learning doctrinal concepts similar to what would later be described in codified counterinsurgency doctrine. Certainly by the mid-1990s, the Army returned to thinking about and codifying low-intensity conflict doctrine. Former Army Chief of Military History John Sloan Brown notes that, “Most soldiers and virtually all combat units had served in stability operations since DESERT STORM...”³⁴ This is true for Natonski, MacFarland, and Casey. Following Operation Desert Storm in 1991, the Army added into its capstone doctrine, Field Manual 100-5, *Operations*, a section on operations other than war (previously part of pre-Vietnam versions). Field Manual 100-23, *Peace Operations*, followed this. The Center for Army Lessons Learned collected and distributed lessons from these operations and officers contributed to the subject through student papers, professional journal articles and blog postings and discussions. Combat training centers integrated guerillas, hostile civilians, refugees, and even non-government organizations from the mid-1990s on. As Brown concluded, “...the underlying principle [of low-intensity conflict] seems to have been grasped by most.”³⁵ The Army did publish Field Manual 3-07, *Stability Operations and Support Operations*, in the month prior to the invasion of Iraq. Many of the concepts in this new manual existed in other doctrinal or academic publications prior to its development.

Even the Army’s and Marine Corps’ capstone doctrines, the primary war fighting publications of both branches, prepared these officers to serve in counterinsurgency or stability operations environments and to develop sound operational approaches. While these manuals historically focused on a single type of warfare, they contain principles and concepts applicable to all types of warfare. The Army’s doctrinal roots are largely based on French and Prussian concepts with particular emphasis on precepts described by Swiss theorist Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini

³⁴ John Sloan Brown, *Kevlar Legions: The Transformation of the United States Army 1989-2005* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 2012), 413. Emphasis in original.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 414-5.

and Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz.³⁶ Army doctrine has historically focused on a high- and mid-intensity warfare with the belief that these types of war were more complex than low-intensity warfare or operations other than war. Austin Long argues that this is due to the Army's cultural roots of the Civil War being its foundational conflict.³⁷ Though, as Army Training and Doctrine Commander General Don Starry argued in the development of the 1982 manual, the Army focused on the war that had to be won. Through the course of history, the Army has participated in a number of operations that capstone doctrine did not cover in particular. Within the past four decades, notable operations, including those in Grenada, Haiti, Panama, Somalia, and Rwanda, forced officers to adapt doctrine with varying degrees of success. Still, each of these conflicts required some degree of concepts found in capstone doctrine: offense, defense, and stability. The Army expanded its discussion of non-offensive and defensive warfare in its 2001 capstone manual, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, due to criticism that previous versions did not go far enough. The manual solidified the concept of Full Spectrum Operations, which required the military to be prepared for operations ranging from peace to declared war. Within that, the Army conducted offensive, defensive, stability and support operations. Each of these types received their own chapter.³⁸ The 2001 manual would be the basis for officer education, especially at the Command and General Staff Officer's Course and the Battle Command Training Program, which trained staffs and commanders above brigade level. However, the manual did not appear to be sufficient for Iraq and thus on 1 October 2004 the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth issued Field Manual (Interim) 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations*.³⁹ While Field Manual 3-24 would become the official manual, this was the first centralized doctrine on counterinsurgency published in the 21st century.

³⁶ Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine*.

³⁷ Long, *The Soul of Armies*, 38-41.

³⁸ Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine*, 248-55.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 264.

Counterinsurgency was not necessarily an overlooked or dismissed form of warfare in capstone doctrine. In 1979, Chief of Staff of the Army General Edward Meyer worried that the new version of Field Manual 100-5, *Operations*-still in writing at the time-did not dedicate space to counterinsurgency. Ultimately, the commander of Training and Doctrine Command, General Donn Starry convinced him it was better to focus on the most dangerous task-war in Europe-and the forces could react to other forms of war if necessary. Both Starry and Meyer would have preferred two forces and two doctrines, one for general purpose and one for Europe, but ultimately acknowledged it was not feasible.⁴⁰ Still, the final manual acknowledged that counterinsurgency was a form of warfare for which the Army needed to prepare.⁴¹ So, the Army Casey, McMaster, and MacFarland came up in was not one that shied away from counterinsurgency but one that simply could not afford to focus on the concept and land war in Europe at the same time. If two of the highest-ranking Army officers occupied their time thinking about this form of warfare, others throughout the ranks did as well.

The doctrinal roots of the Marine Corps are different than those of the Army. The Marine Corps' culture historically has split between amphibious operations and small wars or imperial policing.⁴² For much of the Marine Corps' history it was not large enough to form brigades or divisions and thus its warfighting cultural is based around smaller units. In the 1930s, the Marine Corps codified small wars in doctrine, culminating with the issuance of the *Manual for Small Wars Operations* in 1935.⁴³ While Marine culture shifted throughout the rest of the century between emphasis on small wars and amphibious operations, General Charles Krulak, Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1995-1999 emphasized the former, especially in his concepts of the "strategic corporal" and the "Three Block War," which required a single unit to conduct multiple types of

⁴⁰ Trauschweizer, *The Cold War U.S. Army*, 218.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 223

⁴² Long, *The Soul of Armies*, 67.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 79.

operations in a small area.⁴⁴ It was not until 1989 that the Marines had a consolidated capstone manual. Fleet Marine Force Manual 1, *Warfighting*, and its successor Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, *Warfighting* (1997), demonstrated a strong preference for the ideas of Carl von Clausewitz as the author described in his book *On War*. Chapter 1 of the 1997 manual contains sections on Friction, Uncertainty, Complexity, the Human Dimension, and Physical, Moral, and Mental Forces.⁴⁵ In fact, the manual mentions Clausewitz by name several times. These manuals describe the Marines' version of maneuver warfare. In 2001, the Marine Corps published Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-0, *Marine Corps Operations*, as a follow up. This capstone manual in use at the time of the Marine deployment to Anbar is quite similar to the Army's Field Manual 3-0 published in the same year. It is a broad doctrine describing tactical and operational employment across a spectrum of conflict. It has one chapter on Military Operations Other Than War (19 pages).⁴⁶

Both Field Manual 3-0 and Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-0 were manuals designed to provide a philosophy of warfighting and a guide to planning. They also contained several principles and precepts. While the Marines demonstrated a more clear bias toward Clausewitz, both contained elements of his theory as well as the theories of Jomini. Neither capstone manual truly addressed counterinsurgency. Both described operations other than war (stability operations for the Army), but did not view these operations as separate from the typical tenets and principles of military operations. In effect, these doctrines were intended to be adaptable to any situation a force may find itself in. Thus, they were common starting points for staffs and commanders when entering into both familiar and unfamiliar operations.

⁴⁴ Charles Krulak, "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War," accessed 22 February 2017, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic_corporal.htm.

⁴⁵ Marine Corps Doctrine Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1997), 3-20.

⁴⁶ Marine Corps Doctrine Publication (MCDP) 1-0, *Marine Corps Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), iii-x.

While neither the Army's nor the Marine Corps' capstone doctrine at the outset of the insurgency in Iraq appears sufficient for guiding a force in how to conduct those types of operations, both manuals provided a philosophy of war and framework that provided useful tenets and precepts for military forces in all types of warfare. In that, these manuals contributed to the broad base of knowledge and experience that the officers in this study possessed at the outset of their deployments. While none may have possessed a how-to counterinsurgency manual, each was nonetheless prepared for the challenge due to a career of institutional education, experiential learning, and training as well as personal self study that provided them an ability to think critically and creatively. None of the officers was a specialist in any form of warfare. All trained in maneuver warfare and learned its doctrine in various military courses. However, each additionally had experience or had studied non-maneuver warfare or military tasks, whether that was peacekeeping, noncombatant evacuation, humanitarian assistance, or counterinsurgency.

That each of these five officers came into command with the ability to adapt to the insurgency they faced speaks volumes about the military's ability to select and develop officers. None of the officers had a similar career path. Three entered through Reserve Officer Training Corps and two through the United States Military Academy. Four had advanced degrees, though none through the same program; MacFarland earned his from the School of Advanced Military Studies, Mattis earned his at the National War College, McMaster received one as part of his education to become a faculty member at West Point, and Casey attended Denver University for two years between assignments. Natonski had a career of experiences in operations other than war, whereas Mattis had a very conventionally focused career. Casey served in various roles in the capital region. What all of these officers had in common was that they each had similar key positions such as platoon leader, company commander, operations officer, executive officer, and battalion commander. Further, they each had a broad base of military education and demonstrated intellectual curiosity from an early point in their career whether that was through personal reading,

civilian education or both. These were officers worthy of their ranks who could take their experience, education, training and doctrinal knowledge and combine that with focused research to think critically and creatively about the problem they faced. The sections that follow will demonstrate that these officers arrived in their positions prepared for the challenge and applied history, theory, and doctrine (both contemporary and older versions) to develop operational approaches tailored to their situations.

Developing the Operational Approach at the Top: Multi-National Force-Iraq

Unlike some of the commanders in this study, Casey had very little notice he would be taking command in Iraq. Of the other four, only Natonski also took command of an organization already in Iraq. Casey arrived expecting to find a completed campaign plan, but the plan was still in draft form.⁴⁷ Therefore, Casey fell back on his prior experience and directed a doctrinally sound development of an operational approach. Prior to leaving for Iraq in June 2004, he had met with several political leaders and received guidance from the President and Secretary of Defense. After taking command on 1 July, he sat down with then US CENTCOM commander, General John Abizaid (who had replaced Franks), to receive his guidance as well. He also met with John Negroponte, the American ambassador to Iraq.⁴⁸

Casey established a group of experts from multiple agencies to look at the problem from a non-traditional viewpoint. This group, known as a Red Team, consisted of members of the Special Intelligence Service, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the American and British embassies as well as Casey's staff. A senior member of the US embassy led the team with an American major general as the deputy.⁴⁹ Casey's intent was to develop a common visualization of the situation

⁴⁷ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 97.

⁴⁸ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 20.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

between his command and the State Department.⁵⁰ Following the Red Team's report, published on 15 July, Casey and Negroponte developed a combined military and State Department mission statement. The statement read, "In partnership with the Iraqi Government, MNF-I conducts full spectrum counterinsurgency operations to isolate and neutralize former regime extremists and foreign terrorists and organizes, trains and equips Iraqi security forces in order to create a security environment that permits completion of the [United Nations Security Council Resolution] 1546 process on schedule."⁵¹ Combining the visualization from the Red Team and the joint mission statement, Casey's staff began work on a campaign plan.⁵² While the staff worked on the operational approach, the Red Team continued to assess the situation. Throughout this course, Casey participated in the operations process while conducting his other command duties.⁵³

Casey published his initial campaign plan on 5 August 2004. Casey outlines four lines of effort (lines of operation in his terminology): security, governance, economic development, and communicating, which roughly translate to the four instruments of national power: diplomacy, information, military, and economics.⁵⁴ Each of these lines of effort had associated effects (effect is an element of operational design, a joint and army concept). These lines of effort, as illustrated in Figure 1, flowed toward an end state which was, "Iraq at peace with its neighbors and an ally in the war on terror, with a representative government that respects the human rights of all Iraqis and security force sufficient to maintain domestic order and to deny safe haven to terrorists."⁵⁵ Casey and his staff also spent a significant amount of time discussing the center of gravity, developing strategic and operational centers of gravity that are in accordance with joint doctrine on operational

⁵⁰ Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama* (New York: Vintage Press, 2013), 95.

⁵¹ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 29.

⁵² Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame*, 97

⁵³ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 26-28

⁵⁴ Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Print Office, 2013), I-11-I-13.

⁵⁵ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 31.

design.⁵⁶ Ultimately, Casey's centers of gravity were coalition public support for the mission (strategic) and the legitimacy and responsibility of the Iraqi government (operational).⁵⁷ In describing his approach, Casey wrote, "we laid out a counterinsurgency strategy that sought to use the full spectrum of military and civilian tools to separate insurgents and extremists from the Iraqi people and defeat the insurgency while we restored Iraqi capacity to govern and secure the country."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 28-31.

⁵⁷ Donald Wright and Timothy Reese, *On Point II: Transition to the New Campaign: The United States in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM May 2003-January 2005* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 178.

⁵⁸ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 30.

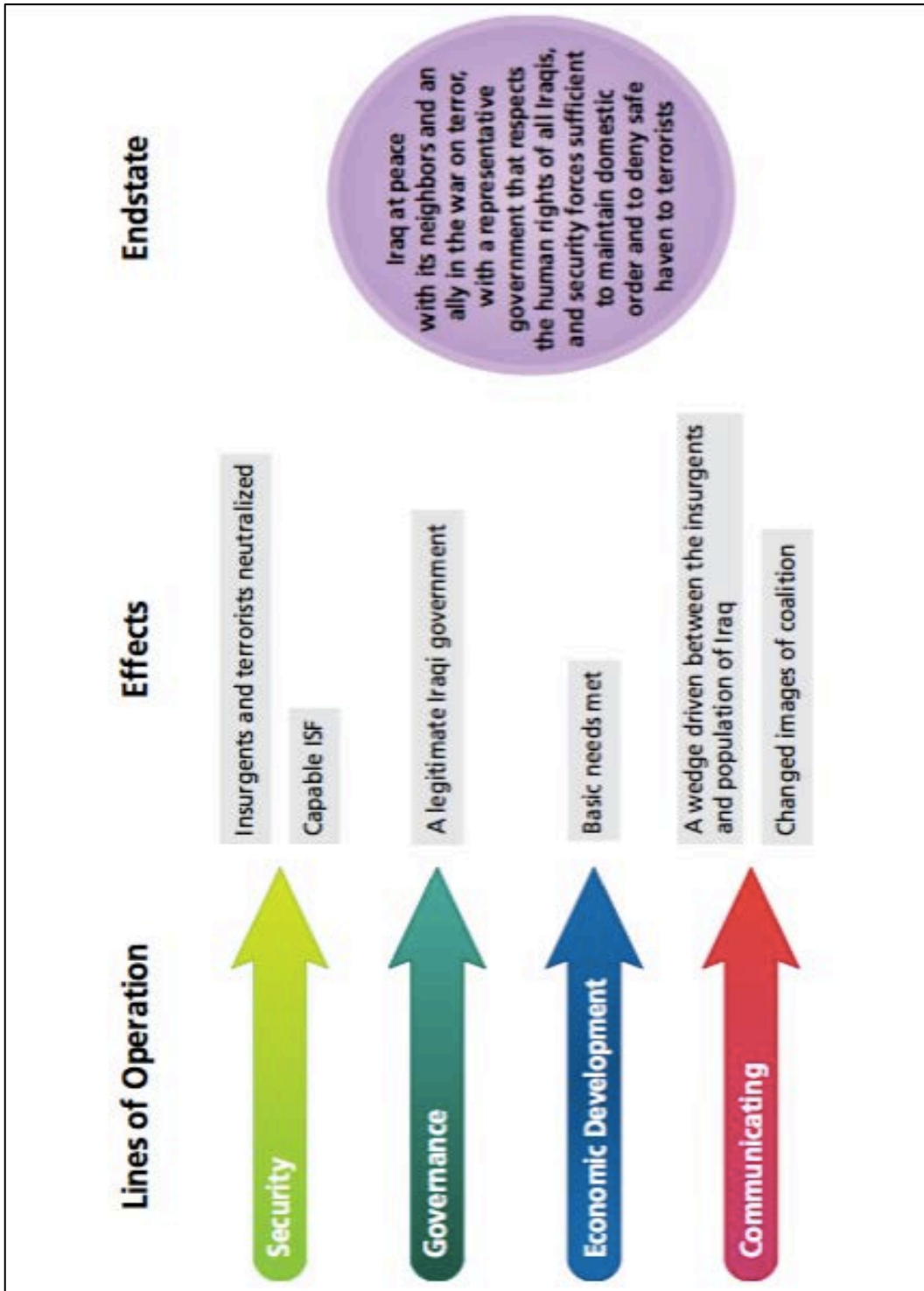


Figure 1: Multi-National Force-Iraq Initial Operational Approach. Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 31.

The initial campaign plan was intended to get the coalition forces to the end of the United Nations mandate eighteen months later. Given that Casey’s Red Team continued to work on the

problem, he knew that his initial campaign was only the beginning. His operational approach would have to evolve. Implicitly, Casey understood war as a complex adaptive system responsive to feedback. By leveraging diplomatic, informational, economic, and military power toward his ends, the interactions of the agents and systems within the system would produce feedback requiring MNF-I to adapt. Sunni and Shi'a insurgent groups would create competition requiring the coalition to alter its approach and makeup.⁵⁹ While Casey's initial operational approach came about using operations doctrine and an assessment of the situation, it would evolve through the use of theory, history, and doctrine.

In addition to continuing the work of the Red Team, Casey and his director of strategy, plans, and assessment, Air Force Brigadier General Stephen Sargeant, gathered a group of experts to increase the staff's competency in counterinsurgency. This group largely consisted of PhD holders who worked for the RAND Corporation as well as Army Colonel William Hix, a Special Forces officer with experience in counterinsurgency operations in the Philippines. Hix recruited Kalev Sepp, a former history instructor at West Point with a PhD from Harvard.⁶⁰ Sepp, a retired Army officer, had also served in the Special Forces and had taught a class on insurgency and revolution at West Point. Sepp additionally had experience in Honduras and El Salvador. Both Hix and Sepp would become influential in Casey's development of an operational approach.

Casey felt that his forces needed a greater understanding of the practice of counterinsurgency. His "perception, from observing and talking to subordinates, was that [the coalition] understood the doctrine well enough, but that [they] all had a lot to learn about how to apply that doctrine, particularly in Iraq."⁶¹ Therefore, he directed the staff in September 2004 to distill relevant lessons from history that they could share and implement. Sepp became the point

⁵⁹ See Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton University Press, 1998); Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 157.

⁶⁰ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*. 97-99.

⁶¹ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 44

man on this analysis. He studied fifty-three insurgencies from the twentieth century and came up with twelve successful and nine unsuccessful practices. To a degree, this validated existing theories, such as those of David Galula, Frank Kitson, and Robert Thompson, in an empirical fashion by demonstrating the historical practices that the theories describe and prescribe. This study would later be included as an unclassified annex to the updated campaign plan. *Military Review*, the professional journal centered at Fort Leavenworth, published this annex as an article.⁶²

As part of his desire to adapt to the situation Casey ordered semi-annual “Campaign Progress Reviews.” These reviews looked at the situation and recommended adjustments to the operational approach as necessary. Sepp would be a part of the first review in late 2004 and his recent paper informed the discussion.⁶³ The review saw the operational approach as sound but in need of some tweaks and enhancements. In particular, the review found that there needed to be a more effective implementation of non-kinetic operations and that Iraqis needed to take on a larger role.⁶⁴ The results of this review demonstrate the premise that theory, history, and doctrine played a role in the development of the operational approach. In the first campaign plan, there was a reflection of operations doctrine in its development as well as familiarity with what is necessary to stabilize a nation. The review, with some influence from Sepp’s study of history, reflected the increase in counterinsurgency-specific knowledge on the staff, which came from theory and history. Casey took further steps to spread this knowledge of theory, history and doctrine when he established the Counterinsurgency Academy at Taji, Iraq, requiring all incoming commanders to

⁶² Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 104-5; Kalev Sepp, “Best Practices in Counterinsurgency,” *Military Review*, LXXXV, no. 3 (May-June 2005), 8-12.

⁶³ Carter Malkasian, “Counterinsurgency in Iraq: May 2003 – January 2007”, in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, eds. Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 250.

⁶⁴ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 47.

attend.⁶⁵ Casey also established the Phoenix Academy, a school that employed Special Forces soldiers to train the trainers of indigenous forces.⁶⁶

Casey would continue to adapt his operational approach through a combination of Campaign Progress Reviews, Red Team reports, and other ordered assessments. At least once, he received written national strategic guidance. In November 2005 he received the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq from the National Security Council. The guidance laid out political, economic, and security lines of effort leading to an end state that appears to restate the one Casey and Negroponte wrote the year prior, “A new Iraq with a constitutional, representative government that respects civil rights and has security forces sufficient to maintain domestic order and keep Iraq from becoming a safe haven for terrorists.” The guidance in many ways validated that Casey’s approach was in line with strategic goals. It did, however, introduce the terms “Clear”, “Hold,” and “Build”, which Casey had not used in previous versions of his approach. While the guidance contained in this document was not a significant departure from the existing approach, Casey decided to meet with Ambassador Negroponte and issue a new joint mission statement as well as new objectives. This strategic vision was also incorporated into the December 2005 Campaign Progress Review.⁶⁷

As 2005 came to a close, Casey and his staff deduced that they had made significant progress in blunting the main insurgent group, Al Qaeda in Iraq, but also saw the rise in sectarian violence. This portended a shift in the nature of the war, and thus it led them to consider changes to their operational approach.⁶⁸ Ultimately, Casey has received heavy criticism for attempting to reduce the number of US troops involved in direct combat roles and consolidating the number of

⁶⁵ Malkasian, “Counterinsurgency in Iraq,” 252; Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 73.

⁶⁶ Casey, *Strategic Reflections*, 61.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 77-8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

bases his troops owned.⁶⁹ However, it was not a terrible departure from the conclusions of Sepp's article and there were political considerations as well.

If MNF-I did significantly degrade the primarily anti-government insurgent forces in Iraq, then Casey's operational approach was sound. Evidence suggests this may be the case. As Casey stated, the main source of violence in the 2006 time frame came from sectarian violence. While this portended a civil war, it also demonstrates that the main anti-government insurgency was significantly blunted. Thus Casey's approach adequately dealt with the threat that existed when he arrived but may have overlooked other potentially destabilizing sources of violence. Reducing the influence of the main anti-government group in Iraq may also have created a situation where Sunni's felt compelled to fight for themselves thus triggering an increase in Shia militant actions. Due to the improved security that came during Petraeus's tenure, many have concluded that that commander and not Casey developed the operational approach that restored security to Iraq. However, given the history of counterinsurgency, it is hard to believe that actions of one commander over eighteen months could have led on their own to such a dramatic turnaround. Certainly, Casey and his staff helped lay the groundwork even if a later commander altered some of their tenets. First, Casey established the framework MNF-I actions in the four lines of effort. Second, Casey developed the COIN and Phoenix Academies, which continued to train commanders and advisors through Petraeus's tenure. Third, Casey built the infrastructure and security forces to a point that provided Petraeus the means to implement a reimagined operational approach.

It is easy to see how Casey and his staff employed operational art. Casey's focus was on fulfilling his United Nations mandate and ensuring his military operations aligned with the political (strategic) goals of the ambassador and president. Casey did not generally direct tactical operations, however, he did oversee four lines of effort and three specific tactical missions: training and advising security forces, tactical operations, and special operations missions. Casey and his staff

⁶⁹ See Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*; Ricks, *The Gamble*; West, *No True Glory*.

used elements of operational art such as centers of gravity, basing, and lines of effort in building their approach.

They also demonstrated an understanding of theories of war and warfare. Above all, the main ideas of Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz and Swiss theorist Antoine Henri de Jomini, well entrenched in Army doctrine, stand out in his adherence to political directives and arrangement of tactical missions. Counterinsurgency theorists also influenced the operational approach that MNF-I developed. While Casey does not mention any particular theorist in his memoir aside from T.E. Lawrence, he does indicate that his staff studied and understood counterinsurgency theory. Similarly, Casey and his staff employed a wide survey of history to develop their operational approach. Further, many members of the staff and Casey himself had experience in the 1990s succession of peacekeeping and stability operations that informed them. Casey and his staff were further able to adapt doctrine to the situation at hand using a mix of stability, peace keeping, offensive, and operations doctrine.

Casey and his staff were a highly experienced and informed group. Casey had more than 30 years of experience and military education. His deployment to Bosnia certainly informed him about the type of warfare MNF-I was engaged in. Beyond that his graduate studies, fellowship, experience with Congress, and service as Vice Chief of Staff informed his understanding of the strategic context and political dimension of the war. Casey learned throughout his career to deal with other government agencies and political leaders. Sepp had earned a PhD as well as taught and participated in counterinsurgent warfare. Hix had at least twenty years of experience and military education as well as operational counterinsurgency experience. Many other members of the staff held doctorates. Casey and his staff used their broad development, their educations and theory, history and doctrine to develop their approach. Far from being dull, Casey was a thoughtful, well educated, and highly experienced officer prepared for the complexity of Iraq.

The Marines and Counterinsurgency in Anbar Province

The development of the 1st Marine Division's operational approach started at Camp Pendleton, California several months before Casey took charge in Iraq. Major General James Mattis and Lieutenant General James Conway, commander of 1st Marine Division's parent unit 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, discussed their approach while looking at the problem prior to the division's February 2004 deployment. Mattis's division would be the primarily ground element for Conway's force. Therefore, both generals worked together on their operational approach. They decided to try a population-centric approach with a heavy emphasis on the development of indigenous security forces.

As he did throughout his career, Mattis studied intently prior to deploying. In this case, he used a mix of expired doctrine, history books, and even *National Geographic* magazines.⁷⁰ He focused some of his study on the French 10th Parachute Division in Algeria in 1960.⁷¹ The general brought veterans of Vietnam War Combined Action Platoons to talk to his troops. The division commander further directed the development of one Combined Action Platoon per battalion and looked to increase the language capacity of his troops. In addition, Mattis brought Naval Postgraduate School Arabist Barak Salmoni to teach culture to his Marines.⁷² This indicates that Mattis valued the works of Bing West and Andrew Krepenovich – which were on his reading list. Mattis also required his Marines to read the Marine Corps *Small Wars Manual*.⁷³ The 1st Marine Division's operational approach would continue to evolve throughout the unit's deployment, but from the start it incorporated doctrine and history.

⁷⁰ Valenti, "The Mattis Way of War," 48.

⁷¹ Charles Neimeyer, Interview with James Mattis, *Al-Anbar Awakening: Volume I, American Perspectives*, eds. Timothy McWilliams and Kurtis Wheeler (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 2009), 26.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷³ West, *No True Glory*, 49-50.

Mattis also worked with Marine agencies to develop the training necessary for the operational approach. Initially his division established a mock Iraqi village in an abandoned housing area at March Air Force Base and began conducting scenario training with role players to replicate the environment Marines would face in Anbar. During this time, Mattis had communication with the 82nd Airborne Division's unit in Anbar. The Marine Corps Warfighting Lab and Training and Education Command assisted in bolstering the training.⁷⁴ The Marines also turned to the Los Angeles Police Department to learn how to police a large, multi-ethnic urban center.⁷⁵

Mattis developed his operational approach using elements of what the military now recognizes as design. The main basis for it indicates the level of research into Iraq that the commander and his staff did. 1st Marine Division classified the main agents in Anbar into three broad categories: the tribes, the former regime elements, and the foreign fighters. In Mattis's view, each of these required a separate focus, though to a degree the tribes and former regime elements interacted while each of the group contained criminals. To focus on the tribes, the main mechanism was to secure the local environment with jobs as a supporting effort. Former regime members would either be converted or defeated and foreign fighter would be destroyed. Mattis employed two lines of effort (termed elements in his vernacular) as shown in Figure 2: Diminish Support to Insurgency (main effort) and Neutralize Bad Actors (shaping effort). Supporting the main effort were efforts to promote governance, economic development, essential services, and development of Iraqi security forces. At the base of the operational approach were combat operations and information operations. The Marine Corps described information operations as an "overarching 'bodyguard'" to the two lines of effort.⁷⁶ Describing his own view of this approach, Mattis said,

⁷⁴ Neimeyer, Interview with James Mattis, 22

⁷⁵ Ibid., 25

⁷⁶ Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 5-1, *Marine Corps Planning Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), J1-J2.

[W]e are now going into what we consider to be a counterinsurgent effort, and that required what I called the three P's [sic]: patient, persistent, presence. Patience you understood. That word sends a message. Persistent, you can't go in and come out, you can't be episodic. And presence, you've got to be there or you're not influential. And this included building Iraqi security forces, which unfortunately had been basically put together with uniforms and a modicum of training, rather than taking the time to build them correctly.⁷⁷

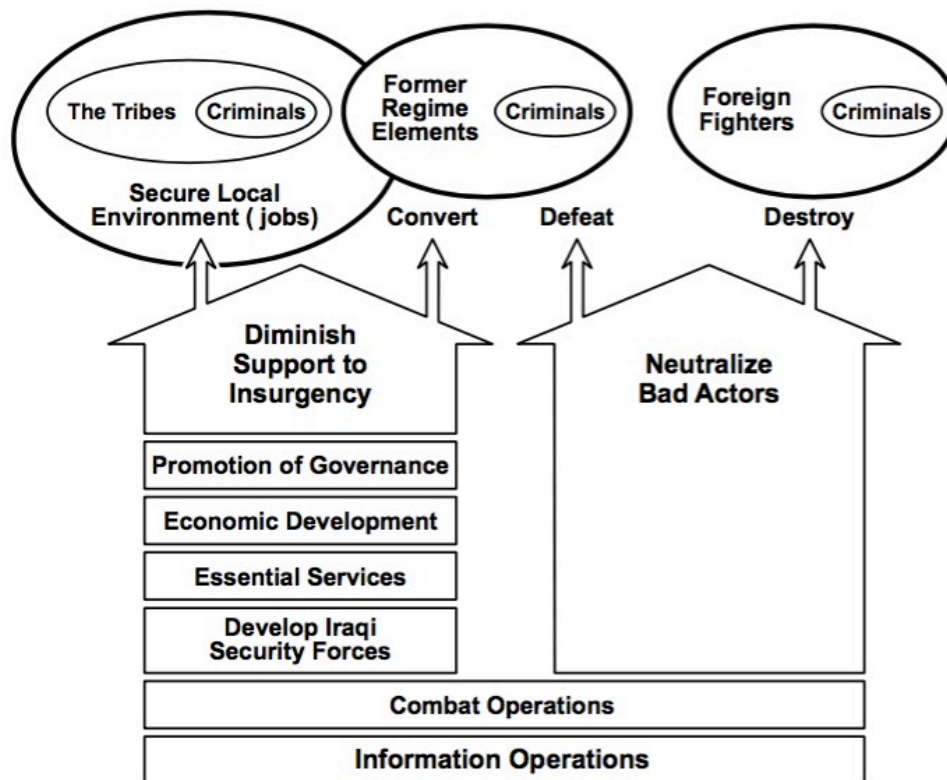


Figure 2: III Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) Operational Approach for Anbar Province. MCWP 5-1, *Marine Corps Planning Process*, J1.

Mattis and his staff added to this approach by creating an opening gambit that served as an interim-operating concept. His staff issued this plan through Fragmentary Order 0011-04 titled “Fallujah Opening Gambit” which was known colloquially around the division as “First 15 Plays” (See Appendix A). The order consisted of kinetic operations designed to increase security, defeat the enemy and build the capacity of indigenous security personnel such as police and border patrol as well as civic action such as populace engagements, distribution of necessary supplies and

⁷⁷ Neimeyer, Interview with James Mattis, 29.

reducing support for insurgent forces among the people.⁷⁸ Essentially, it was means for working toward the two lines of effort of Diminish Support for the Insurgency and Neutralize Bad Actors. The tenets of the plan are deliberately vague to allow freedom of action. These prescriptions reflect a balanced approach to the problem and demonstrate an understanding of the concepts of counterinsurgency. Mattis stated in an interview that this approach “was based on a study of history, understanding of COIN doctrine, and a recognition that this was going to be an ethically and morally bruising environment that we had to prepare the troops for.”⁷⁹

Mattis’s operational approach received a setback due to greater than expected violence in Anbar province and the murder of four Blackwater contractors in March 2004 whose bodies were hung from a bridge in Fallujah. The action occurred just prior to Mattis taking the reins and he tried to urge calm amongst his civilian and military superiors that would allow him to employ his “Fallujah Opening Gambit”. However, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld ordered an assault on the city, which forced the Marines into a solely kinetic operational approach in the city for the time being.⁸⁰ The Marines were able to stand up an indigenous security force known as the Fallujah Brigade. However, there were many problems with this as well. In fact, it would come to be run by and filled with former Ba’athist sectarians and had to be disbanded carefully.⁸¹

The fight for the city was known as Operation Vigilant Resolve or the First Battle of Fallujah and occurred from 3 to 30 April 2004. As images of the fighting and news of the operation spread, President Bush came under fire from the United Nations, the Iraq Governing Council, coalition partners, Bremer and the American people who were all unhappy with what they were

⁷⁸ Dick Camp, *Operation Phantom Fury: The Assault and Capture of Fallujah, Iraq* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2009), 37.

⁷⁹ Neimeyer, Interview with James Mattis, 26.

⁸⁰ Camp, *Operation Phantom Fury*, 56-8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 89-92.

seeing for a variety of reasons to include humanitarian concerns and the cost of fighting.⁸² Sensitive to these political considerations, the administration ordered the halting of offensive operations. Mattis attempted to continue his original operational approach following the cease-fire but Vigilant Resolve emboldened insurgents and made civic actions difficult inside Fallujah. However, with insurgents occupied in Fallujah, the 1st Marine Division saw better success outside the city.⁸³

The Marines intended to conduct another battle to retake Fallujah but had to wait until the summer force rotations went into effect. Marines were nearing the end to their seven month deployment cycles and many of the Army units in support had been in Iraq since just after the 2003 invasion and it was time for them to return home. The first battle had to be planned hastily due to the political pressure to act quickly. The next one would take some time to properly plan. Therefore, the 1st Marine Division focuses on providing security, stability operations, securing routes, and training an Iraqi security force that would be effective and legitimate.⁸⁴

Mattis did not sit by idly biding his time. He worked to block insurgents from movement in and out of Fallujah. Without his forces tied up in the city, he was able to maximize his efforts in other parts of Anbar. He applied pressure to several areas working along the lines of his predetermined course of action. He pressed the enemy through ambushes, continuous patrols to demonstrate the presence of marines and soldiers, and employment of civil military operations.⁸⁵ However, the force rotation forced the Marines to slow their operations until the new forces were in place and prepared to conduct combat operations.

In August Mattis left Iraq and turned his division over to Natonski. Natonski's new deputy, Brigadier General Joseph Dunford who had been Mattis's chief of staff until August, noted that

⁸² Ibid., 80.

⁸³ Kenneth Estes, "U.S. Marine Corps Operations in Iraq, 2003-2006" (Occasional Paper, History Division, United States Marine Corps, 2009), 41-8.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 45.

there were no major changes to the operational approach at the handover referring to Natonski's direction as "continue to march" in Anbar.⁸⁶ However, the new division commander did deviate from Mattis with respect to the plan to clear Fallujah. He did this generally by adding forces to the upcoming ground assault.⁸⁷ Outside of Fallujah, the operational approach that focused on civic action balanced with kinetic operations continued. However, within Fallujah, it became clear that no civic action would succeed in the town without addressing the lack of security in the town. Thus, in most of the portion of Anbar under Natonski, Marines and attached units focused on both lines of effort. Within the city, the focus remained heavily on the "Neutralize Bad Actors" line of effort.

Natonski's operational approach demonstrated the characteristics of the so-called classic counterinsurgency theory, particularly that of French theorist David Galula. The second operation to clear Fallujah in November and December 2004, where Natonski was the ground force commander, adheres to Galula's theory that the first step at the tactical level is the "[d]estruction or expulsion of the insurgent force" from an area of operations. The Frenchman notes that the initial clearance operation is not an end, but a means to allow more nuanced operations. Despite his talk of destruction or expulsion, Galula acknowledged that this first step will not actually destroy the enemy so much as clear him from an area.⁸⁸

While Natonski would retain much of Mattis's operational approach for Anbar as a whole, he gathered an operational planning team to develop a viable course of action for Fallujah. Said Natonski, "We brought as many Army planners in as we could, and as we went through the development of our courses of action and we wargamed [sic] them, it became very apparent that despite the fact that I had a division at my disposal, I was also responsible for the entire Al Anbar

⁸⁶ Camp, *Operation Phantom Fury*, 114.

⁸⁷ West, *No True Glory*, 258.

⁸⁸ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (West Port, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 75.

Province.”⁸⁹ Natonski understood through planning that he needed to balance the fight for Fallujah with the larger operational needs of the province. He also realized that there needed to be a strong mobile force that would allow him to attack from the outside in. As Natonski looked at his force, he determined that he needed heavy Army units and military police to help cordon off the city. Thus, he requested and received two Army mechanized battalions and a brigade of combat support troops.⁹⁰ Galula described the first operations as starting with a build up of forces on the outside of the selected area to include mobile units and those allocated to remain in the area. These units then should push in a succession of rings to catch the enemy.⁹¹ While the actual battle, named Phantom Fury or Al-Fajr in Arabic (7 November to 23 December 2004), did not feature a constricting ring, it did seek to seal off the city and use a mobile force to hammer against a static anvil. Following the operation, Marine units implemented a tightly controlled resettlement that brought residents in slowly to prevent insurgents from reentering in large numbers. As a way of moving forward, each resettled resident received \$2500 to help them reestablish their lives in the city and offset costs of being without a home for several weeks.⁹² Describing this approach later, Natonski said, “the Battle of Fallujah was an illustration of jointness [sic], maybe on a smaller level than a joint task force. I’m not sure that people could really envision what we pulled off. It was because [Marine and Army leaders]. It was the same with the Iraqi forces. We brought them into the fold. We trained them before we went into battle...They were very proud of their performance in Fallujah. We were trying to build the confidence of the Iraqi units in their proficiency during the battle as well, and I think we were successful in that.”⁹³

⁸⁹ Laurence Lessard, Interview with Lieutenant General Richard Natonski, 5 April 2007, Contemporary Operations Study Steam, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 5.

⁹⁰ Camp, *Operation Phantom Fury*, 123; Matt Matthews, “Operation AL FAJR: A Study in Army and Marine Corps Joint Operations,” Global War on Terrorism Occasional Paper, Combat Studies Institute, US Army Combined Arms Center, 2006, 13.

⁹¹ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 76.

⁹² Wright and Reese, *On Point II*, 358.

⁹³ Lessard. Interview with Lieutenant General Richard Natonski, 10.

According to Galula, the operation has succeeded if the static unit can conduct its normal operations relatively free from hampering. By this criterion, Operation Al-Fajr was a success. The next step for Galula is the deployment of the static unit, which includes searching out remnants of the insurgent force.⁹⁴ The Marines continued to hunt insurgents after the end of the operation. Galula's next three steps are: Contact with and control of the population, destruction of the insurgent political organization, and local elections.⁹⁵ Marine operations following Al-Fajr focused largely on securing elections (national and regional) and rebuilding Fallujah in effort to build governance and restore the economy as well as undermine insurgents.⁹⁶ At least 65 percent of the population came out for three elections in the year following the operation, allowing the coalition to help build a municipal government.⁹⁷ In effect, the goal was to gain control of the population and destroy the organization of the insurgents. This further demonstrates a return to the principles laid out in Mattis's original operational approach.

The Marine operational approach developed first by Mattis and refined and furthered by Natonski demonstrates a mixture of theory, doctrine, and history. Like the Army, the Marines had not updated their counterinsurgency doctrine since Vietnam. However, Mattis understood that existing operations doctrine and even old manuals could provide useful guidance. Thus, he not only referred to a sixty-four year old manual but also forced his Marines to digest the doctrine. Mattis further dedicated himself to a deep study of Iraq and a thorough study of counterinsurgency history, particularly Marine operations in Vietnam. While Natonski's particular interest in history is hard to pin down, his career provided him a wealth of understanding. Over a lifetime of service, Natonski's experience became a form of history of its own informing him what was important. This is likely why Natonski so readily accepted the majority of Mattis's approach; he appeared to take what

⁹⁴ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 77.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81-89.

⁹⁶ Estes, "U.S. Marine Corps Operations," 67.

⁹⁷ Malkasian, "Counterinsurgency in Iraq," 250.

Mattis had built and apply specific changes rather than develop a new approach. Natonski stated in an interview that he used lessons from Mattis to alter his approach.⁹⁸ While the two had widely different careers, they saw operations in a similar manner based on shared understanding of doctrine. Mattis's study of the subject and Natonski's experience in stability operations led them to similar conclusions. Finally, Natonski demonstrated an adherence to the main tenets of the classical theory and developed a plan using those tenets.

Counterinsurgency at the Brigade Level: Tal Afar and Ramadi

Unlike Natonski and Mattis, Colonel H.R. McMaster did not serve in the initial phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. However, when he brought his 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment to Tal Afar, Iraq, it was not his first time in the country. Nor was it his first time considering the problems of Iraq. In November 2003, the US Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership published McMaster's thesis: "Crack in the Foundation: Defense Transformation and the Underlying Assumption of Dominant Knowledge in Future War." While not a paper about counterinsurgency, the paper does compare Operation Iraqi Freedom to other post-Desert Storm conflicts.⁹⁹ During this time, McMaster was serving on CENTCOM staff, where he had been during the invasion of Iraq. He first was Abizaid's executive officer when the former was the deputy of CENTCOM and then became the leader of the commander's initiatives group when Abizaid took the reigns of the command.¹⁰⁰ During this time, McMaster began sowing the seeds of the operational approach he would develop in 2005.

McMaster immersed himself in the counterinsurgency writings of past theorists and practitioners. Along with books, he seized on the proceedings of a 1962 RAND corporation

⁹⁸ Lessard. Interview with Lieutenant General Richard Natonski, 3.

⁹⁹ H.R. McMaster, "Crack in the Foundation: Defense Transformation and the Underlying Assumption of Dominant Knowledge in Future War," Student Issue Paper, Center for Strategic Leadership, US Army War College, 2003.

¹⁰⁰ Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 170.

counterinsurgency symposium whose participants included Galula, British officer Frank Kitson who had served during the Malayan Emergency, and US Air Force Major General Edward Lansdale who had advised Philippine president Ramon Magsaysay during the Huk Rebellion. He also spent time visiting Iraq and observing actions on the ground, which allowed him to interpret good and poor practices. From all of this, McMaster came to the conclusion that the clear, hold, build approach was a viable one for operations in Iraq.¹⁰¹

McMaster took command of his brigade in June 2004 and began revising training that put his brigade in situations similar to those found in Iraq such as traffic control points, engaging local leaders and dealing with uncertain situations where the enemy is hard to distinguish from the populace. He required his commissioned and non-commissioned officers to read an array of counterinsurgency texts, to include John Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, a comparison of British and American operations in Malaya and Vietnam respectively, and also the writings of T.E. Lawrence, who had led indigenous insurgents against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War.¹⁰² However, despite all of his study and preparation, McMaster could not develop his final operational approach until after arriving in Iraq. This was because his brigade first went to southern Iraq in February 2005 before being sent to Tal Afar in the north. Thus, he had to adjust to a new environment and problem once in theater.

Upon receiving his mission to move to Tal Afar, McMaster finalized his operational approach. McMaster's staff culled through the intelligence reports that a brigade under the 101st Airborne Division had filed in 2003 and 2004 to gain an understanding of the situation. The commander also brought then Lieutenant General Petraeus, who was serving as the commander of Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq, to the area for advice as the general had

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² George Packer, "The Lesson of Tal Afar: Is It Too Late for the Administration to Correct Its Course in Iraq?" *The New Yorker* (10 April 2006), accessed 22 February 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/04/10/the-lesson-of-tal-afar>.

commanded troops there when things were more secure. McMaster even brought an Army major then teaching at West Point to help understand the tribal structure and dynamics. The significance of this officer was that his doctoral dissertation was on the tribal resistance to the British when the United Kingdom occupied Iraq in the post World War I era.¹⁰³ This last effort was likely especially helpful. MacFarland, who would succeed McMaster as commander in the area described the multitude of tribes and ethnicities in Tal Afar as “a dog’s breakfast.”¹⁰⁴ McMaster’s 2nd Squadron, his main effort, developed five tenets for operations that demonstrate the effect of this study: “Secure the population; Enable the Iraqi Security Forces; See first, understand first, act decisively; Understand your unit, its capabilities, and constantly attempt to improve – widen the rumble strips as you go; and, Trust and confidence in your subordinates enables initiative – In counterinsurgency, initiative, speed, agility, and the ability to seize opportunities are critical.”¹⁰⁵

Like Natonski in Fallujah, McMaster determined that he had to wrest control of the city from the insurgents before any further efforts could occur. However, political will to go in hard as in Operation Al Fajr in Fallujah did not exist. Therefore, McMaster had to devise a more surgical approach. He first had engineers wall off the city with an eight-foot berm. Simultaneously, he employed information operations, police, and local leaders to encourage civilians to leave the city.¹⁰⁶ If operational art is, as doctrine informs us, employing tactical means to achieve strategic objectives, then this is a great example. The strategic aim was that the enemy no longer possessed Tal Afar and thereby a supply route into Syria but at a relatively low cost to infrastructure and civilians. McMaster and his staff designed a plan to make this happen. Describing his approach later, McMaster said it became clear

¹⁰³ Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame*, 166.

¹⁰⁴ Steven Clay, Interview with Colonel Sean MacFarland, 17 January 2008, Contemporary Operations Studies Team, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Ricardo Herrera, “Brave Rifles at Tall ‘Afar, September 2005,” in *In Contact: Case Studies from the Long War, Volume I*, ed. William Robertson, 125-147 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 131.

¹⁰⁶ Gordon and Trainer, *The Endgame*, 166.

that a large operation [was] necessary to defeat the terrorist organizations such that economic and political development [could] proceed, and so we [could] set conditions for the introduction of Iraqi security forces -- a reconstituted police force and the Iraqi army -- so the improvement in security in the city [would be] permanent, and then on the back end of that operation, to conduct reconstruction, to rekindle hope among the population and to set sort of the foundation for reconciliation between the Sunni and Shi'a populations within the city.¹⁰⁷

With the help of a battalion from the 82nd Airborne and with Iraqi Army troops, the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment conducted Operation Restoring Rights in late August 2005 to clear the town. As the clearance operation was underway, McMaster began emplacing combat outposts to retain control of cleared areas and provide security to the populace. This helped enable the line of effort to develop intelligence networks by convincing local leaders they were safe and the coalition force could be trusted. While the initial operation involved heavy weaponry such as air delivered munitions, multiple launch rocket systems, artillery and tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles, McMaster reduced the amount of munitions and heavy equipment his forces employed as the operation wore down.¹⁰⁸ This demonstrates an adherence to some of the principles US Army Colonel John McCuen wrote about in *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War*. McCuen posited that “destruction must be followed by construction.”¹⁰⁹ Additionally, McCuen advocated for outposts in towns, the development of intelligence networks, and the use of indigenous forces for specific tasks.

Following the completion of 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment’s tour in January 2006, Tel Afar mayor Najim Abdullah al Jabori sent a letter to Casey thanking the sacrifices of the unit. President Bush later quoted the letter in a speech,

To the families of those who have given their holy blood for our land, we all bow to you in reverence and to the souls of your loved ones. Their sacrifice was not in vain. They are not

¹⁰⁷ Public Broadcasting Service, Interview with H.R. McMaster, accessed 30 March 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/endgame/interviews/mcmaster.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Malkasian, “Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 251-2.

¹⁰⁹ John McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War: A Psycho-Politico-Military Strategy of Counter-Insurgency* (Bath, England: Pittman Books, 1966), 128.

dead, but alive, and their souls [are] hovering around us every second of every minute. They will not be forgotten for giving their precious lives. They have sacrificed that which is most valuable. We see them in the smile of every child, and in every flower growing in this land. Let America, their families, and the world be proud of their sacrifice for humanity and life.¹¹⁰

The letter is a powerful indication of how the local Iraqis viewed the unit's success. In fact, by September 2006, the Iraqi Army was squarely in the lead in the city.¹¹¹ On the American side, Casey decided that Tal Afar had made sufficient strides to pull out the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment's replacement, MacFarland's 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, after only five months in the city. The security situation is remarkable considering that no unit had been in the area for a year prior to the summer of 2005 and no American unit remained by mid-summer 2006.

After Casey decided to move US forces out of Tal Afar, MacFarland received orders to move to Ramadi in June 2006 to replace 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the Pennsylvania National Guard's 28th Infantry Division. Prior to their arrival, the previous unit had only been able to secure major lines of communication, the government center of Ramadi and military bases. Thus, while MacFarland and his staff had been able to fall in on an operational approach focused on counterinsurgency in Tal Afar, they would need to develop a new one to deal with Ramadi's unique issues. MacFarland received guidance to "Fix Ramadi but don't do a Fallujah."¹¹² The commander and his unit, by the time of their move to Ramadi, possessed a greater depth of experience in counterinsurgency than any of the other units and commanders examined in this paper. This is due to 1st Brigade's nearly five months in Tal Afar with a working operational approach in place. As with Natonski's career of operations other than war, experience can be a history of its own. However, MacFarland had already trained his unit for operations prior to arriving in Iraq and combined this with his on ground experience. He said, "certainly, we benefited from [Tal Afar] and,

¹¹⁰ George Bush, "Remarks to City Club of Cleveland," (20 March 2006), accessed 22 February 2017, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060320-7.html>.

¹¹¹ Herrera, "Brave Rifles in Tall 'Afar," 147.

¹¹² Clay, Interview with MacFarland; MacFarland needed permission to develop a campaign plan since doctrine does not allow brigade commanders to develop campaign plans.

then, our home station training was a great rehearsal in preparation for Tall Afar [sic], which was relatively permissive compared to Ramadi. So, Tall Afar [sic] was great preparation for Ramadi and when we hit Ramadi we hit the ground running.”¹¹³

MacFarland’s superior, Marine Major General Rich Zilmer, gave him permission to develop a Ramadi-specific campaign plan.¹¹⁴ Ultimately, the commander and his staff reached back to their time in Tal Afar and their handover from McMaster to develop their approach for Ramadi. They had taken extensive notes of the method the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment used and that became the base of their plan.¹¹⁵ The 1st Brigade developed an approach that isolated the city, moved in slowly by clearing an area with a large amount of combat power and placing a combined US/Iraqi position in the zone. From there, the forces would then build infrastructure and institutions that would help to bring stability to the area. The isolation of the city was complete by 10 June 2006. As MacFarland described it in December 2006, “we basically just did shaping operations in parallel with our decisive operations.”¹¹⁶ At some point, once the area was firmly in coalition control and the right institutions were in place, the government of Iraq and Iraqi Army were to assume responsibility for the region.¹¹⁷ As MacFarland described it,

[M]y idea was, given the combat power that I had at hand, we would use the ‘clear, hold, and build’ concept to clear and hold one neighborhood at a time or a couple neighborhoods at a time and then, once I had that neighborhood pretty well secured and the enemy beaten down, I would turn that over to the Iraqi Security Forces [ISF] and move forward into another neighborhood and establish a web of combat outposts that would secure all the key locations around the city and basically deny the enemy their safe haven.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ James Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 113.

¹¹⁵ Jim Michaels, *A Chance in Hell: The Men Who Triumphed Over Iraq’s Deadliest City and Turned the Tide of War* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2010), 55.

¹¹⁶ Kurtis Wheeler, Interview with Sean MacFarland, *Al-Anbar Awakening: Volume I, American Perspectives*, eds. Timothy McWilliams and Kurtis Wheeler (Quantico, VA: US Marine Corps, 2009), 178.

¹¹⁷ Louis DiMarco, *Concrete Hell: Urban Warfare From Stalingrad to Iraq* (Oxford: Osprey, 2012), 198, Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 246.

¹¹⁸ Clay, Interview with MacFarland.

MacFarland and his staff demonstrated adherence to the Army's operations process while employing operational art. The operations process is a cycle of understanding, visualizing, describing, and directing with leadership and assessment touching at all points.¹¹⁹ MacFarland made clear that he took pains to understand and visualize the fight in Ramadi and then describe this to his staff. His initial guidance was to take control of the Ramadi General Hospital, the soccer stadium, and the train station.¹²⁰ These became decisive points in the push into Ramadi. They were symbols of governance as well as terrorist havens. Marines under MacFarland seized Ramadi General Hospital on 5 July 2006. MacFarland's approach had doctrinal foundations while demonstrating similarities to certain Galula precepts. MacFarland's goal was to eventually trap insurgents in a tightening ring, which is the concept Galula advocated. The commander of 1st Brigade also stated the history influenced his approach; he likened it to General MacArthur's World War II island hopping operations in the Pacific theater.¹²¹ He described his desired end state in a December 2006 interview. "We have the ink spot strategy. All of the ink spots haven't connected up with one another yet and completely covered Ramadi...we're working toward that end state..."¹²²

A major aspect of MacFarland's approach was the integration of Iraqi Army and police units with his own soldiers and marines. Initially, he received two Iraqi Army brigades, one that was experienced and one new to Iraq. He linked the inexperienced brigade with the 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry, a light infantry unit from the Army's 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), while parsing the experienced troops out to other battalions. Three of his battalions partnered directly with an Iraqi Army battalion from the veteran American brigade.¹²³ He would later integrate Iraqi Police as he received them. As with other aspects of his approach, MacFarland took lessons from recent

¹¹⁹ Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-2.

¹²⁰ Clay, Interview with MacFarland.

¹²¹ Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War*, 113.

¹²² Wheeler, Interview with MacFarland, 181.

¹²³ DiMarco *Concrete Hell*, 197.

history in Iraq and more broadly from counterinsurgency theory and historical practices to develop this partnered approach. Eventually, MacFarland would preside over the so-called Anbar Awakening allowing Sunni tribal groups to establish armed neighborhood watches. MacFarland's operational framework made it easy to seize the opportunity to integrate local indigenous forces as a new line of effort. Because the commander and his staff had already worked the operations process to understand the environment (almost completely Sunni) and used theory and history to develop their approach, the acceptance of these tribal security groups became a simple branch plan.

The success of MacFarland's operational approach is not as readily apparent as that of McMaster's or the combined Mattis/Natonski approach. According to IraqBodyCount.org, an organization that tracks civilian deaths from violence in Iraq, after the Second Battle of Fallujah deaths in Anbar province fell from 800 in the month of November to less 100 per month in the middle of 2005. Civilian deaths rose while MacFarland's brigade was in Anbar and continued to rise after his brigade left. However, violence dropped significantly toward the end of 2007. While President Bush did not make a speech recognizing the brigade's success like he had McMaster's, a State Department representative did inform the president of the positive developments in the area. LTG Stanley McCrystal, in charge of special operations in Iraq, and Chiarelli, the commander of Multi-National Corps-Iraq acknowledged their success. General Petraeus even paid a visit to Ramadi to learn from MacFarland.¹²⁴ Ultimately, the Sons of Iraq movement grew out of MacFarland's sponsorship of the Anbar Awakening.

McMaster and MacFarland were two well-educated, thoughtful commanders who used history (recent and modern). Both developed operational approaches that took into account their own understanding of war, the theory and history of counterinsurgency and the unique particularities of their areas of operation. Thus, these brigade commanders used similar processes as

¹²⁴ Michaels, *A Chance in Hell*, 209.

the division commanders and theater commander in responding to unfamiliar problems for which current doctrine provided a base but was not completely sufficient.

Conclusion

In 2003, as the insurgency in Iraq gained a foothold, the Army and Marine Corps had not updated their respective doctrines to face such a threat in at least a generation. While each had some doctrine for stability actions, counterinsurgency was not a form of warfare for which the services trained their officers. Eventually, the two services would come together to develop a common doctrine. However, this combined manual would not appear until December 2006. Therefore, commanders and their staffs had to become imaginative in their efforts to develop operational approaches. At that point, it was important for the Army and Marine Corps to have provided their officers with a wide range of developmental, educational, and training experiences from which these officers could draw in order to adapt to unfamiliar situations. Further, doctrine that instilled a broad understanding of war and diverse ways of warfare was important to provide a basis that officers could use to construct relevant operational approaches. This has implications for the future.

The Army's view of the future, outlined in TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *Win in a Complex World*, envisions multiple types of threats without centering on one in particular. Using four harbingers of future conflict (competing powers such as China and Russia; regional powers such as Iran and North Korea; transnational terrorists organizations; and transnational criminal organizations) *Win in a Complex World* attempts to develop universal principles applicable across the spectrum of conflict rather than focus on a single enemy.¹²⁵ With such a diverse range of threats and an unknown character of future conflicts, it is likely that commanders and staffs in the future will face problems where doctrine does not provide a clear path. Therefore, it will be necessary for

¹²⁵ TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, 13-4.

them to innovate. At that point, officers will need to draw on their career experiences and personal study to find answers.

The commanders and staff in this study all faced a similar situation. None had ever been in a counterinsurgency situation and only McMaster had conducted any formal research into the subject. However, even McMaster's doctoral studies were limited in applicability. His research focused largely on the interactions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the White House; McMaster was a brigade commander. Therefore, his research likely served him better in particular in his time on the working group for a solution to the Iraq problem, dubbed the "Council of Colonels," which he served on following his command. Still, his research, thought, and writing on the subject certainly shaped his views. Natonski had a long career of civil focused operations but had never been in a situation similar to Iraq. Thus, each had to reach into the past to develop plans for the future.

Despite the challenges, these commanders were not interlopers in a conflict for which they were not prepared. Casey, Mattis, Natonski, McMaster, and MacFarland all were able to adapt to a complex situation. These officers employed many of the tenets of counterinsurgency that Field Manual 3-24 would codify. However, they did not have the benefit of the manual when crafting their approaches. How were they able to adapt so readily to this unfamiliar form of warfare?

In each case, the commanders used history to shape their operational approach. In Casey's case, the prime link to history came in the form of Kalev Sepp who had studied and taught counterinsurgency. Sepp's studies brought to light more than fifty counterinsurgency situations just in the previous century, with the large majority of those instances not directly involving the United States. Casey also brought his Bosnia experience and used his international relations education. The other four all took it upon themselves to look into past instances of insurgency. Natonski understood population-focused operations through a history of career experiences. MacFarland was an avid reader of history and graduate of the School of Advanced Military Studies. It is clear that he and his staff focused on recent history in Tal Afar to develop their plan for Ramadi. In many ways,

their plan in Ramadi mirrored events in Tal Afar. MacFarland conceded this point. While it would be easy to discount what MacFarland did by claiming he just took McMaster's playbook, it would be unfair. MacFarland did not blindly transpose the McMaster blueprint onto Ramadi. He studied both problems and used what made sense. Further, given that results in Tal Afar were still in the early returns stage, it was not a given that McMaster's had done the right thing despite the press's attention. MacFarland also conducted his own research in formulating his plan.

Each officer employed theory in developing his operational approach. In countersurgency, theory and practice are often intertwined as most of the major counterinsurgency theorists were practitioners so what constitutes history and what constitutes theory can become complicated. Still, each officer's use of theory is informative. Through Kalev Sepp, Casey validated the classical theories by comparing them to history and then used that study to inform a review of his operational approach. Mattis used a wide range of theorists to develop his operational approach, and his successor Natonski implemented precepts that Galula had described a half century earlier. McMaster read the writings of Galula, Kitson, and Lansdale. Similarly, as part of Sepp's review for Casey, MNF-I looked into history and compared it with theory. MacFarland also demonstrated use of Galula's theories.

Use of doctrine is more explicit than that of theory. Casey employed the Army's capstone doctrine. He directed the use of operational art to develop his operational approach. From his perch, Casey focused on broad actions rather than tactical precepts. He and his staff adapted existing operations doctrine to fit their needs. The *Small Wars Manual* influenced Mattis and, by extension, Natonski. Their operational approaches, like that of Casey, employed counterinsurgency precepts. However, each demonstrated a foundation in service warfighting doctrine. Thus, Mattis's operational approach combined current and outdated doctrine. This is similar for the two brigade commanders. While McMaster's and MacFarland's operational approaches demonstrated an understanding of counterinsurgency, each contained fundamental elements of capstone doctrine

such as offense, defense, and stability operations, and, to a large degree, operational art. Like the generals, these officers adapted current operations doctrine to build an approach for which the doctrine had not been designed. What this demonstrates is the applicability of capstone doctrine to wide range of conflicts. Doctrine has rarely been adequate to guide initial operations in war as Walter Kretchik shows throughout *U.S. Army Doctrine*. However, commanders generally have been able to adapt doctrine to the needs of the situation.

Perhaps the greatest influence on any of these officers' (and their staffs') ability to adapt to an unfamiliar situation is not what they did just prior to or during their time facing the counterinsurgency in Iraq. Rather, it is the breadth of their professional training, education and developmental experience that enabled these officers and their staffs to think critically and creatively about the problem and find solutions where doctrine was insufficient. It is improbable that officers wholly unprepared for counterinsurgency were able to adapt solely through pre-deployment research; they already had the depth of thinking and research skills necessary to adjust to an unfamiliar situation. Each officer had completed a long career of education beyond undergraduate studies. All completed their basic course as a lieutenant, then their captains course, intermediate education course as a major, and then a senior service college or equivalent experience. These experiences instilled in them the basics of their operating doctrine and provided them the opportunity to think broadly about war. MacFarland, McMaster, Natonski, and Mattis all wrote about war in their courses. While the author could not find surviving papers from Casey, it is safe to believe he did as well. MacFarland took his military education a step further with his attendance of the School of Advanced Military Studies. McMaster pursued civilian education, earning a PhD in military history. Casey earned a master's in international relations.

The officers also experienced a diverse range of training and experiences. All entered the service during the Cold War and trained on the doctrine of the times. However, as the world situation shifted in response to the break up of the Soviet Union, training events adapted to the new

environments. Throughout the 1990s, the US was involved in what came to be known as operations other than war. Operations in Somali, Bosnia, Kosovo and Haiti, among others, provided the military an understanding of a world that required military forces to be able to achieve results without resorting solely to applying force against an enemy and occupying territory. In response, training at the combat training centers and across the services changed. Therefore, officers who had served in the 1990s and then led organizations in Iraq in 2004 or later had received training experiences that provided some familiar scenarios to what they faced in Iraq. These five officers all possessed the requisite intelligence to extract relevant lessons from these experiences and apply them to Iraq.

Each of these officers had some operational experience prior to 11 September 2001. These were diverse experiences that ranged the gamut of mid-intensity war in Iraq to humanitarian operations in Somali. What these experiences did was allow the officers to apply their doctrine to a range of situations. Surely even during Operation Desert Storm, Mattis, Natonski, and McMaster found a need to tweak operations doctrine. Not only did these officers gain from the valuable experience as leaders and commanders, they grew in their understanding of war. Like their education and training, it is the breadth of the experience rather than the suitability to the problem of counterinsurgency that prepared them for operations in post-Saddam Iraq.

This demonstrates that the Army and Marine Corps properly prepared these officers for the challenges they faced. While none could be seen as being completely prepared for counterinsurgency, each was well educated, trained, and experienced in war. Doctrine provided a theoretical basis of war from which they could adapt. Each arrived to Iraq with the ability think creatively and critically. While Mattis has the most conventional career of any of the officers, none appears to be a model for how a military officer becomes a senior leader. Each took a different path to their commands and as of this writing each became at least a lieutenant general in their service.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ As of this writing MacFarland (Commanding General, III Corps) and McMaster (National

It appears to be the extensiveness of training, educational, and developmental experiences rather than a particular type of experiences that prepares an officer to adapt.

Each of these officers also supplemented their education experiences with self-study. This is speculative with respect to Natonski though the author finds it likely. None were content to let the Army or Marine Corps develop them alone; they took it upon themselves to take it a step further. In a 2014 article, McMaster places personal and participative self-development on the same level of importance as operational experiences and institutional learning.¹²⁷ This sentiment resonates with the other officers in this study.

These findings have implications for future generations of officers who are likely to face problems for which doctrine does not fully guide them and for which their training and education has not fully prepared them. First, at least for these officers, the institutional and operational experiences the Army and Marine Corps provided may not have prepared them specifically for counterinsurgency but did adequately imbue an understanding of war and planning. They also provided a base for critical and creative thinking. Officers should seek to get the most out of their developmental, educational, and training experiences and see them not as preparing them for a specific event so much as providing them a broad ability to adapt. Second, these officers supplemented their experiences with personal study. This demonstrates the importance of self-study in breadth and depth. Rather than seeking to be experts on one form of warfare and or one campaign or conflict, officers should read for knowledge over a wide range of military and leadership subjects. Third, the officers here maximized non-standard career opportunities. This comes out more readily from the experiences of the Army officers. Each attended civilian graduate school. McMaster earned a PhD and taught history. Casey served in positions that brought him into

Security Advisor) are currently lieutenant generals. Natonski retired as a lieutenant general. Casey and Mattis both retired as full generals.

¹²⁷ H.R. McMaster, "Studying War and Warfare" (26 October 2014), accessed 22 February 2017, <http://mwi.usma.edu/2014/11/11/studying-war-and-warfare-by-major-general-hr-mcmaster/>.

contact with politicians and other agencies. MacFarland attended the School of Advanced Military Studies as well as graduate school for engineering. These non-standard opportunities helped shape their thinking. Officers should not shy away from unique opportunities that take them away from the operational force but rather see these as assignments that will prepare them for future operations. Fourth, these officers sought to adapt current and obsolete doctrine and searched theory and history to supplement their own knowledge and experiences. Theory, history, and doctrine are great models for developing operational approaches, but appear best suited when employed by officers with a broad base of personal development.

The future will likely bring Army and Marine officers in contact with problems and situations for which they have not been specifically trained and for which doctrine is not easily applicable. In these situations, officers who have a broad base of developmental, educational, and training experiences will likely be able to apply critical and creative thinking while drawing on their experience, history, theory, and doctrine to develop effective operational approaches. Thus, the time to prepare for tomorrow's unknown conflict is today and the key is to maximize experiential opportunities and supplement them with personal study.

Appendix A

1st Marine Division's First 15 Plays

Civic Action

- Interact with local tribal, administrative, and religious leaders.
- Distribute school, medical, and children's recreational supplies.
- Meet with local governing councils to build rapport and gain credibility.
- Integrate the actions of the Combined Actions Program (CAP) units in order to enhance Iraqi confidence and support.
- Diminish Iraqi populace support for or tolerance of anti-coalition forces. Reduce Iraqi unemployment by creating public-sector jobs as rapidly as possible and establish job security.
- Increase effectiveness of public services and local governing bodies.
- Develop Sunni advisor program.
- Initiate former Iraqi military engagement program. Use "veteran's points" to bring former military to the forefront of employment and reduce adversarial relationships with them.
- Coordinate and disseminate IO [information operations] message to introduce Marines to the local populace and gain information superiority.

Kinetic Operations

- Conduct patrols to include emphasis on joint patrols with Iraqi forces in order to build confidence and assess their abilities.
- Increase effectiveness of Iraqi security forces to include the police, Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, highway patrol, border patrol, and Facility Protection Service by providing basic/advanced training, close integration into our formations, and supervision.
- Defeat anti-coalition forces in coordination with Iraqi forces.
- Disrupt enemy infiltration of Iraq through overland movement or movement along waterways. Special attention will be paid to the border regions to disrupt the introduction of foreign fighters, with an initial emphasis on the Syrian border, avoiding adversarial relationships with legitimate smugglers who may be able to assist us.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Camp, *Operation Phantom Fury*, 37.

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