

LEARNING FROM OUR MILITARY HISTORY: THE UNITED STATES ARMY,
OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, AND THE POTENTIAL FOR
OPERATIONAL ART AND THINKING

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fulfillment of the requirements for the
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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Art of War

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

LEARNING FROM OUR MILITARY HISTORY: THE UNITED STATES ARMY, OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, AND THE POTENTIAL FOR OPERATIONAL ART AND THINKING, by Major Aaron J. Kaufman, 206 pages.

This thesis began with a simple question: How was the US Army successful in OIF? As a US Army officer with two tours in OIF, I had difficulty understanding the change that occurred beginning in 2007 as a product of combat operations. Some tactical organizations, companies included, learned and adapted, whereas others accomplished little and made the environment worse. The interviews conducted as part of the Scholar's Program and personal reflections confirmed that a deeper and more historical understanding is required. I concluded that OIF demonstrated the need for operational art and thinking, particularly in commanders of relatively junior rank. Struggling to write this thesis, I noticed my copies of the US Army's Green Book Series on the history of World War II. Clearly, OIF lacks such an effort. After all the effort expended in Iraq, we may ultimately fail in crafting our own military history in OIF in breadth and depth. This thesis offers an explanation on how we learned and adapted in OIF, not for the purposes of a definitive military history, but only as an intellectual way point that may lead us to useful military history for the future of the Army.

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ACRONYMS

AAB	Advise and Assist Brigade
AAR	After Action Review
ADP	Army Doctrinal Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrinal Reference Publication
ARFORGEN	Army Force Generation
ARTEP	Army Training and Evaluation Program
BATT	British Army Training Team
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
BUA	Battlefield Update Analysis
CAC	US Army Combined Arms Center
CALL	Center for Army Lessons Learned
CAT	Civil Action Team
CENTCOM	US Central Command
CERP	Commander's Emergency Relief Program
CFLCC	Combined Forces Land Component Command
CGSC	US Army Command and General Staff College
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
CLP	Combat Logistics Patrol
CMH	US Army Center for Military History
CMTC	Combined Maneuver Training Center
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority

CSI	Combat Studies Institute
DWEC	District Executive War Council
EBAO	Effects-Based Approach to Operations
EBO	Effects-Based Operations
FM	Field Manual
HES	Hamlet Evaluation System
HRC	US Army Human Resources Command
HVI	High Value Individual
IECI	Independent Electoral Commission Iraq
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IGFC	Iraqi Ground Forces Command
IIG	Interim Iraqi Government
IO	Information Operations
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
JCPM	Joint Campaign Planning Model
JRTC	Joint Readiness Training Center
MDMP	Military Decision Making Process
MNC-I	Multinational Corps Iraq
MNF-I	Multinational Force Iraq
MNSTC-I	Multinational Security Transition Corps Iraq
MOE	Measures of Effectiveness
MOP	Measures of Performance
MSR	Main Supply Route
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer

NITAT	Northern Ireland Training and Advisory Team
NTC	National Training Center
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
OIL	Observations, Insights, and Lessons Learned
OODA	Observation, Orientation, Decision, and Action
OOS	Out of Sector (mission)
OPFOR	Opposing Forces
PC-COIN	Population-Centric Counterinsurgency
PME	Professional Military Education
PMESII-PT	Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, Information, Physical Environment, and Time
PSYOP	Psychological Operations
QRF	Quick Reaction Force
RIP	Relief in Place
RRF	Responsible Redeployment of Forces
SWEC	State Executive War Committee
TOC	Tactical Operations Center
TRADOC	US Army Training and Doctrine Command
TTP	Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures
UN	United Nations
USF-I	United States Forces Iraq
VBIED	Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
VCI	Vietnamese Communist Infrastructure

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1992, the United States (US) Army's Center of Military History (CMH) published the reader's guide to the collection of works titled the *United States Army in World War II*. In the book's foreword, the Chief of Military History, Brigadier General Harold Nelson wrote:

Since the Army authorized the project in 1946, seventy-eight volumes have been or are being published representing an organized treasury of knowledge on the world's greatest conflict. Behind them lies one of the largest masses of records and recollections ever produced. These documents, including those of the enemy, have been explored by professional historians, with the cooperation of a host of participants and with all the facilities and assistance that the Office of the Chief of Military History and its successor, the Center of Military History, could provide to ensure that this endeavor was as comprehensive, accurate, and objective as possible. The final result has provided commanders and staff officers, historians, and students—military and civilian alike—with an unprecedented professional guide to past experience as they seek light on the uncertain path ahead.¹

Later known as the Army Green Book Series, the total effort by the US Army in collecting, interpreting, and publishing the military history of the war effort remains an impressive and unsurpassed institutional effort at preserving military history for the benefit of future military officers and civilian historians alike. Any study of the US Army in World War II (WWII) will invariably involve some of the military history captured in the Green Book Series. The books remain an essential part of the military history of WWII.

¹Richard D. Adamczyk and Morris J. MacGregor, eds., *The United States Army in World War II* (Washington, DC: The United States Army Center for Military History, 1992), iii.

The history of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) extends beyond a decade now. The Army has published several books on the early operational history of OIF, including *On Point I* and *On Point II*, which describe the first eighteen months of the war. The Center of Military History has published *Tip of the Spear*, which highlights small unit actions, as well as Dale Andrade's book *Surging South of Baghdad*, which presents a year-long operational and historical account of the 3d Infantry Division's deployment in support of OIF in 2007. All of these accounts relied heavily on interviews, some more timely than others, and after-action reviews (AAR).

The sum total of accounts, however, provides little towards the creation of a total understanding of an operational and strategic military history that can descriptively explain how the Army and the war interacted and changed over time. Instead, researchers are left with procedural handbooks and writing on tactics written by various agencies in the Army, which fail in width, depth, and context to substitute for military history.² Out of context practical approaches thus substitute for a deeper study of operational thinking and strategy. Practicality, however, is thin gruel for officers and commanders that require

²The U.S. Army places significant effort into the rapid publication of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) and lessons learned. The main agency responsible for this is the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), located at Fort Leavenworth, KS. According to its website, the CALL "rapidly collects, analyzes, disseminates, and archives observations, insights, and lessons learned (OIL), TTP, and operational records in order to facilitate rapid adaptation initiatives and conduct focused knowledge sharing and transfer that informs the Army and enables operationally based decision making, integration, and innovation throughout the Army and within the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) environment." CALL manuals are ever-present items in most Army headquarters, more so than military history books or scholarly journals.

a broad and deep understanding of military history to act wisely in combat.³ The military history of OIF appears already defined by other narratives; ones not shaped by an Army that has failed, so far, to collect and interpret its own history, unlike the history of WWII as captured in the Green Books.⁴ This scattershot approach undermines the utility of military history.

³Michael Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History," *RUSI Journal* (February 1993): 29-30. Howard argues that three general rules of study must be followed by the officer who studies military history as a guide in his profession and who wishes to avoid its pitfalls. "First, he must study in width. He must observe the way in which warfare has developed over a long historical period. Only by seeing what does change can one deduce what does not; and as much can be learned from the great discontinuities of military history as from the apparent similarities of the techniques employed by the great captains through the ages." Secondly, officers "must study in depth. He should take a single campaign and explore it thoroughly, not simply from official histories but from memoirs, letters, diaries, even imaginative literature, until the tidy outlines dissolve and he catches a glimpse of the confusion and horror of the real experience. He must get behind the order subsequently imposed by the historian, and recreate by detailed study the omnipresence of chaos, revealing the part played not only by skill and planning and courage, but by sheer good luck. Only thus can he begin to discover, if he is lucky enough not to have experienced it at first hand, what war is really like." Finally, officers "must study in context. Campaigns and battles are not like games of chess or football matches, conducted in total detachment from their environment according to strictly defined rules. Wars are not tactical exercises writ large. They are, as Marxist military analysts quite rightly insist, conflicts of societies, and they can be fully understood only if one understands the nature of the society fighting them. The roots of victory and defeat often have to be sought far from the battlefield, in political, social, and economic factors which explain why armies are constituted as they are, and why their leaders conduct them in the way they do."

⁴The narratives I describe all center on the US Army in OIF and emanate from a central idea I call the rejection narrative, focused on the idea that the US military, and the US Army in particular, rejected counterinsurgency after Vietnam. The rejection narrative serves as a basis for another causal narrative, or the doctrinal determinism narrative, which claims the US Army requires doctrine in order to adapt and change. The final narrative extends the deterministic effects of doctrine to the policy and strategy realms, that in essence doctrine determined strategy. The narratives are essential to making logical leaps of three to four decades in cause and effect, and the Army makes it easy to promote big idea narratives with moral overtones when the military history is thin or inaccessible.

This gap in Army official history has not impeded the pursuit of histories and narratives by others that stake claims on the deterministic factors of OIF history, on how the Army failed, succeeded, adapted, and learned in combat. At some point, OIF history will not remain a product of benign observation, but will transform into a tool to adjust the way the Army trains, educates, and fights in the future. Historical interpretation will prove consequential, whether or not the Army chooses to invest the effort in collecting and writing its own war history.

Many of the current accounts of the Army's efforts in OIF rely on a baseline claim, at times assumed, on an historical argument roughly described as the rejection thesis. The rejection thesis has roots in the end of the Vietnam War, and its consequences extended into OIF. This thesis argues that Army deliberately rejected counterinsurgency, in theory and practice, following Vietnam. The moral arguments for rejection of counterinsurgency emanated from a visceral reaction to the war and the tremendous amount of resources devoted towards a losing effort. In the end, the Army bore the heaviest cost during the war as well as the brunt of the political and public opprobrium following its end. The Army barely escaped from the aftermath of Vietnam. Thus, equating counterinsurgency as Vietnam enabled the Army and its leaders to cast off COIN with the war itself, returning the thinking on war and warfare to its proper sphere, conventional land battle in Europe, where the true strategic interest lay.⁵

⁵Colin Kahl, "The Other Side of the COIN" (Paper prepared for the International Studies Association Annual Convention, San Francisco, CA, 26-29 March 2009), 24; Colin Kahl, "COIN of the Realm," *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 6 (November/December 2007): 169; Austin Long, *On Other War: Lessons from Five Decades of Counterinsurgency Research* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2006), 20; Austin Long, "Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence: The U.S. Military and Counterinsurgency

The COIN rejection argument serves as a basis for additional narratives. Expanding from the rejection thesis, another argument assumes the deterministic effects of doctrine, in part based on recent Army history. The rejection thesis serves as the start point. In essence, the Army reformed itself and restored its professionalism and reputation, in part through training and education reforms, just as the Army in Iraq, burdened by its doctrine of decisive battles, overcame its failings through the publication of the new COIN field manual. The main vessel for reform in each case proved to be doctrine. The ultimate expression of the first reform effort was the 1982 version of Field Manual 100-5, nicknamed AirLand Battle. It served as the essential source of institutional change, as the leading indicator of what the Army would become, and was vindicated in the Army's performance Operation Desert Storm.⁶ Thus, the Army requires doctrine to reform itself, to learn and adapt in a broad manner that leads to success. The history of the 1970s peacetime Army is overlaid atop the wartime Army in the mid-2000s. A decade of reforms of change from 1972 to 1982—the historical interpretation of the period—is projected, reworded, and compressed onto OIF, specifically over the time

Doctrine, 1960-1970 and 2003-2006," RAND Counterinsurgency Study, Paper 6 (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2008), 19. Long highlights the change of thinking on the importance on large scale, third-party interventionist counterinsurgency, a loss that is understandable considering the context of the period; Nathaniel C. Fick and John A. Nagl, "The U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual: Afghanistan Edition," *Foreign Policy* 170 (January/February 2009): 42-43; David Fitzgerald, "Vietnam, Iraq and the Rebirth of Counter-Insurgency," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 21 (2010), 151, 158; Jeffrey Record, "Review of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq, by Ahmed Hashim," *Middle East Policy* 13, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 156-58; Jeffrey Record, "Review of The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual," *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 3: 144-145.

⁶Although AirLand Battle was not designed as doctrine to fight the particular enemy faced in Kuwait and Iraq.

period of 2003 to 2006. Distilled, the argument claims that the Army required new COIN doctrine to improve its performance in OIF.⁷

Carried even further, another thesis claims that the new doctrine not only helped reform the Army during OIF, but also served as the basis for strategy that won the war. New doctrine shaped the tactical realm, or the conduct of the war, as well as the policy and strategy realms. It proved an indispensable factor, responsible for turning the war around. Soldiers, leaders, and policy makers alike benefitted from the efforts that went into the new field manual, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*.⁸

The sum of the arguments, while certainly based on fragments of historical truth, nevertheless fails to account for how the Army learned and adapted in combat during OIF. The rejection thesis and its offspring attempt to extract too much causation from events of the last four decades, to trap the Army's way of warfare and thinking within conventional warfare doctrinal blinders, which began in the doctrine and training revolution of the 1970s. The publication of new doctrine, namely FM 3-24, stripped away

⁷Kahl, "The Other Side of the COIN," 3, 24; Long, *On Other War*, 1, 62-63; 20; Long, "Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence," iii, 27; Long argues that organizational structures, such as military organizations organized to fight peer competitors, are both mentally and materially ill-equipped to fight insurgencies. Organizational culture borne of doctrine and tradition effectively set the limits on the ability of the military organizations to think and adapt in war. However, Long also challenges the claims of linkages between the publication of FM 3-24 in December 2006 to the Army's performance during the surge in 2007; Nagl and Fick, 43; Fitzgerald, 151; Record, "Review of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq," 156-157; Record, "Review of The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual," 143.

⁸Fick and Nagl, 42-43.

the conventional warfare blinders and exposed the collective brain of the Army to modern counterinsurgency, saving the Army from itself as well as the strategy in Iraq.⁹

Examples of learning and adapting leading to improved practice are offered—such as Colonels Sean MacFarland in Ramadi and H.R. McMaster in Tal Afar—but such examples are used as exceptions to the general arguments of Army incompetence rather than prototypes of the US Army learning in action. Military history thus provides a few deviant examples for others to emulate, to intellectually sate the practitioner and to give the appearance of usefulness, as long as such stories fit into larger narratives. In this case, such examples are selected to provide legitimacy to larger arguments surrounding doctrine, strategy, and methods such as population-centric COIN that without them would appear monolithic, generic, overly top-down, and thus easily dismissible through a little research.¹⁰ The big, general argument would die the death of a thousand particular

⁹Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1-1. The opening epigraph, attributed to a Special Forces officer in Iraq in 2005, claims that “counterinsurgency is not just thinking man’s warfare—it is the graduate level of war.” To claim that COIN is more challenging cognitively than other forms of war is essence a form of hubris that stakes a claim as to the inherent superiority of the doctrine that envelops the epigraph. War is cognitively challenging in all of its forms.

¹⁰Broadly speaking, the population-centric approach to COIN emphasizes the local population as the decisive terrain, or the center of gravity, in all combating all insurgencies. See Department of the Army, *The US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), xv. This public version of FM 3-24 has an intro written by John Nagl that describes the key to COIN is to protect the population. This is not written in the official version of the Army FM; see also Octavian Manea, “The Philosophy Behind the Iraq Surge: An Interview with General Jack Keane,” *Small Wars Journal*, 5 April 2011, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/726-manea.pdf> (accessed 20 April 2011), 1. General Keane describes the principles of population-centric COIN. Keane claims that the weight of military effort must be placed on securing the local population in order to separate the insurgent from the population, in order to both defeat the insurgency and bolster the legitimate government; see also John A. Nagl, “Let’s Win the

paper cuts, including arguments that attack the essential theory of population-centric COIN.¹¹

Wars We're In," *Joint Forces Quarterly* no. 52 (1st Quarter 2009): 23. Nagl talks about the enduring principles of COIN, invoking T. E. Lawrence, Sir Robert Thompson, and Robert Komer. Nagl (and Keane) argue that the role of coercive violence and force is subordinated to this effort, to the point that force and violence must be minimized in all circumstances to ensure that popular grievances and alienation are not extended to and directed at the COIN intervention force and thus risk the success of the COIN campaign. As insurgencies are essentially a form of war amongst the people, the blame and consequences of excessive violence between the insurgent and counterinsurgent will land at the feet of the COIN force, as the insurgent is often from the people, both in blood heritage, culture, and traditions; see also David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press 2010), 45. In his 28 Articles, Kilcullen advocates only attack the insurgent when he gets in the way of your strategy, and that the COIN force should focus on attacking the enemy's strategy, not his forces. Addressing the drivers of popular grievance and insurgency causation, while at the same time protection the local population from the violence and retribution of the insurgent, are critical to defeating the subversive political organization of the insurgent and more important than capturing or killing the militant arm of the insurgency.

¹¹Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976* (Washington, DC: US Army Center for Military History, 2007), 424-429. One could also make the claim that PC-COIN is a recycled idea from the 1960s. Birtle's book highlights that the thinking behind PC-COIN within the US Army goes back to the mid-1960s, and the 1966 version of the Army's COIN manual dedicated significant emphasis on the critical role of nation-building and power-sharing societies. In essence, insurgencies are popular movements that are emergent, and in order to combat them the root problems of, among other things, social and economic injustice must be addressed. Thus, PC-COIN of recent thinking retains threads that date back to at least the mid-1960s; for anti-PC COIN arguments, see Gian P. Gentile, "Our COIN Doctrine Removes the Enemy from the Essence of War," *Armed Forces Journal* (2008): 1, <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2008/01/3207722> (accessed 10 April 2011). The supposed antithesis of population-centric COIN is enemy-centric COIN. This idea argues that population-centric approach is a strategy that essentially assumes away the enemy, which is a critical failure in any military planning. The enemy is relatively incidental to the larger problems that drive the insurgency. The notion of the "people are the key" in COIN, where an abstract center of gravity substitutes for a more concrete center of gravity—namely the insurgent and his organization—is a recipe for extending a COIN campaign interminably and the wasting of military resources. See Gian P. Gentile, "Freeing the Army from the Counterinsurgency Straitjacket," *Joint Forces Quarterly* no. 58 (3d Quarter 2010): 121. In essence, the population-centric approach will inherently expose the COIN force to asymmetric attrition through the expenditure of limited resources over extended periods of time. See also, Gian P. Gentile, "Let's Build an Army

This version of history will prove useless to the military practitioner. Detailed understanding of particular campaigns will remain difficult, as the same cases will surface again and again in footnotes and citations, providing little to no depth or context that can inform other theses or claims, undermining the critical role that military history serves in educating and developing future commanders in the profession of arms.

Operation Iraqi Freedom, its historiography, will wane in utility as future officers and

to Win All Wars,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* no. 52 (1st Quarter 2009): 31. Military forces in COIN must remain oriented on destroying the insurgent force, which is ultimately the most dangerous threat in any insurgency. This enemy-centric approach does not negate the necessity for proper strategy and the requirement for other means required to campaign, but argues that the military portion of any COIN force must remain largely oriented on destroying the armed insurgent organization; Population-Centric COIN (PC-COIN) is perhaps the instrumental means of a particular and myopic view of COIN that centers on nation building, which is both expensive and resource-intensive, and emphasizes the political and moral worldviews of the counterinsurgent-as-interventionist power. However, interventionist COIN does not need to be expensive and resource-intensive, as seen by the British during the Malayan Emergency. For a critique of nation-building as a morally bankrupt concept, see, Celestino Perez Jr, “The Army Ethic and the Indigenous Other: A Response to Colonel Matthew Moten’s Proposal” (Paper Submitted to the Exploring the Professional Military Ethic Conference, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 15-18 November 2010), 9. Perez writes “the U.S. government’s and the military’s approach to politics is naively instrumental: If we roll up our sleeves and work hard enough as an interagency team, we can help establish the right socio-political institutions and systems until, alas, a polity is born or revitalized. This is the Frankenstein approach to nation building. The manner by which a people becomes a polity has less to do with systems and infrastructure and more to do with the empirical mystery integral to political foundations. One can solve a puzzle; however, one does not solve—and much less does one build—those statistically uncooperative moments of political foundation. Such answers, such solutions, simply arise—unpredictably, unintentionally, and always in cooperation (or in conspiracy) with others. Oftentimes such solutions fail to arise at all, even at the expense of vast numbers of lives. Such is the simultaneous indispensability and elusiveness of the intangible dimension of politics.” Third parties can no more build a nation than they can impose political and moral perspectives on an alien population. Rather, they can only set the conditions that will hopefully lead to a political condition or solution favorable to the interests of the counterinsurgent. This idea of the objective of an interventionist COIN effort is concurrent with the definition of strategy as the pursuit of continuing advantage. See Everett C. Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age* (New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 6.

historians dismiss the big arguments in search of more particular detail in history, and due to a variety of reasons will find little available for primary research, no official history like the WWII Green Book series. The value of the history of OIF as a basis of how the Army learned and adapted over time—beyond the glut of books on tactics, techniques, and procedures—will diminish to insignificance.¹²

There is a better lens with which to view and interpret the history of OIF, one that avoids the claims of big, top-down imposed narratives as offered by the rejection thesis and its offspring, and also serves to provide the military officer more detailed context and descriptive military history. The study of operational art and thinking—based on descriptive, detailed, and available military history—should serve as the basis for understanding how the Army learned and adapted in OIF.

This thesis begins by placing the study of military history as the centerpiece of officer education and development, particular for future commanders of forces in the field. It then examines doctrine in the US Army experience since the mid-1970s that began with men such as General William DePuy, and the tension it brought to officer development. The thesis then goes on to examine operational art in US Army doctrine and counterinsurgency (COIN), and investigate, in depth, the writing and thinking of a senior military officer with significant experience in countering insurgency as well a high command of conventionally-trained forces. In chapter four, we review the history of Operation Iraqi Freedom, to shape the context of what follows, and how the war appeared in many facets a problem of management. In chapter five, we seek to identify general

¹²This problem is defined also by the total lack of primary sources, of war diaries, journals, and other materials from individuals and units collected, saved, archived, and declassified.

ideas concerning how leaders and organizations learned and adapted while fighting in OIF, particularly concerning command leadership traits that my predispose an organization to learning and adapting. This chapter makes claims based on inductive reasoning, on the synthesis of interviews with military officers, and how this informs on the necessity for operational art and thinking. In the final chapter this thesis demonstrates the critical linkage between the study of military history, command leadership, and the potential for operational art and thinking. Finally, this chapter revisits the introduction and the critique of the rejection thesis, particular its dependence on ideas of the deterministic effects of doctrine.

In the end, the potential and usefulness for COIN doctrine is ultimately dependent on the quality of command leadership, on officer education and development. More importantly, OIF demonstrates the absolute requirement for operational art and thinking in command leadership, and better history ought to provide a basis for study, towards increasing the potential for operational art and thinking within future officers. However, this requirement needs much more particular and descriptive history than what is available now, on histories rich in detail, personal experience, and context.

CHAPTER 2

DOCTRINE, HISTORY, AND OPERATIONAL ART

It is not enough to write new doctrine, if the purpose is to change the way an army will fight. Ultimately, an army's behavior in battle will almost certainly be more a reflection of its character or culture than of the contents of its doctrine manuals. And if that culture—or mindset, if you will—is formed more by experience than by books, then those who would attempt to modify an army's behavior need to think beyond doctrine manuals.

— Paul Johnston
Doctrine is Not Enough

In the last 35 years, the US Army sought to shape itself institutionally as an organization centered on warfighting doctrine. Operational doctrine, or writing that shapes all other subordinate publications, provides the organizing framework on how the Army thinks about fighting. In the case of Army Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, formerly 100-5, the doctrine has been rewritten eight times since 1976.¹³ Since the mid-1970s the US Army has attempted to use doctrine as tool for change and reform, to shift organizational momentum and thinking towards new ideas on fighting. Indeed, one only need read the introduction of the various iterations of *Operations* since 1976 to gain the idea of the importance the Army places its writing. “The US Army is doctrine-based and doctrinally capable of handling large campaigns as well as combat in a variety of

¹³Since 1976 with the publication FM 100-5, *Operations*, known as the Active Defense, the FM has been rewritten eight times. Under the number 100-5, the FM was rewritten in 1982, 1986, 1992, and 1996. In 2001, FM 100-5 was renumbered FM 3-0. FM 3-0 was rewritten and published in 2008. Change 1 to FM 3-0 was published in 2011, and has been superseded by Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, which is itself subordinate to the Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*.

scenarios. The Army's doctrine lies at the heart of its professional competence. It is the authoritative guide to how Army forces fight wars."¹⁴

Doctrine is perhaps the most determinant and consequential representation of Army thinking, one that translates concepts on fighting to action, reshapes organizations, and leads the development of new combat systems. Most importantly, it assumes a central and deterministic role, as the Army's thinking on the past, present, and future of warfare as manifested in publications that determine how the Army organizes, educates, trains, and equips its units, leaders, and soldiers to fight and win in the next war. It is thus the instrumental means of shaping change, organizational and institutional reform. In essence, doctrinal reform demonstrates the Army's commitment to learning and adapting. Getting doctrine right serves as the first step towards future victories, an insurance against the fog and friction of the future battlefield. At its most simple, good writing leads to victory.

Armies choose doctrine, however, and not the other way around.¹⁵ On the one hand, the military occupation and the profession of arms require unified thinking and

¹⁴Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, June 1993), iv. See also v-vii. To paraphrase for further reinforcement, "As the Army's keystone doctrine, FM 100-5 describes how the Army thinks about the conduct of operations. FM 100-5 undergirds all of the Army's doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leader development, and soldier concerns. Never static, always dynamic, the Army's doctrine is firmly rooted in the realities of current capabilities. At the same time, it reaches out with a measure of confidence to the future. Doctrine captures the lessons of past wars, reflects the nature of war and conflict in its own time, and anticipates the intellectual and technological developments that will bring victory now and in the future. . . . This doctrine retains the best of all the doctrine that has gone before and expands upon it as appropriate. . . . Throughout, doctrine reflects the adaptation of technology to new weapons systems and capabilities, organizations, missions, training, leader development, and soldier support. In this way, doctrine continues to be the Army's engine of change.

language that enables the efficient use of military power. On the other, military leaders do not control the application of force or its defining contexts, and such contexts such as where, when, and how are arguably more deterministic towards the outcome of fighting than the quality of doctrine.

In other words, military organizations codify thinking in writing to suit their requirements and responsibilities. As such doctrine as theory cannot stand on its own, not without the consideration of institutional or corporate culture, traditions, experiences and other contexts that influence its writing. It may assume primacy in driving peacetime reforms, as it did with the US Army in the late 1970s through the early 1980s, but the reform of doctrine does not always lead to organizational change in the Army.¹⁶ When analyzing the success of fighting organizations that develop into learning organizations historically—ones that learn to fight better over time—attributing that improvement in fighting competence to doctrinal reforms presumes a deterministic effect of doctrinal reform, an effect which is not provable in all circumstances and requires careful study on its own. In fact, other aspects may prove for more deterministic in improving fighting competence, such as organizational culture, tradition, and perhaps most importantly, recent warfighting experience.¹⁷ Perhaps only tactical doctrine serves to complement the learning habits of the learning military organizations, and not necessarily drive them.¹⁸

¹⁵Paul Johnston, “Doctrine is Not Enough: The Effect of Doctrine on the Behavior of Armies,” *Parameters* 30, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 36.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.* Johnston provides several examples of how experience and culture influence the outcome of war rather far greater than doctrine, including the German, French, and British interwar thinking and doctrine, and how culture and experience preceded the writing of doctrine. Concerning the US Army, Johnston also describes the

The most recent edition of Army FM 3-0, *Operations*, appears to express a less certain tone than seen in earlier iterations of the FM, perhaps in recognition of recent operational experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Army doctrine balances between the Army's current capabilities and situation with its projected requirements for future operations. At the same time, Army doctrine forecasts the immediate future in terms of organizational, intellectual, and technological developments. This requirement is particularly challenging for this edition of FM 3-0. . . . Army leaders must examine and debate the doctrine, measuring it against their experience and strategic, operational, and tactical realities. They must also recognize that while FM 3-0 can inform them of how to think about operations, it cannot provide a recipe for what to do on the battlefield.¹⁹

The central role doctrine plays both as an expression on how the Army thinks about fighting and as a basis for Army reform serves to orient thinking on organizational adaptation and learning as a product of accepted and codified thinking. However, placing doctrine in the center of organizational and institutional worldview may fail to consider how Army traditions, culture, and recent experience serve to drive the way the Army actually fights, learns, and adapts. Institutional consensus on the central role accepted thinking plays in determining the outcome of war may prove resilient to internal critique,

dissonance between the ways the first Gulf War was fought and how the Army thought it fought based on its contemporary doctrine (AirLand Battle).

¹⁸Daniel P. Marston, *Phoenix From the Ashes: The Indian Army in the Burma Campaign* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003). Marston's book captures tactical and organizational reforms of the Indian Army from 1942 to 1945, stemming from defeat at the hands of the Imperial Japanese Army. While the reforms of tactical doctrine played a significant role, the reforms would bear little fruit without the pursuit of Indianization of the officer corps, the recruiting of non-martial races, and the critical role of the senior leadership of the Indian Army, to include Slim, Wavell, and Auchinleck. Marston argues that the Indian Army, never the main effort and perhaps the least resourced of all the British military field forces, was truly a learning organization.

¹⁹Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, Change 1, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2011), ix.

as history can be shaped to reinforce this consensus.²⁰ Thus, when viewed from the inside of the Army, the doctrine-centric worldview may substitute institutional consensus and interest for a more self-critical, introspective, and objective appraisal on the efficacy of official publications. In essence, the Army controls the development doctrine, but not military history. How elites in the Army that write and approve publications use military history to influence and inform doctrine remains more or less a function of its subjective utility.

The ideas of doctrinal determinism and the doctrine-centric force needs to be evaluated in recent history, particularly regarding on how the Army fought insurgency in Iraq. Have official publications, particularly operational counterinsurgency doctrine, served to inform on the idea of accepted and codified thinking as the source of reform driving learning and adaptation? Does doctrine, particularly operational counterinsurgency doctrine, serve as an indispensable means towards the development of Army units as learning organizations? The war in Iraq demonstrated the limits of ideas regarding doctrinal determinism and the doctrine-centric force, particularly in the sense that while doctrine can serve to inform practice it neither precedes action nor inherently remedies bad practices in the US Army tradition. When considering military operations in Iraq in 2007, the main reason for improvement in the security environment in Iraq centers on two factors. First, more time and experience in conducting COIN in Iraq increased the potential for operational art executed at the small unit level, company and

²⁰For an example of history used to shape the institutional world, see Robert H. Scales, *Certain Victory: The US Army in the Gulf War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Government Printing Office, 1994). This official history of the US Army in the first Gulf War serves reinforces the Army's view on the strength of its doctrine and the central role it played in the war.

above. Second, using this potential required a better operational approach at the theater level—to include dispersal of forces—and additional forces as part of the surge, which enabled the corps commander to address operational problems, such as insurgent safe havens and lines of communications without shifting forces in theater.

COIN doctrine proved informative, yet incidental to the results achieved and thus not a critical factor in learning and planning. Rather than an authoritative source of reform towards better practice, COIN doctrine in particular remains simply a source of information. The critical factor in achieving success has been and remains command leadership, particularly at the brigade level and below. If anything, fighting in Iraq indicates the necessity of operational art at lower levels of command. Consequently, the military history of OIF does not fit neatly into a doctrine deterministic argument or narrative.

Understanding operational art in Iraq, in how units reformed, learned, and adapted under good leadership with the right command climate is critical in understanding the military history of OIF. Perhaps the only way to understand operational art in OIF is through descriptive military history, a history that centers on individual commanders and how they thought about fighting. This history is perhaps the only way to gain sufficient familiarity with the war that could serve to inform both contemporary interpretation and future practice. Concerning the military professional and future commander, no theory in operational COIN doctrine is sufficient in depth, consistency, and context to replace the utility of descriptive military history. While the utility of official thinking on warfighting is necessary for the effective use of military power, its utility cannot substitute for military history, particularly in the education of future commanders of fighting

organization. Thus doctrine is inherently subordinate to military history. As an enabler of thinking and visualization through study and reflection, for translating ideas into action, military history, more than doctrine, is truly a tool of military command.

The Necessity of Military History for Command Leadership

Military educators might, of course, console themselves with the reminder that, after all, few officers will become senior commanders, and that, for most others, the distillation of history through doctrine, however incomplete, will suffice to meet professional needs. The reality is less comforting. Some junior officers eventually will become senior leaders, and current selection processes offer no assurance that historical literacy will be among their intellectual attainments. On the contrary, the institutional bias, if anything, is in the opposite direction. Moreover, if there is a perceptible trend in modern warfighting, at least among developed nations, it is the devolution of leadership responsibility downward. As recent conflicts have underlined, junior officers increasingly confront requirements formerly the province of more senior leaders, and for which prescriptive rules, however thoughtfully developed, will prove less and less useful.²¹

At first glance, Sinnreich's writing in 2006 appears to claim that a greater knowledge of military history is required now more than ever, that as greater responsibility is placed in the hands of relatively junior officers in the context of modern wars, more educational efforts must be placed on the development of historical literacy among military professionals. This quote seems to argue that more junior leaders increasingly face operational type problems, or problems that lack clear linear tactical actions, and thus requiring more historical literacy as an aid to thinking. The recent history of OIF seems to support this claim. Thus, if the Army is to benefit professionally from the military history of OIF—one that centers on operational art—then it is necessary

²¹Richard Hart Sinnreich, "Awkward Partners: Military History and American Military Education," in *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession*, ed. Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 73-74.

the actions and reflections of individual commanders, even down to company level, and how they planned and sequenced tactical actions towards the goals of strategy. Such a military history is more detailed and more difficult to develop than one that starts with COIN doctrine, but it is ultimately more useful professionally towards the development of the next generation of officers and commanders. Some argue that the study of military history is an outdated form of academic and intellectual provincialism.²² However, the profession of arms retains its own unique requirements of knowledge and its own history in peacetime and in war, not divorced from the greater realities of other contexts, but so momentous in consequence that it requires careful study in its own right. The relevance of military history is of exponential importance.

The apparent narrowness of military history as a field is eclipsed by the change that war brings to human affairs. Perhaps it is the consequences of military history that provide one of the enduring imperatives to the military professional to understand military history. The other concerns the moral imperatives surrounding command and leadership in war, where the military commander bears the responsibility for achieving success, controlling force, and preserving blood and treasure. The two imperatives compel the knowledge and understanding of military history as an absolute requirement for military leadership. The mandate for historical literacy is thus built in to the responsibilities of command and imposed on commanders by the unpredictable character of war itself.

²²Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh, "Why Military History Matters: Another Perspective," 5 January 2010, <http://warhistorian.org/wordpress/?p=2122> (accessed 19 May 2011). Hsieh argues for the maintenance of military history as a distinct field in history in academia.

The recognized need for historical literacy is as old as the written history of warfare, as old as Thucydides in his descriptive *History of the Peloponnesian War*.²³ If war is the permanent condition of human society as Thucydides claimed, then pursuit of historical literacy in military history remains an enduring requirement for the military professional. The pursuit of historical knowledge forms the foundation of the lifelong process of learning that aids the military professional in fighting wars. For the military professional, the desire to learn precedes the pursuit towards greater understanding and must be the most important personal source of motivation.

The pursuit of understanding and historical literacy is shaped indelibly by the means used to educate the military professional. The means are the form of education, and when combined with experience and reflection serve to hone the skill and competence of the military officer. As history often fails to fit neatly into theory without ignoring inconsistency, or into neatly categorized taxonomies or lessons learned captured for classroom instruction, the careful and personal study of military history for military professionals must be considered a career-long, if not life-long endeavor and an essential component in professional development.

²³Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich, eds., *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2. See also Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (London: Penguin Books, 1954), 48. Murray and Sinnreich quote from Thucydides, “those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past, and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future.” Thucydides understanding of human nature concluded that inevitably war would continually revisit man and civilization, and thus an accurate understanding of the past was an essential component to shaping the future.

History as an academic endeavor is also subject to bias, to shifting consensus of opinion over time.²⁴ Thus it follows that any fixed opinion or official sanction presented as historical fact must always be viewed with skepticism, including the interpreted historical foundations of doctrine. Accepting things as facts or laws in military history through a reliance on officially sanctioned history or doctrine can lead to lockstep and unenlightened approaches to warfare based on misinformed doctrine or an over-reliance on personal experience.

On the other hand, the military professional may also be a commanding officer, and the burden of command operates within and is subject to the constraints of time, and the commander's decisions are often far more consequential than those of other professionals. There is simply limited time for study, and often for reflection of both study and experience. Theory can prove intellectually comforting, where its appeal to universal utility negates the requirement of deep contextual understanding. At some point in military planning and operations, command decisions are required, and the limitations of available time serve to curtail detailed study and extended reflection to gain intuitive knowledge over time. Thus theory can negate the requirement to readdress base assumptions and inconsistency in a time-constrained environment, where one virtue of theory serves to prevent indecisiveness and inaction. As military organizations exist to act on a thinking enemy, theory aids the practitioner in action.

²⁴Murray and Sinnreich, 11. Murray and Sinnreich write that "In the end, like the phenomenon it studies, military historiography is a human enterprise, with human attributes and flaws." A recent example of historical revisionism is the evaluation of U.S. Grant as both a military leader and US President, seen in Jean Edwards Smith book *Grant*, which attempts to revise the interpretation of the historical record on U.S. Grant, which was heavily influenced towards the negative by post-war southern historians.

In the US Army the competition for time in an officer's career means that operational assignments will often trump institutional requirements for officer education and development opportunities, particularly while the Army remains at war in Afghanistan. A higher value is placed on experiential learning and not on education. Officer schools that do teach some military history, such as the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, can only provide a superficial understanding of military history, as there is often little depth, and entire wars are covered in one two or four hour class. Preparation for class requires the speed-reading of military history.²⁵ This method of history instruction is akin to force-feeding, where reflection, thought, individual contribution, and evaluation of understanding places no intellectual or academic burden on the officer student.²⁶ In this type of learning environment, the study of history produces no actual improvement in critical thinking or quality of insight, with little actual benefit to the military officer. Thus, the less intellectually rigorous the study of history becomes, the less value is the study of history to producing a better and more capable military professional and leader. It is both prophetic and self-fulfilling. History loses its central role in the education of officers, becoming no more or less valuable than any other

²⁵Richard L. Davis, "The Case for Professional Military Education: A View From the Trenches," *Airpower Journal* (Winter 1989). Davis highlights a critique of US Air Force PME in 1989 that is heard today at the US Army Command and General Staff College, that instruction is "an inch deep and a mile wide." Another common aphorism, based on the experience of the author is 'wafer thin'. Essentially, the instruction is broad in scope but lacking in depth and understanding. This includes the instruction of military history.

²⁶John P. Kiszely, "The Relevance of History to the Military Profession," in *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession*, ed. Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27. Murray is speaking the British Army's staff colleges, but it applies equally to the U.S. Army's staff college as well.

portion of the curriculum. Furthermore, distilling history to principle, to useful facts or lessons learned, and simple interpretation may serve to make history more teachable in short classes, to reconcile the constraints of time with the institutional requirements to train and educate the military officer. On the other hand, historiography shows that the interpretation of history, the writing of history, changes over time, sometimes dramatically.

The Army is not an academic institution, but the academic study of military history is arguably more important and consequential than the mastery of doctrine, especially for commanding officers and those directly involved in planning for use of force. A proper educational balance is required, a balance that ensures officers understand and master doctrine while remaining historically informed and inquisitive, and held accountable for both. Within institutional military schools, mastery of officially sanctioned ideas will arguably prove more important than demonstrating competence in understanding military history. But mastery of consensus ideas on warfare is insufficient in war, where the autonomy of command necessitates individual skill and vision leading collective action. The path towards skill and acumen in military command in war fundamentally requires historical literacy, and more specifically a deep familiarity of military history that enables better judgment and decision-making. Learning and adapting in command towards better fighting in war is thus more reliant on history and context than doctrine, where doctrine is less a source of direction and information and more an enabler of execution.

Fundamentally, military leaders must recognize the role of doctrine and the limits of its utility when considered as a contiguous body of authoritative information,

particularly in its educational purposes. It serves several essential purposes for military organizations. It enables military organizations to efficiently plan, train, and communicate in orders and in common professional language, terminology, and processes.²⁷ Most importantly it serves to assist and inform the organization and training of military formations around the mission of fighting wars—the main purpose of any fighting organization—while attempting to balance the tensions that exist within any doctrine. These tensions are persistent and stem from three major influences: the roots in history and continuity with the past, the requirements for relevancy in the present, and the necessity to remain valid in the near future.²⁸ Doctrine must reflect a sound understanding of military history and theory, of successful and unsuccessful theory and practice in the past, at least in appearances. It must also serve to anticipate certain changes in warfare that may provide the military force with an advantage in the next conflict, without becoming too ambitious in attempting to divine revolutionary change that may in fact reflect the institutional bias towards a desired state of future warfare.²⁹

²⁷Department of the Army, FM 3-0, *Operations*, D-2.

²⁸BL010, Senior officer in the British Army, Interview by Mark Battjes, Nathan Springer, Dustin Mitchell, Rob Green, Aaron Kaufman, Rick Johnson, and Ben Boardman, Warminster, UK, 29 March 2011.

²⁹Peter R. Mansoor, *Baghdad at Sunrise: A Brigade Commander's War in Iraq* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 107. Mansoor highlights the US Army's institutional belief in Rapid Decisive Operations (RDO) following the first Gulf War, where organizational and technological superiority would reflect the way the Army fights in the future, despite an understanding that future war would be decentralized, chaotic, and uncertain. Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 226, 230. Linn writes about the profusion of buzzwords or new jargon that also influenced Army doctrinal development, such as mass effects, dominant maneuver, full dimensional protection, etc., all contingent upon information age technologies. H. R. McMaster, "Learning from Contemporary Conflicts to Prepare for Future War," *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs* 52, no. 4 (2008).

Doctrine in some contexts can appear deterministic in the outcomes of war. History demonstrates doctrine can inhibit thinking on war and perhaps so the seeds of disaster. However, ex post facto critiques of doctrinal thinking must inherent recognize two factors. First, during peacetime adversaries interact only in the abstract, in the minds of men and on paper. Secondly, the margins of success or failure in war can prove very thin, despite the outcomes. Victory seems more preordained after the fact than the actual adversaries may admit. When analyzing success or failure, on the quality of pre-conflict thinking, historians must arguably remain conservative in approach in conclusion in determining the causes of success or failure. Thus, arguments that designate doctrine as a source of failure portending defeat must be scrutinized for the depth of thinking, consideration of contexts, and quality of argumentation. In analyzing doctrine in relation to warfighting, context is everything. The defeat of France in 1940 highlights this burden.

French Army interwar doctrine, based on their interpretation of the lessons of WWI, led to belief that method battle—highly centralized, tightly controlled, defensive oriented, and firepower intensive—would prove superior to offensive oriented maneuver warfare, much as it had in WWI.³⁰ This dominant view on the future of war sharply influenced the role of commanders in method battle, where control was viewed as more important than initiative in order to ensure that higher commanders retained their hands on the handle of the fan, in control of the battle.³¹ The perception and intellectual concept

³⁰Robert A. Doughty, *The Breaking Point: Sedan and the Fall of France, 1940* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1990), 27-30. Doughty's research and arguments clearly stake the claim in problems that doctrine can inflict on an army. However, he also lays out the thinking and context of French doctrinal reforms, which when analyzed do not appear extreme or poor in the contexts of the time.

³¹*Ibid.*, 29-30.

that method battle could sufficiently leverage control over the dynamic battlefield against a German Army educated and trained to fight decentralized through the initiative of subordinates led directly the disaster at Sedan in 1940. Stated simply, French doctrine failed to prepare its army for the next war, and in fact harmed it to the extent that it undermined their military strategy and led to defeat.

However, the margins of victory in the defeat of France hung on a couple of threads and a few panzer corps that broke through the French lines south of the village of Stonne and west of Sedan. The operational maneuver to the coast—the Sichelschnitt—although neat in concept, was a one-off event that while superbly executed, did not demonstrate a general competence of operational and strategic thinking on the part of the Germans, who failed in Soviet Russia. While French interwar doctrine certainly influenced the conduct of the war in 1940, it is nevertheless difficult to place doctrine as the center of a defeat argument, as without consideration of circumstance and context, the argument is immediately subject to historical contradiction. What is true of the French Army in 1940 and perhaps the US Army in 1982 is not necessarily true in today’s context. Rigorous and comprehensive research and history ultimately determine the validity of such claims on cause and effect.

Doctrine is thus more of an organizational tool, clearly not sufficient on its own in creating adaptive and thinking leaders.³² The idea of a doctrine-centered Army, though placing an absolute claim on the necessity of quality organizational thinking and writing,

³²Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Army Leadership: Competent, Confident, and Agile* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 7-1. Forceful prose and speeches on the requirement for leaders that are adaptive, agile, competent, culturally astute, etc., does not necessarily lead to the creation of better leaders.

may create the perception of consequential and deterministic nature of official publications. In essence, no Army wants to be in the position of the French Army in 1940, saddled with narrow thinking that limited the army prior to its defeat, with thin margins for success or failure. However, doctrinal determinism, while perhaps more valid for analyzing the defeat of France in 1940, are not valid in all cases of success or failure in modern war, and not for the debate surrounding US Army counterinsurgency doctrine published in 2006 and its supposed effects on Army performance in Iraq.

The debate extending five years from the publication of Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* and its supposed broad adoption by the military provide a snapshot of a history or narrative that makes a claim for doctrinal determinism.³³ In that vein, doctrine, when good adequately prepares commanders and units for the fight prior to employment; when bad, it poorly educates and prepares commanders and units for the wrong fight and potentially sets up the force for mission failure. It is simple argument that starts with a general claim rather than a narrow one, a deduction based on the assumption of the centrality of doctrine in Army thinking and performance in war. This assumption, however, biases proper research and analysis, and is perhaps prejudicial to true learning, and is not validated in recent history.

³³John A. Nagl, "Learning and Adapting to Win," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 58 (3d Quarter 2010): 123; Nicholas Lemann, "Social Scientists Do Counterinsurgency," *The Nation* 86, no. 10 (April 2010): 73-77. Lemann compares and contrasts the arguments for and against population-centric COIN as advocated by some social scientists, as well as its counterargument by historian Mark Moyar.

Contemporary Arguments Surrounding Counterinsurgency Doctrine

Army FM 3-24, published in December 2006 immediately prior to the announced change in strategy by President George Bush represented the first major adjustment addressing counterinsurgency doctrine in over 20 years. Much of the success attributed General David Petraeus in 2007 during the Surge nested well with the argument that doctrine in the form of FM 3-24 preceded effective action, primarily as he was the lead proponent for the new doctrine as the commander of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, prior to his appointment as commander of Multi-National Forces Iraq in January 2007. Circumstances thus aligned to give the manual immediate creditability based on the strong reputation of the General Petraeus.

The major critique of FM 3-24 is that it leans too far in the direction of population-centric COIN (PC-COIN) while deemphasizing the role of armed force or the threat of force in the pursuit of COIN campaign goals.³⁴ The ability of the counterinsurgent force to bring sufficient destructive force, or the threat of force, to bear on the insurgent force is critical in any insurgency. If most insurgencies end in a negotiated outcome, then negotiating from a position of strength—strength that is manifest in significant military or paramilitary capability—is an enduring requirement if the counterinsurgent-supported government is to achieve a desired outcome. The COIN force must retain the potential to compel the enemy to do its will as a basis for negotiations. Negotiating from a position of self-induced military weakness is one of the

³⁴Gian P. Gentile, “Let’s Build an Army to Win All Wars,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 52 (1st Quarter 2009): 27.

main reasons that the British Army failed in its efforts to pacify Basra in Iraq in late 2007, necessitating the Iraqi led operation *Charge of the Knights* in early 2008.³⁵

In leaning towards one direction, the manual creates a list of principles and imperatives for COIN, paradoxes of COIN operations, as well as successful and unsuccessful practices that appear simultaneously dogmatic and opaque, but are claimed as proven in the history of combating insurgency.³⁶ In claiming the existence of principles—principles that are always true—the authors are giving the impression that the intellectual rigor, logic, and reason behind the claim to principle are in fact are as provable and incontrovertible as the nine principles of war established by J. F. C. Fuller in his seminal work *The Foundations of the Science of War*, published in 1926.³⁷ In fact,

³⁵BL010, Interview. The military weakness was self-induced, due to a desire to get out of Iraq and the cognitive dissonance of not recognizing an insurgency when you see it, conflating crime with insurgency.

³⁶Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 1-20 through 1-22. According to FM 3-24, the historical principles for COIN are: Legitimacy is the main objective, unity of effort is essential, political factors are primary, counterinsurgents must understand the environment, intelligence drives operations, insurgents must be isolated from their cause and support, security under the rule of law is essential, and counterinsurgents must prepare for a long-term commitment. The contemporary imperatives for COIN are manage information and expectations, use the appropriate level of force, learn and adapt, empower at the lowest levels, and support the host nation. The paradoxes of COIN operations are: sometimes if you protect your force, the less secure you may be; sometimes, the more force is used, the less effective it is; the more successful the counterinsurgency is, the less force can be used and the more risk must be accepted; sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction; some the best weapons for counterinsurgents do not shoot; the host nation doing something tolerably is normally better than us doing it well; if a tactic works this week, it might not work well next week . . . it if works in this province, it might not work in the next; tactical success guarantees nothing; and many important decisions are not made by generals.

³⁷The original nine Principles of War as defined by Fuller were direction, offensive action, surprise, concentration, distribution, security, mobility, endurance, and determination. See J. F. C. Fuller, *Foundations of the Science of War* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1926), 208.

contrarians argue that the principles espoused in FM 3-24 are not proven historically, and while may prove correct in certain contexts, are not universally correct in all circumstances.³⁸ The arguments that center on the presumed effects of FM 3-24 on the conduct of OIF, positive and negative, assume a deterministic, cause and effect relationship between doctrine and outcomes. The issue of doctrine and consequences requires further investigation.

Is Doctrine and Consequential? The U.S. Army Experience in OIF

The consequences of incorrect doctrine are perhaps overblown when analyzed historically in Iraq, and this includes any doctrine or approach espoused by one camp or another in the COIN doctrine debate. Operational COIN doctrine as seen in FM 3-24 may not broadly describe the way units Army units actually fight, and is thus not necessarily a factor in success. If this is the case, then it follows that the center point of the argument of population or enemy centric approaches, as a critique of doctrine sufficiency and fidelity in fact and in history, may prove useless when trying to determine its effect on conduct. While it is easy to assume the corruptive effects of bad doctrine, particularly in the US Army culture fixed on the idea of doctrinal centrality since the 1970s, it is not clear that

³⁸ Author's opinion on the COIN principle of Unity of Effort is Essential. Combat units in Baghdad during the Surge achieved success in spite lacking true Unity of Effort. Perhaps the best outcome possible was achieving Harmony of Effort, which implies that progress across time and space occurred without any synergizing or unifying effort from higher headquarters. This was also present in the efforts of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams and their relationships with tactical units conducting COIN in Baghdad. Additionally, the notion of achieving unity of effort while structurally impeding this principle through unit rotations every twelve months and constantly changing battlespace is implausible. Units achieved success even though we did not adhere to this principle. The oral histories in support of this thesis support this claim; Gian P. Gentile, "Time for the Deconstruction of FM 3-24," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 58 (3d Quarter 2010): 117.

operational doctrine actually described and changed the way the Army actually fought, particularly in Iraq. More consequential is perhaps the use of doctrine as a basis for education to indoctrinate everything from tactics through military leadership which perhaps assumes that all forms of Army doctrine—tactical, operational, and administrative—are of equal utility.³⁹

Arguments on methods in COIN may fail to address the tremendous influence of US military culture and tradition in war and how it influences the way the US and the Army actually fights. In his book *The American Way of War*, historian Russell Weigley describes the American way of war as confined mostly to strategies of annihilation.⁴⁰ Unlimited war aims combine with virtually inexhaustible resources ensures that annihilation surpassed attrition in US war strategy.⁴¹ The notion of total destruction of the enemy's forces became not simply an ideal object of fighting, but the only object of fighting.⁴² Essentially, the sum effects of American military tradition and culture, when considered in total, serve to shape how the US fights. Rather than an American way of war, Weigley is actually describing an American way of warfare, a form of warfare that assumes a quality and character all its own once fighting starts, and ultimately supersedes

³⁹Opinion of the author. A good subject for research on the relationship between officer education and its effects on actual warfighting.

⁴⁰Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), xxii.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*

what doctrine prescribes or anticipates.⁴³ Weigley claims an American way of fighting, one shaped through tradition, which is generally applicable to most contexts.

A more recent argument offered by Antulio Echevarria argues that there is no American way of war, but there is an American way of battle.⁴⁴ In essence, the American way of battle is a consequence of the bifurcation of responsibilities in war, where the military concentrates on winning the battles and politicians are concerned with winning the peace.⁴⁵ In its sphere of responsibility, the only requirement of the military is to win the battle and defeat the enemy, which should secure victory, lead to peace, and end the war.⁴⁶ War, in the eyes of the Army, is about winning the battles and campaigns. Strategic success should naturally follow. The ability of certain military leaders to operate in the strategic realm, to negotiate and solidify the peace after the fighting ends, is questionable, and is perhaps influenced by the thinking that good combat operations and campaigns fix strategic problems, even if strategy has failed to describe the problem effectively.⁴⁷

⁴³Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 220.

⁴⁴Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Toward an American Way of War* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2004), 1.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷BF010, Former Army Officer and Current Academic, Interview by Aaron Kaufman and Rick Johnson, Boston, MA, 11 March 2011. The interviewee discusses the triumphalist and magnanimous way that General Schwarzkopf approached the cease-fire negotiations at Safwan, Iraq, during Operation Desert Storm. The fight was over, and thus the main problem was solved and negotiations were of secondary importance. He argues that this thinking pervaded the military and political culture of the time after the fall of Baghdad in 2003.

Despite their differences, the ideas of Weigley and Echevarria are filial and appeal to a dominant American tradition of warfare in the last 75 years, one involving a tremendous application of material resources to address ostensibly military problems, whether it is destroying Nazi Germany or Al Qaeda in Iraq. Both wars proved and continue to prove tremendously costly in resources, but less so in blood than in treasure. In Total War, and in Limited War minus the very large ground force, the US military can leverage virtually limitless resources to win the next battle or the short campaign.⁴⁸ The major problem centers on the management of resources, training, doctrinal development, and the organization of campaigns and operations to achieve a successful outcome.⁴⁹ With significant resources even in Limited Wars such as OIF, arguably the main problems of war hinge on the optimization of processes and the discovery of efficiencies that lead to better management of the war effort. War then is a technical problem

⁴⁸The concept of Total War has roots in Clausewitz. Total War general describes a lack of limits concerning the prosecution and objectives of the war, often associated with facing an enemy that presents an existential threat. In Total War, war aims are unlimited, the mobilization of human and material resources is total, and traditional immunity afforded to non-combatants is often denied, and the means used to prosecute the war are constrained only by resources. The objective with respect to the enemy is often total defeat or destruction of his ability to fight and complete subjugation of the enemy's political will and authority. Terms such as 'unconditional surrender' are associated with Total War. World Wars I and II are both considered Total Wars. In Limited War, both the ends and means are often politically and militarily restrained. The objectives of war are often tied to gaining a favorable position in a negotiated settlement that ends hostilities. National resources in men and material are not mobilized in total, although Limited War can be very costly as seen in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Hypothetically, traditional rules and laws of armed conflict are followed more so than in Total War, and non-combatant immunity is respected.

⁴⁹Linn, 7. Linn argues that the Army's Way of War is dominated intellectually by three competing, but not mutually exclusive camps, including the Guardians, Managers, and Heroes. The Managers view war as a question of organization, versus the Guardians who view the war as an engineering problem. For the Managers, war is a question of the rational organization of men and material.

requiring a better scientific approach, a complex but solvable problem of science and engineering.

Recent experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has demonstrated that resource-intensive limited warfare in the form of counterinsurgency is no recipe for success or the outcome of good strategy. Instead, money substitutes for strategy, and in its effort as applied towards nation building actually impedes rather than enables progress. Furthermore, the ability to fall back on extensive resources may inhibit true understanding and problem solving, enabling a self-imposed cognitive isolation from the battlefield, where the requirement for deep contextual understanding and detailed local knowledge are overwhelmed by the desire for easy, shallow, and costly palliative solutions. Rather than money being an additional weapon of warfare, money becomes an indiscriminate weapon of mass disruption and corruption. War, whether COIN or conventional, is not a problem of social engineering that can appeal to the laws of the physical universe as a basis for solving complex human problems in war. However, fixating on arguments of doctrinal sufficiency may ultimately mask this problem and fail to describe how military organizations become learning organizations in war, particularly concerning the effects of FM 3-24 on the Army as it fought in Iraq.

Thus the idea the doctrine determines action in the tradition of the US Army—that doctrine such as FM 3-24 is either good in that it was a requirement and precursor to success in Iraq, or that it is bad in that it will corrupt the force—is not born out historically. In fact, the ability of the Army to leverage massive resources in virtually every form of warfare leads to strategies of both attrition and annihilation, regardless of the Army's doctrine and views of its history, even with the major limitation, nowadays,

of the small size of the professional Army in the form of brigade combat teams. The question of best methods or approaches in COIN, whether population centric or something else, are simply an extension in the belief in the deterministic effects of doctrine.

The ideal of the doctrinally centered Army is not inherently flawed with respect to education. However, the function of doctrine in enabling military organizations to fight more efficiently and effectively is separate from the autonomy of the command and the requirement for commanders to think and lead effectively in the face of a lethal enemy. In essence, doctrine enables organizations to execute the directives of command. Military history, on the other hand, educates commanders on things to think about, acting as an aid to decision making. Doctrine is simply insufficient as the basis of education for commanders and future commanders. Military history should act as the basis for officer education and development, particularly for those that choose to enter the combat arms, such as infantry and armor.

Clausewitz on Education and Developing Commanders

Given the nature of the subject, we must remind ourselves that it is simply not possible to construct a model for the art of war that can serve as a scaffolding on which the commander can rely for support at any time. Whenever he has to fall back on his innate talent, he will find himself outside the model and in conflict with it; no matter how versatile the code, the situation will always lead to the consequences we have already alluded to: talent and genius operate outside the rules, and theory conflicts with practice.⁵⁰

In this paragraph, Clausewitz stakes his claim that a true positive doctrine for all war is unattainable, that war in practice will never be subordinate to the written theories

⁵⁰Clausewitz, 140.

that attempt to control it. On its face, Clausewitz's claim seems uncontroversial, particularly to those that have experienced war. On the other hand, the claim on the unattainability of a positive doctrine at some point inherently undermines the doctrinal foundations of some Western military thought, particularly US military thought heavily invested in the work of Baron Antoine de Jomini.⁵¹ At the very least, Clausewitz is attacking the notion or assumption of the enduring quality, utility, or comparative superiority of military doctrines beyond their initial application and contexts, when the seeming trivialities of friction and chance converge to impose change when theory proves incorrect or inconsistent.

Theory in the form of doctrine is inherently flawed from inception, but there is risk in assuming that due to its flaws it is ultimately useless. Rather, it is simply more or less useful depending on a variety of circumstances and the ability of the commander. Historically, US Army doctrine served as the basis for organizing and training military forces, instructing tactics, and to give the peace-trained officer something of the viewpoint of the veteran.⁵² Though imperfect, theory in this form serves as a source of

⁵¹Baron Antoine de Jomini, *The Art of War*, trans. by G. H. Mendell and W. P. Craighill (Rockville, MD: Arc Manor, 2007), 31, 41. Jomini claimed that war was a distinct science of its own, and that science has proved its utility and principles in all forms of ordinary, including human, affairs. His influence was noted in the 1862 US Army translation of his book, and persists today, particular in vocabulary and in the use of principles. In this case, principles are in essence conflated towards law, stemming from the intellectual efforts of the French Enlightenment to rationalize social and government systems towards natural law, as humans live in a natural world governed by laws characterized by Newtonian physics. Such efforts to rationalize human systems, to the use social engineering towards a better form of society government in conformity to natural law were refuted by the German Enlightenment and philosophers such as Kant and Hegel. Clausewitz recognized this, but projected it onto the realm of warfare.

⁵²The Infantry Journal Incorporated, *Infantry in Battle* (Richmond, VA: Garrett and Massie, 1939), vii.

ideas based on tactical lessons learned in fighting in recent history, while avoiding abstract theories.⁵³ At the time, US Army doctrinal literature was designed to provide the untested soldier, leader, and unit the ability to fight through initial emotion of fear caused by uncertainty common to all armies fighting the first battle. In this view of theory, there is little projection of abstraction into the future or prediction of revolutionary technologies that would radically change the nature of war in the near-term.

Contradictions inherently exist between theory and practice, in thinking about war while at peace versus thinking while fighting. History demonstrates the dialectic nature of both, a thesis-antithesis synthesis, where thinking about fighting changes upon interaction with a dangerous enemy. Ultimately, there can be clear dichotomy between the art and science of war or between theory and application, as relevant and essential learning occurs from both.⁵⁴ Knowledge however cannot be confined to the understanding or mastery of complicated processes that seeks to leverage control of the complex. Doctrine cannot substitute for the detailed study of military history, particularly for the officers that command combat organizations directly tasked to close with and destroy the enemy.

There is also significant risk in doctrine becoming dogma, particularly to those officers that spend much of their career wedded to the mastery of processes and complicated models in the context of complex military affairs. Written principles may masquerade as absolute truths, creating intellectual barriers to reflection through simply assigning a fixed and enduring principle in doctrine to that which is ephemeral, arbitrary,

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Clausewitz, 148. Clausewitz differentiates between the art and science of war as the difference between the application of creative ability and the pursuit of knowledge, where the object of art is ability and the object of science is knowledge.

or lacking in intellectual rigor.⁵⁵ A main argument against FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* is the assigning of principle to that which is not always true.⁵⁶

With no military history foundation to reflect from, leaders and future commanders raised in this environment are at risk of believing, unreflectively, in the absolute authority, rather than the particular value of, doctrine. In this context, a learning organization is assessed as an outcome of doctrine mastery, in relative cognitive isolation. But a military organization cannot often set the terms of interacting with the enemy, so the learning is also function of the inability to control an enemy with a will, while conserving one's strength. The true test of a learning organization comes after making contact with a lethal foe, in the sheer effort in bending the enemy to your will. The outcomes of fighting determine the true quality of units called learning organizations, not doctrine or mastery of doctrinal procedures, whether or not doctrine shapes or determines performance.

⁵⁵Timothy L. Challans, *Awakening Warrior: Revolution in the Ethics of Warfare* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 162. Challans asserts that General Montgomery Meigs insertion of morale as a tenth Principle of War when he was the commander of CAC and in charge of doctrine was arbitrary and not in the intellectual vein that J.F.C. Fuller pursued when he posited the Nine Principles of War.

⁵⁶See endnote 20. Also aggravating the argument that COIN principles are not true principles are the misunderstanding of euphemisms such as hearts and minds, the people are the key as well as other emotive slogans used in Afghanistan, such as the one described as courageous restraint. Courageous restraint was used by British Army commanders in Helmand in 2009 as a reason in denying authority to use protective fires (indirect) in support of troops in contact. See BL150, Company Sergeant Major, Interview by Aaron Kaufman and Dustin Mitchell, 5 April 2011; BL200, Platoon Commander, Interview by Aaron Kaufman and Dustin Mitchell, 7 April 2011. This appeals to the COIN imperative of Use the Appropriate Level of Force as well as the COIN paradox of success in COIN means using less force and accepting more risk.

Indeed, the emphasis that US Army doctrine places on particular heuristics in the form of decision-making modeling tools and processes may also compound the problem of a dogmatic approach to doctrine. The dependence on certain heuristic models with scientific, staff-centric processes with only an abstract view of the tactical environment, relying on significant and perhaps arbitrary feedback mechanisms can give the impression that the Army places far more credence in the science of war than in the art of war.⁵⁷ The use of prescriptive and detailed heuristics with a façade of scientific process—backed by direct and authoritative language—to drive decision-making can lead the practitioner to place far more faith in process and with a bias towards scientific approaches than is actually merited.⁵⁸ The superficialities of complicated planning procedures can give the appearance of control while providing little control in actuality.

Several heuristics dominate Army thinking and planning for military operations. The operations process, formerly known as the military decision-making process, or MDMP, is the primary heuristic that the Army uses to solve problems as detailed in Army FM 5-0, the *Operations Process*. More recently, the Army has adopted another

⁵⁷Nigel Aylwin-Foster, “Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency,” *Military Review* (November-December 2005): 6-7. Aylwin-Foster’s view of the US Army during his time in Iraq on MNC-I staff included terms such as process oriented, staff driven (instead of command driven), a commitment to unreasonable optimism which clouded frank and correct assessment, etc. Aylwin-Foster’s view of the US Army is probably widely held in the US Army officer corps.

⁵⁸Christopher R. Paparone and George Reed, “The Reflective Military Practitioner: How Military Professionals Think in Action,” *Military Review* (March-April 2008): 6-7. Paparone and Reed write that MDMP, instead of actually generating unique solutions or options for the commander, is instead perhaps better described as a myopic-decision making process. The implication is that the process and work behind it creates a false impression of intellectual rigor, when in fact it is an exercise in control, conformity, and adherence to mechanics.

heuristic, known institutionally as targeting and captured in Army FM 3-60, *The Targeting Process*.⁵⁹ According to FM 3-60, targeting is the process of selecting and prioritizing targets and matching the appropriate response to them, considering operational requirements and capabilities.⁶⁰ This includes the both lethal and non-lethal methods of targeting.

Targeting is an offspring of the now out-of-favor terminology Effects-Based Operations (EBO) or Effects-Based Approach to Operations (EBAO), unless it is merely coincidental that the same language of effects and changing system behavior appears in the FM.⁶¹ In spite of General Mattis' argument about the insufficiency of EBAO in targeting complex human systems, the Army continues to subscribe to an effects-based approach in both targeting combat systems as well as human systems.⁶² Whether or not the Army has heeded, considered, accepted or dismissed the main critiques of EBO or EBAO is unclear.⁶³ The perception of the Army's bias towards heuristic models,

⁵⁹Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-60, *The Targeting Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, November 2010).

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 1-1.

⁶¹General James N. Mattis, USMC, "USJFCOM Commander's Guidance for Effects-based Operations," *Joint Force Quarterly* 51 (4th Quarter 2008): 105-106. For a closer examination of the language in FM 3-60, see "Targeting Principles," 1-2.

⁶²Mattis, 105. Mattis argues that EBO/EBAO cannot predict or anticipate the actions of complex human systems because it essentially cannot describe the human system because it fails to account for free will, passions, relationships, etc.

⁶³For a philosophical and academic argument against EBO/EBAO, see Tim Challans, "Tipping Sacred Cows: Moral Potential Through Operational Art," *Military Review* (September-October 2009): 19-28.

technical solutions, and staff-centric processes in problem solving is certainly reinforced in FM 3-60.⁶⁴

Recognizing both the utility and limitations of doctrine is thus the key. Conceptually, this span of utility is hierarchical and perhaps functional. The closer the military organization is to results of the practical application of doctrine, the more immediate the feedback regarding the efficacy and utility of the doctrine. As such, tactical doctrine often serves as a direct aid to fighting, whereas operational doctrine might better be described as an aid to efficient planning. In both cases, doctrine proves useful or it does not, at which point a new technical solution or modification to doctrine is proposed. The difficulty in assessing efficacy and utility of doctrine becomes more difficult as one approaches the higher echelons of military organizations. Experience is more direct and concrete at lower echelons, and more abstract at higher echelons, especially when fighting insurgencies.⁶⁵ Operationally oriented doctrine, such as FM 3-24, FM 3-0, and FM 5-0 do not receive the same immediate feedback. Thus assessing utility is difficult with respect to its ability to improve organizational fighting ability.

⁶⁴The primary proponent for FM 3-60 is the Fires Center of Excellence, located at Fort Sill, OK, which is also the home of the Field Artillery. The Field Artillery branch is arguably the Army branch most oriented on the technical aspects of combat.

⁶⁵This paragraph is the author's opinion based on experience. Small unit maneuver doctrine, from the company-level and below, is extremely useful and necessary for building competent and capable teams. It provides a sound base of competency regarding the use of force, which is easily manipulated by well-led units. Deviating significantly from developing these tactical skills undermines the basic small unit competencies necessary to build confident and capable fighting organizations. Combat arms units, well trained in core competencies and led by good officers, often use force far more judiciously in COIN than in units where leaders are not trained regularly in controlling force. This is often referred to as getting the fundamentals right.

Arguably, heuristic models are the Army's only institutional way of dealing with abstract and complex problems; but the more abstract the problem, the harder it is to assess the efficacy of the actual model, to claims that complicated processes are positively influencing the environment. While manual after manual contain a few intellectual caveats that warn against attempting to use the manual as a checklist, it is easy to see how a few caveats can get swept up in the hundreds of pages of text. The amount and scope of Army doctrine may encourage doctrinaire approaches to thinking and operations.

A key ingredient missing from the equation is the individual, particularly the exceptional officer and commander, unbound intellectually and not constrained by institutional beliefs or desires. How does doctrine interact with those officers that own or gain, as Clausewitz asserts, either a talent or genius for war?

Rule Breakers: The Genius and the Talented

Clausewitz claims that talent and genius operate outside of the rules, and such rules must include those communicated via principle, process, or restriction in war arbitrarily written in doctrine that fails the test of history, practice, or exercise in logic.⁶⁶ History provides numerous examples of military geniuses, functioning intellectually outside of his contemporaries and the current *zeitgeist*, operate outside of the contemporary rules and achieve success. Perhaps a better argument is the military genius exposes the oversimplified rules of bad and overly prescriptive theory, or more simply,

⁶⁶Clausewitz, 140.

geniuses are better at identifying contradictions in theory and exploiting them.⁶⁷

Regardless of the sufficiency of theory, genius is arguably not a common trait and thus insufficiently reliable as a requirement for successful military commanders.

Talent becomes the critical requirement, and perhaps the greatest determining variable in success. Although not all officers are endowed with talent in military affairs, talent can be developed through careful study combined with experience. The distribution and development of talent in the form of military officers within the organization is more important than a haphazard and unpredictable reliance on the pursuit and harvesting of military genius through more paternalistic or nepotistic approaches. If the variable of talent can be influenced towards the positive gain of the military organization, then great emphasis must be placed on both the development of talent and ensuring talented officers are in command.

Relevant, accountable, and rigorous education must serve as the fundamental basis of talent development within the officer corps, as it is perhaps the most determinant human factor in the origin of military success. All education and degrees are not the same, however, and appropriate for officers preparing to lead combat organizations. For those that hope to command combat organizations, the central component to this education must be military history, from undergraduate education and beyond, rather than an irrelevant business degree from an online, for-profit university. The scope and method of education of the military officer provides the theoretical framework that serves to

⁶⁷Cliff Rogers, "Clausewitz, Genius, and the Rules," *The Journal of Military History* 66 (October 2002): 1167.

shape and mold talent within military organizations. Clausewitz argues education, or study, is the essential requirement for theory, not doctrine.⁶⁸ He further argues:

Theory need not be a positive doctrine, a sort of manual for action. . . . It is an analytical investigation leading to the close acquaintance with the subject; applied to experience—in our case to military history—it leads to thorough familiarity with it. The closer it comes to that goal, the more it proceeds from the objective form of a science to the subjective form of a skill, the more effective it will prove in areas where the nature of the case admits no arbiter but talent. It will, in fact, become an active ingredient of talent. . . . Theory then becomes a guide to anyone who wants to learn war from books; it will light his way, ease his progress, train his judgment, and help him to avoid pitfalls.⁶⁹

Thus the basis for educating military officers and talent development is the careful and continual study of military history above all else, and not doctrine. Talent is developed through study and vicarious learning to gain familiarity and honed through experience. Overemphasizing the study of doctrine at the expense of history as well as the shaping history to create doctrine that suits institutional preferences, results in both the suppression of talent and perhaps courts military disaster. The Russo-Japanese War provides an example. The offensive concepts and doctrine that dominated the opposing armies in World War I failed despite the knowledge of weapons effects from the recent Russo-Japanese War in 1905.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Clausewitz, 141.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰James D. Sisemore, “The Russo Japanese War: Lessons Not Learned” (Master’s thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2003), 1. See also Robert A. Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2005), 25-28. Doughty describes the roles of senior French Army officers, such as Joffre, in the promulgation of the idea of *offensive à outrance* and its influence on doctrine.

The most critical variable to military success is talented command leadership, commanders who are themselves products of their education, both formal and experiential. The nature of the learning organization is thus critically influenced by the commander's education and experience. The recent historical role of doctrine in developing leaders, particularly in the recent tradition of the US Army is important to understand both historically and in informing on the efficacy of the idea of the doctrine-centric Army. The Army's post-Vietnam War reform efforts of the 1970s, and the ideas of two senior Army leaders at the time concerning the role of doctrine, serve to provide perspective as to why the view that the Army is a doctrine-centric organization continues to this day.

Divergent Philosophy on the Role of Doctrine:
Generals DePuy and Cushman

Doctrine and leadership are inherently intertwined. Defining the role of doctrine in the Army leads to promotion of certain viewpoints on authority as it is institutionalized within both the operating force and educational systems that develop officers and NCOs throughout their careers. Over time, as the Army orients toward internal sources of authority—field manuals—which promote certain views will expand through the indoctrination of officers throughout their career, where the collective brain aligns with the originating view on the role of doctrine. The seed of an idea thus grows into an institutional norm and operational practice.

The US Army owes significant portions of its doctrinal heritage of the last 35 years to the vision General William DePuy. DePuy, a World War II veteran and division commander in Vietnam, was an associate and subordinate of General Creighton Abrams

and the right man at the right time to assume broad reform responsibilities under the mandate established by Abrams during the final years of the Vietnam War. DePuy's responsibilities coalesced upon his selection as the first commander of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) in 1973. His tremendous influence on Army doctrine is indisputable, in not in actual product but in the role doctrine assumed at the center of Army reforms. The function and role of doctrine changed during his tenure as the first commander of the TRADOC. Doctrine, based on certain concepts of warfare, assumed the central role in reforming the Army, of linking programming, budgeting, and combat systems development to training, organization, and equipping, ultimately to the point where the Army became a doctrine-centric organization.⁷¹

DePuy's experience in World War II and in the Army, the loss of life due to officer incompetence, led him retain a pessimistic view on human ability and initiative.⁷² The tactically inept Army of the mid-1970s, due in particular to the commanding officers of tactical formations, required immediate attention if US Army forces in Europe stood a chance of beating the Soviets.⁷³ He believed that military organizations operated best when told what to do in simple terms.⁷⁴ Field manuals would serve as the means of clearly organizing military thought into action, to ensure that units in field could fight

⁷¹Paul H. Herbert, Leavenworth Papers 16, *Deciding What Has to Be Done: General William E. DePuy and the 1976 Edition of FM 100-5, Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, August 1979), 1.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 54.

⁷³Donn A. Starry, "Interview by LTC Matthias A. Spruill and LTC Edwin T. Vernon," in *Press On! The Selected Works of General Donn A. Starry*, ed. Lewis Sorley (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2009), 1004, 1018-1019, 1020.

⁷⁴Herbert, 54.

immediately and outnumbered against a foe with similar capabilities, and thus addressing the immediate requirement of improving Army forces preparing to fight the Warsaw Pact forces. This framework would serve to enable performance-based training and evaluation and build combat organizations capable of fighting and winning against the most dangerous threat, which at the time was the Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces facing NATO forces across the Iron Curtain.⁷⁵ The institutional purpose of reforming the Army as well as the practical purpose of defeating enemy forces aligned under doctrine, the practical purpose enabling the institutional purpose. DePuy was convinced that his ideas for Army and doctrine were the right way approach to reforms, and to ensure the implementation of his ideas, he incorporated other like-minded officers into very small cadres of doctrine writing teams that he controlled, relying heavily on hand-selected elites such as General Donn Starry.⁷⁶ If the proper doctrine can be deduced and distilled towards a coherent training methodology, from individual soldier training to operational collective tasks, then arguably the result will be a force prepared to fight and win wars, even at the immediate outset of hostilities.

Major General John H. Cushman was the commander of the U.S. Army's Combined Arms Center (CAC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, from 1973 to 1976, during DePuy's command at TRADOC. Traditionally, CAC served as the Army's integrating center, where ideas promoted at the various branch schools were integrated into coherent

⁷⁵Roger J. Spiller, "In the Shadow of the Dragon: Doctrine and the US Army after Vietnam," *The RUSI Journal* (December 1997): 45.

⁷⁶Herbert, 59.

doctrine.⁷⁷ Cushman's ideas on the role of doctrine differed significantly from DePuy's. He believed that organizational ability was tied directly to how effective the organization could harvest the collective initiative of individuals in pursuit of a common purpose.⁷⁸ This approach assumes that creative potential within organizations is more widely distributed than DePuy would claim. Doctrine, in Cushman's view, was a combination of theory, experience, and inductive reasoning, and would serve to guide versus bind the hands the practitioner.⁷⁹

DePuy's views oriented on fixing the most pressing problem—the general tactical incompetence of the Army—promoting new training methods being incorporated at tactical training schools via training circulars prior to the publication of FM 100-5 in 1976. Fixing the tactical incompetence of the Army was clearly more important than making better military thinkers, at least at the time. Combined with the isolation of Cushman and CAC, DePuy's triumph ensured that a more prescriptive, directive approach to training and doctrine would triumph over Cushman's more descriptive and intellectual approach to doctrine.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Ibid., 51.

⁷⁸Ibid., 54.

⁷⁹Ibid., 55. In Cushman's view, the only requirement of doctrine was to succeed in combat. Cushman and CAC quickly became marginalized—at least with respect to the writing of operational doctrine—within the new TRADOC, particularly after DePuy rejected the draft operations manual CAC submitted for review. Solidifying the role of doctrine required the operational force to adopt and implement the new doctrine and approach to training. DePuy and his deputies conducted numerous visits to operational units and hosted conferences that gave the appearance of dialogue, where commanders could offer critiques and improvements to the nascent doctrine.

⁸⁰Ibid., 42. General Donn Starry and the Armor Center retained the authority for writing armor, cavalry, and mechanized doctrine under DePuy.

DePuy and Cushman also held divergent views regarding the role of the Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) in educating and training Army field grade officers. DePuy believed the scope of officer education should be limited to training officers to manage Army divisions in combat, while at the same time learning how to train subordinate units on how to fight.⁸¹ Cushman's view was broader on the role of the college. He believed that officer education must go beyond DePuy's view, and that officers must become better thinkers in order to face the intellectual challenges of service as field grade officers.⁸²

DePuy, on the other hand, saw a different problem. Officers must be able to lead immediately when assigned to a unit, and as such developing immediate duty competence—fighting competence—became an absolute requirement for branch schools. No longer could the Army rely on the mobilization base for building combat power. Instead, the Army must fight and win with what it has. Doctrine may prove sufficient to this task, but as officers increase in rank and responsibility, the requirements of fighting competence expands to encompass more than the duties of the officer within his organization.

Stated simply, the divergent views encapsulate two approaches to officer education and leadership: What we want officers to do in their executive duties and responsibilities versus what we want officers to be—or eventually be—in regards to an program that can maximize and leverage their innate talent and ability. Focusing on the latter—the officer in being—should thus mentally and intellectually prepare the officer

⁸¹Herbert, 54.

⁸²Ibid.

for command, develop adaptability, and inculcate good learning habits that enables better thinking and military decision-making. If, however, the incentives and rewards are skewed towards the mastery of doctrine and not educational performance, then we risk promoting conformist values and shallow thinking at the ultimate expense of fighting competence and leader development. Furthermore, if the reward of doctrinal mastery is higher rank and responsibility, then it follows logically that ambitious individual officers will determine that the mastery of doctrine is more personally and professionally important and consequential than that of other disciplines, such as military history. Indeed, intellectual pursuits outside of military education are not required and perhaps even discouraged. Thus, from the very beginning of an officer's career, the path of development and education can lead to habits of mind that once manifest in positions of command authority can serve to kill a learning organization, whether by the culture of the leadership or no latent cognitive potential outside of doctrinaire thinking.

Concerning Cushman's view, he believed doctrinal education insufficient to both the task of creating better staff officers and commanders and generating the ideal military officer limited only by their talent and ability.⁸³ In this view, the training of officers to do things within the constraints defined institutionally does not in itself result in officers being better, where the better officer is characterized as more professionally capable, through learning and adapting, of facing contingency and fighting and winning in war. Fundamental to this view is the understanding that doctrine, however farsighted, detailed, and rigorously applied cannot anticipate all contingencies that face the warfighter,

⁸³John H. Cushman, *Fort Leavenworth: A Memoir* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Government Printing Office, 2001).

account for the friction in war. He believed that instructive sources must be descriptive and informative, and not prescriptive and direct.⁸⁴

It is arguable that the Army perspective on warfare of the last thirty-six years is less descriptive than prescriptive, and that doctrine offers a good way to approach complex problems versus a checklist of things to do to be successful in war. Indeed, contemporary US Army doctrine warns against its rigid application. “Conflict is fundamentally a human endeavor characterized by violence, uncertainty, chance, and friction. Land operations are inherently tied to the human dimension; they cannot be reduced to a simple formula or checklist.”⁸⁵ Certainly DePuy would agree with this statement.⁸⁶

⁸⁴Herbert, 55. Descriptive doctrine places the burden of understanding the beyond the pages of doctrine directly on the officer corps. Doctrine as a unification of ideas for how military units train, fight, organize, and equip is essential, but it is not sufficient on its own as a source of officer education. The role of descriptive doctrine is to correctly orient thought towards a right path that allows for an infinite combination and variety of events that exist in the real world. Ambiguities, inconsistencies, and uncertainties within the doctrine are a permanent and unavoidable. Sorting through the problems of doctrine, as Cushman would say, requires thought in application. Clearly, Cushman’s view retains a more optimistic bent towards the capabilities of individual officers, but in the context of the time of the DePuy-Cushman conflict, Cushman’s perspective assumed a more general ability of high performance regarding Army field grade officers. DePuy believed the opposite, and in any case, the risk of destruction at the hands of the Soviets in the first battle precluded an approach to education that did not create capable field grade staff officers. If war came, an on-the-job learning approach to staff work and command meant destruction.

⁸⁵Department of the Army, FM 3-0, *Operations*, 7-5.

⁸⁶Herbert, 58-59. DePuy’s remarks give the appearance that a prescriptive doctrine is not possible, that all possible contingencies cannot be planned for. DePuy further appeals to logic, coherence, simplicity, directness, assertiveness, and clarity when describing the new manual. Doctrine is an instrument of teaching, and those with the most experience in war and peace ought to do the teaching. Some of his words seem to appeal to uncertainty and unforeseen contingencies, but the tone of writing and his requirements for logic, clarity, and assertiveness in doctrine serve to minimize the

Regardless of the disputed particulars with the 1976 version of FM 100-5 and the debate following its publication, the role of doctrine was firmly in the DePuy school. Future iterations of FM 100-5 would shift emphasis on certain types of operations and reestablish the primacy of combined arms maneuver as well as initiate the thinking behind operational art, but none of this changed the fact that DePuy had established a four-star Army headquarters that retained control over the Army's thinking about warfare. His subordinates, most notably Generals Starry and Gorman, would build on what DePuy started.⁸⁷

Parallel to DePuy's efforts in shaping the doctrine-centric force, the efforts of General Paul Gorman were perhaps the most tactically consequential in solidifying the long-term gains of DePuy's vision within the Army. Gorman led the effort to establish

importance of contingencies. In this sort of teaching environment, doctrine is the instrumental means towards better staffs and units in combat. Also, a main concern of doctrine-centric education is the risk of creating doctrinaire thinkers. Doctrinal approaches and fixation considered over time can foreshadow portend how the Army selects officers for positions of command, particularly in peacetime. If the doctrine is prescriptive, and officers are evaluated on their ability to implement doctrine in training, then the system develops to support and perpetuate doctrinaire thinking. Likeminded leaders will promote the same type of leaders, supported by an underlying military bureaucracy that sees good officers abstractly through the prism of success in key positions; key positions evaluated also through a doctrinal lens. Do certain things well, and the institution rewards you with promotion and command. Significant deviation from this career path may result in risk to both promotion and selection for command. Officers are thus mainly required to perform well in the world as shaped through doctrine. Doctrine-centric education and training performance evaluations that measure performance against doctrine, particularly large unit operational doctrine, is perhaps better described as training and indoctrination, rather than education. It can prove both institutionally and intellectually restraining.

⁸⁷See also Linn, 193-233. Linn argues in this chapter that doctrinal revolution firmly invested and entrenched the Army's doctrine on large, conventional notions of land warfare, and that intellectual endeavors such as the development of the School of Advanced Military Studies simply expanded the depth at which the Army studied the history of battle and maneuver in the form of conventional warfare.

the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California.⁸⁸ He also was the major proponent of the Army Training and Evaluation Program (ARTEP).⁸⁹ In essence, the ARTEP was a way for the Army simplify and unify training processes, making it easier for units to manage individual and unit level training to increase combat readiness. The combination of the directed training requirements at echelon by the ARTEP and the evaluation of unit performance of these tasks at the NTC and its later siblings the Combined Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) and Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) would cement the link between doctrine and unit performance.

A contemporary account of armored cavalry squadron commander in the mid-1980s informs on the perception of some field grade officers at the time. He viewed the objective of the maneuver training scenarios in which armor and mechanized brigades and battalions fought against an opposing force (OPFOR) organized along Soviet lines as a great process of manipulation to coerce units into embracing doctrine, unquestioningly.⁹⁰ He further expounds:

And the game is set up in a way that only the doctrine will prevail. If you don't play by the doctrine, the super OPFOR is going to kick your ass . . . that it's all about adhering to doctrine . . . that this was trying to create an officer corps that was a bunch of automatons, that attributed to the checklist and the decision matrix a kind of sacred status. On the one hand, to the extent that you want to have a doctrinally informed officer corps, that's a good thing. On the other hand, if you want to have an officer corps that has to the capacity to actually think and

⁸⁸Anne W. Chapman, "The Army's Training Revolution 1973-1990: An Overview" (TRADOC Historical Study Series, Office of the Command Historian, 1991), 9.

⁸⁹Herbert, 39.

⁹⁰BF010, Interview.

innovate in response to situations where the doctrine doesn't apply, then you're not building the right kind of officer corps.⁹¹

In essence, adherence to doctrine was enforced at all levels of training through rewards and incentives, and in the case of the Army, the only rewards and incentives that matter are promotion and command selection. Regardless of DePuy's vision regarding doctrine, eventually the institutional and operational sides of the Army came together to support, promote, and reinforce the changes sparked by DePuy and others.

The consequences of DePuy's views of doctrine as a driver of change have not been studied in great detail to the extent that a reasonable critique informs on how DePuy's view—the Army's view—backstopped by both the Army's bureaucracy and institutional schools, affects the quality of the Army's professional military leadership over time. Incentivizing adherence to doctrine leads to the problem of confirmation bias, as it aligns the interests of the promoters of doctrine and the practitioners in the field, where the practitioners eventually become advocates and promoters. When advocates become senior commanders and perhaps general officers, it is arguable that the learning process of any Army combat unit concerning adaptation and innovation, particularly in peacetime, will self-orient towards doctrine. This learning process may not produce the command leadership, and thus the learning organizations, that the Army needs in war.

Changing security environments change institutional thinking. Indeed, FM 100-5 has been significantly revised since DePuy's tenure as the TRADOC commander, beginning in 1982 with the publication of AirLand Battle, followed by 1986, and 1993. In 2003, FM 100-5 became FM 3-0, and has since been changed and republished two times.

⁹¹Ibid.

The reasons for the changes to *Operations* include incorporation of operational thinking and art, changes in fighting concepts, changes and anticipated changes in technology, a transformed security environment following the end of the Cold War, and the collective experience of counterinsurgency campaigns in the Army since 11 September 2001.

Despite the importance the Army places in doctrine, and despite the expansion of its role since DePuy took over TRADOC in 1973, the argument of doctrine as a driver of change and as a source of reforms not only in peacetime, but also in combat fails as applied to OIF and the publication of FM 3-24 in 2006. There was no battle of the minds going on in the mid-1970s, no selecting of DePuy's view or Cushman's.⁹² The DePuy reforms proved absolutely critical in fixing the tactical incompetence of the Army, but they may have also biased the thinking of officers due the emphasis placed on doctrine. In any case, that argument has yet to be substantiated in sufficient detail along the lines of

⁹²Starry, 1111. Starry stated that "I don't think Jack Cushman had the same perception of the battlefield as we did. I cannot talk for him. Jack Cushman is a very smart guy, and I have great admiration for his intellectual ability. But he is not a very practical person. He fundamentally believes that he knows more about almost any subject you want to talk about than anybody else. He came to see me at Fort Knox shortly after I got there, because Leavenworth was supposed to be some kind of a coordinating headquarters over the combat arms schools. He said he wanted to come and see what we were doing. He came and I was prepared with briefings to talk with him and show him what we were doing. He talked for three days. He talked for three days; I listened and quickly determined, within a couple of hours on the first day, that he didn't want to hear what we were doing at Fort Knox at all. He wanted to talk; he wanted to show me how smart he was about all these things. The more he talked, the more I realized that he and I were not in any sort of agreement about anything—tactics, organization, doctrine, anything." Cushman marginalized himself with the TRADOC elite.

Robert Doughty's book on the French Army doctrine after WWI, titled *Seeds of Disaster*.⁹³

Instead of doctrine, the search for understanding must center on the concept of operational art and how the potential for operational art in smaller units increased over time during OIF. The longer the Army stayed in Iraq, the more the potential for operational art increased. As the potential for operational art increased—combined with the appropriate operational approach that the surge enabled—the actions of Army units at all echelons improved the security environment. Understanding how commanders leveraged operational art in OIF—in their own words—will demonstrate that the a narrative that places COIN doctrine in the center is wrong and inaccurately attributes learning and adapting in organizations to the myth of doctrinal determinism, a myth that may persist to this day.

⁹³Doughty's book sets a high standard for research when conducting research on the causes of defeat in war, particular on an argument that claims a doctrinal deterministic cause of defeat.

CHAPTER 3

OPERATIONAL ART IN COUNTERINSURGENCY

Operational Art in U.S. Army Doctrine and in COIN

The recently superseded Army FM 3-0 (Operations) defined operational art as the application of creative imagination by commanders and staffs—supported by their skill, knowledge, and experience—to design strategies, campaigns, and major operations and organize and employ military forces. Operational art integrates ends, ways, and means across the levels of war.⁹⁴

More recently, Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 3-0, titled Unified Land Operations, 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.⁹⁵ Operational art encapsulates the role of the commander in balancing risk and opportunity to create and maintain conditions necessary to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative and gain a position of relative advantage while linking tactical actions to reach a strategic objective.⁹⁶

The ADP 3-0 further writes that operational art is not associated with a specific echelon or formation, nor is it exclusive to theater and joint force commanders. Instead, it applies to any formation that must effectively arrange multiple, tactical actions in time, space, and purpose to achieve a strategic objective, in whole or in part. Instead, the

⁹⁴Department of the Army, FM 3-0, *Operations*, 7-1.

⁹⁵Department of the Army, Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 9.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 10.

necessity of operational art falls to the command echelon that must think operationally in order to accomplish its mission, whether tasked directly or derived implicitly from an ambiguous task.⁹⁷ The ADP definition and explanation fits well within the security environment that defined OIF, where tactical commanders—company commanders on up—faced an environment in Iraq that required operational art and thinking in order to seize the initiative locally towards the broader purposes of strategy. Commanders that led learning organizations in combat inherently used the latent potential for operational art that they either created or nurtured within their commands.

The method of command and control that commanders and staffs use in pursuit of operational art is known as mission command. Mission command is defined as the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based on mission orders for effective mission accomplishment. Successful mission command results from subordinate leaders at all echelons exercising disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to accomplish missions. It requires an environment of trust and mutual understanding.⁹⁸ More subtly, perhaps, mission command implies a particular type of command climate and command leadership. Disciplined initiative in mission command inherently recognizes the limits of control in war, of the autonomy of subordinate commanders making decisions in lieu of directive guidance based on the inability of any military organization to gain perfect knowledge or impose total control. Disciplined initiative is essential in any learning organizations that must constantly adapt

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2003), 1-17.

and innovate as the situation and environment requires. Disciplined initiative requires commanders that foster the same, are self-aware, intellectually humble, and open to the ideas and opinions of their peers and subordinates.

Army FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* does not refer to operational art specifically in the context of counterinsurgency, but does so indirectly through the use of common terminology, particularly regarding the design of campaigns, and the emphasis on placed on unity of effort and unity of command.⁹⁹ Operational art in COIN is thus the equivalent of the creation, implementation, reevaluation, and adjustment of strategy, campaigns, major and minor engagements or operations in the COIN environment over time. Commanders establish control over the conduct of the campaign and operations through mission command, with subordinate commanders retaining broad authorities within their own operating environment.

Operational art in COIN is, however, more than the creation and control of campaigns. Counter intuitively, the idea of control and its common understanding in military hierarchy is often discordant with the practicable reality within the COIN environment. Put simply, the military commander's ability to leverage control over what occurs within his area of responsibility is far less than doctrine entertains when highlighting such principles as unity of effort, where some authority is unifying and synchronizing the work of various organizations towards a common purpose.¹⁰⁰ This fails

⁹⁹Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 4-1. Chapter 4 of the FM deals specifically with designing COIN campaigns and operations. See also 5-31 to 'unity of effort' particularly across all Logical Lines of Operations (LLOs).

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 2-3. FM 3-24 writes extensively on 'unity of effort' and 'unity of command'. Emphasis on unity of effort centers on achieving organizational and executive synergy by orienting various organizations working in the same environment on the same

to recognize that external variables, and not internal ones, are dominant in the COIN environment, where external variables are often outside of the immediate understanding of the commander and the knowledge of such variables often remains hidden and unknown.¹⁰¹ Traditional advantages in firepower and maneuver capability do not inherently provide advantages towards controlling the environment. In essence, we think we control more than we can, and we think we know far more than we do.

According to Army COIN doctrine, the requirement to think operationally along lines of effort and operations—to develop and implement a campaign plan—is often required of or delegated to the battalion level.¹⁰² In order to get subordinate units to think holistically about problems in the COIN environment, abstract and complex problem solving, deconstructed and broken down linearly into campaign objectives, lines of operations, end states, and decisive points, are required of organizations that lack the staff capacity to analyze in detail. Brigades, and in particular battalions and companies, while positioned physically closer to the reality of the COIN environment, are less equipped in technology and manpower to address the complex and abstract problems at the staff level.

objectives (military, government, NGO, etc). FM 3-24 does not discuss the limits of knowledge and control in the COIN environment. The main impression is that ‘unity of effort’ is essentially something that can be controlled by a good senior commander and the military staff under ‘unity of command’.

¹⁰¹Joseph McLamb, “Battle Command in COIN,” *Infantry* 99, no. 3 (September-October 2010): 33.

¹⁰²Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 5-1. FM 3-24 states that battalions can also use LLOs (logical lines of operation). For an example of an Army battalion’s thinking on campaign design and planning, see Wes Morrison, “Battalion Campaign Design in Iraq,” *Infantry* 99, no. 3 (September-October 2010): 11-16.

The campaign plan, however, is only one tool, and less an absolute requirement than simply a method for codifying operational thinking.

The downward pressure to think and plan operationally in fact represents a general lack of positive control and understanding of the environment, at least through lens of the traditionally organized staff and headquarters.¹⁰³ It may represent, *prima facie*, a partial vacating of the traditional hierarchical control in the form of nesting of missions, concepts, purposes, and end states that doctrine often requires.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, campaign plans must nest with the campaign plan of higher headquarters. When analyzed from the outside, however, the entire idea of the positive execution of a military campaign—in a place such as Iraq in OIF—must center on operational art and its potential in small units, and not on ideas of hierarchical control emanating from a campaign plan and its logical rigor. Indeed, subordinate commanders may demonstrate to their commander they understand the campaign and can execute it, through traditional back briefs or confirmation briefs. He can demonstrate that his plan is nested in the higher campaign, at least abstractly, that assigned tasks are nested, and thus usefully project an artificial image of hierarchical control. In execution, however, the subordinate commander and

¹⁰³McLamb, 33. McLamb describes the problems caused by large staffs—problems that can increase the higher the echelon—when those staffs generate a myriad of requirements for subordinate units based on good ideas.

¹⁰⁴Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 2-2, 2-15, 2-95. Commanders are required to nest their mission and end state (or objective) with their higher headquarters. The purposes of subordinate units' missions are also to be nested via the term nested concepts.

unit may perceive little or no control from higher headquarters concerning the execution of missions and operations in the COIN environment despite the nesting of purposes.¹⁰⁵

Asserting more control of the execution of operations of subordinate organizations decentralization may prove of no value, an impossible task. More assertion of hierarchical control by commanders and staffs, through centralization of authority and burdensome requirements directed to subordinate units, is often not a good response to a perceived lack of control. While comforting perhaps to the risk averse or those that lack an understanding of the nature of the COIN environment, it is not a recipe for success and perhaps reflects the poor capabilities or preparations of the units and leaders executing operations in the COIN environment. The US Army has faced similar charges regarding its abilities as manifest in Iraq from 2003-2005.¹⁰⁶

Assessing the operational environment on a regular basis to drive change, adaptation, and seize the initiative from the enemy burdens every headquarters and staff attempting to assert influence or partial control of the operational environment. Achieving positive change at higher levels of command—through orders and directives—requires assessments, which are often the product of large amounts of data collection. As such, assessments are a requirement that FM 3-24 acknowledges and details, described in

¹⁰⁵Ben Zweibelson, “Doctrine and Design: How Analogies and Design Theory Resist the Military Ritual of Codification,” *Small Wars Journal*, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2011/04/to-design-or-not-design-part-2/#c019744> (accessed 5 April 2011). This essay is part five of five articles written on the *Small Wars Journal* webpage under the group title “To Design or Not to Design” under the direction of Chris Paparone. See the comments written by Chris Paparone and others referring to the concept of nesting on the webpage commentary. Paparone refers to nesting as a “euphemism for hierarchical control.”

¹⁰⁶Nigel Aylwin-Foster, “Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency,” *Military Review* (November-December 2005): 7.

two general approaches. The first approach is described as intuitive and subjective, and it shaped through continual learning, understanding, and experience.¹⁰⁷ The second approach is ostensibly objective, and centers on the collection of specific data and empirical facts that drive analysis and objective assessment, often with the use of particular heuristics such as PMESII-PT.¹⁰⁸ The data or metrics-oriented approach to assessment applies particularly to military staffs, as staff officers may lack any subjective experience that shapes intuitive assessment. Both approaches generate internal tension, but intuitive assessment actually requires extensive personal experience and deep understanding as well as a feel for the quality of information. Assessment from data collection, which is ostensibly inductive, are nevertheless arbitrary assessments driven or created for modeling tools, or heuristics, that in turn shape the reporting requirements for metrics generation at lower echelons.¹⁰⁹

The COIN operational environment as seen in recent wars, through forcing smaller and tactically-oriented military organizations into the requirement of thinking operationally, highlights the problems that traditional military hierarchical command and

¹⁰⁷Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 4-6.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 5-27. PMESII-PT stands for political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, information, physical environment, and time. PMESII-PT is a heuristic used to drive information collection and assessment in the COIN environment.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.* The use of Measures of Effectiveness (MOEs) is included in arbitrary reporting requirements. See page 5-27 for definition. A MOE is a criterion used to assess changes in system behavior, capability, or operational environment that is tied to measuring the attainment of an end state, achievement of an objective, or creation of an effect. MOEs focus on the results or consequences of actions. MOEs answer the question: “Are we achieving results that move us towards the desired end state, or are additional or alternative actions required?” These often combined with a superficially scientific approach to interpretation through the use of numbers or colors to divine and drive situational understanding.

control structures may face when trying to understand and change the environment. It may also prove that traditional planning tools and heuristics are unsatisfactory in describing the operational environment, or organizing and allocating forces towards seizing the initiative, as well as anticipating contingency.¹¹⁰

Ultimately, the problems of traditional staff structures in particular environments do not portend organizational failure in COIN. Nor does it mean that conventionally organized military forces cannot effectively conduct COIN. Traditional military capabilities—those military units organized and trained traditionally and hierarchically—are often very capable organizationally in fighting insurgency.¹¹¹ The limiting factor is the quality of command intellect and leadership. Commanders of conventional combat organizations, although perhaps specialized in experience as young officers, must at some point become generalists in thinking on warfare, either through experience or education. The US Army’s experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has demonstrated the necessity of thinking operationally, as a generalist, for those that command forces owning terrain and

¹¹⁰Thomas Erik Miller, “Counterinsurgency and Operational Art: Is the Joint Campaign Planning Model Adequate?” (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2003), iii, 56. Miller argues that operational art in COIN can be executed through the use of a traditional campaign planning tool, the Joint Campaign Planning Model. On page 56, Miller describes the planning for branches or sequels, and that the failure of a plan to achieve an anticipated outcome is planning failure, and thus assumes contingencies can be anticipated. In Miller’s view, the failure of the JCPM is not a critique of the model itself, but a critique of the users of the model. However, contingency by its definition denies anticipation.

¹¹¹Dale Andrade and James Willbanks, “CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons for the Future,” *Military Review* (March-April 2005): 20. Andrade and Willbanks provide a small piece of information on the role of conventional forces in Vietnam. The CORDS program, and specifically Operation Phoenix, was organized to destroy the Vietnamese Communist Infrastructure (VCI). As a proportion, conventional forces killed over 87 percent of the VCI assessed as killed in South Vietnam, with the rest killed by Phoenix.

directly tasked with defeating a lethal foe. This requirement often manifested at the company-level and above. Becoming a generalist for war, however, is not something that occurs from experience and reading a few books. No, true generalists emerge from years of the study of military history, understanding campaigns in depth as well as warfare in its various forms. Generalists in war are generalists because of experience and education, and not because of position, they retain particular in-depth knowledge of a broad variety of warfare.

There is perhaps no better example of a generalist with particular, in-depth knowledge of COIN than General Sir Frank Kitson, on the retired list in the British Army. Most famously, Kitson wrote extensively on COIN theory when it was a popular subject in military affairs, in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Perhaps lesser known is Kitson's extensive writing about conventional war in the 1980s, including *Directing Operations* and *Warfare as a Whole* cement his place as a generalist of war and warfare. His writings are particularly useful for officers that command combat arms formations, and instructive as to the path of development officers must take to become effective commanders. His writings consist of a descriptive synthesis and expression of education and experience, of reflection and learning towards better practice, of the necessity for practitioners of warfare to understand warfare in all its forms. The requirement to understand necessitates generalists instead of single form of warfare experts or commanders.

To the extent that Kitson is a generalist, he was also a specialist when it came to explaining theorizing on certain types of warfare, namely COIN. History and experience combine in Kitson and are expressed in theory. Seeing how a generalist such as Kitson expresses his particular theory concerning COIN is useful for the purposes of

professional military education, on how the practitioner and student of military history can turn educator in military affairs and war.¹¹²

General Sir Frank Kitson on Theory and
Practice: A Synopsis

General Sir Frank Kitson is perhaps the least dogmatic and most practical of all of the COIN theorists. This lack of prescriptive theory is neither a rejection of general themes in COIN, nor the offspring of oversimplification or a lack of detail. Indeed, Kitson is very descriptive on the conditions and capabilities required to fight successfully in the COIN environment. Avoiding attempts to create overreaching theoretical models indirectly recognizes the local nature and uniqueness of all insurgencies and the ability of war to impose itself at the expense of any theory, and thus tends to insulate Kitson's ideas from charges of irrelevance.¹¹³ In essence, Kitson's ideas are more accommodating versus exclusionary to various types of low-intensity warfare

Kitson's two major works on counterinsurgency, *Bunch of Five* and *Low Intensity Operations*, are products of Kitson's historical experiences in the COIN environment combined with insight born of years of reflection. Kitson was commissioned in 1946 in the British Army and served in Germany until the start of the Mau Mau Rebellion in

¹¹²This is not intended as a thorough breakdown of modern COIN theory. Kitson, perhaps more than any other contemporary officer, remains unrivaled in the depth and breadth of his experiences, education, training, and experiential roots in all facets of war. While Kitson's ideas may stand on their own to critique, his reputation and experience compel close scrutiny and reflection.

¹¹³Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 3-1. The aphorism that all insurgencies are local is a commonly understood saying for both practitioners and theorists alike. It is a simple way of saying that the circumstances, conditions, and influences are very particular and highly variable from location to location, even within the same areas.

Kenya, where he would serve initially to augment the police Special Branch.¹¹⁴ He would go on to serve in Malaya, Oman, Cyprus, and Northern Ireland.

Kitson characterizes wars of insurgency as wars for the minds of men.¹¹⁵ He also describes the relationship between violence and ideas in insurgency, where violence is in support of ideas and propaganda.¹¹⁶ In conventional wars he asserts the opposite is true.¹¹⁷ He defines insurgency as the rising in active revolt against the constitutional authority of a country.¹¹⁸ Subversion, preceding and also running concurrent to insurgency, seeks the overthrow and destruction of this political and legal authority.¹¹⁹ Thus, the framework for military intervention to defeat insurgency and subversion is based legally on and in support of the rule of law.¹²⁰

The fundamental requirement for any insurgency is a cause, whether existing or fabricated, that retains significant popular appeal.¹²¹ Without one, an insurgency will lack a clear psychological source of unity and will thus fail, just as foco method of insurgency promoted by Che Guevara as the failure to generate a sufficient cause in Bolivia.¹²² The

¹¹⁴Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 19.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 282.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, xii.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

¹²¹Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, and Peace-keeping* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 29.

¹²²*Ibid.*

cause serves as to ameliorate the initial weaknesses of the insurgent in material and military capability through the protection of the insurgent infrastructure and base.

The efforts to conduct subversion and insurgency, as well as the counter efforts, are described as campaigns.¹²³ The major influence on the form of the campaigns is shaped not through the nature of the enemy, but the nature of the terrain.¹²⁴ In the first campaign form, where a country possesses significant amounts of mountainous and forested terrain, the insurgents will use the mountains and the forest to protect and sustain the revolutionary army.¹²⁵ Additionally, the advantageous terrain may afford the revolutionary force the ability to directly engage the military formations of the government.¹²⁶

The second campaign form lacks the terrain described in the first campaign form. In the second campaign form, the insurgency exists within a combination of urban, semi-urban, and settled rural terrain.¹²⁷ The revolutionary forces cannot mass into larger military formations, and thus rely on economic and political attrition through the use of propaganda, sabotage, and low-level violence, including terrorism.¹²⁸ No base area exists that is inaccessible to the counterinsurgent force. The third campaign form is a hybrid of

¹²³Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, 282.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶*Ibid.*

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 283.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*

the first two.¹²⁹ In all campaign forms, the existence of a transnational ideology is far less important than the nature of the terrain in determining the organization and tactics of the insurgent force.

Kitson on Operational Art in COIN: The Four
Requirements of a Campaign

The campaign to counter insurgency and subversion is known as the framework.¹³⁰ Within this framework, Kitson describes four critical requirements for a workable campaign: coordinating machinery, establishing the right political atmosphere, intelligence, and the law.¹³¹ The framework and requirements must remain flexible, and require constant evaluation, assessment, and adaptation.¹³²

The coordinating machinery provides the leadership for the execution of the COIN campaign. The leadership structure is based on political authority and the law, and within the British tradition is known as the committee system. Fundamentally the committee is combined civil-military command structure, and is shaped to the particular contexts of the specific campaign. In Malaya, the leadership was delegated through the High Commissioner in the Federal War Council to the State Executive War Committees (SWEC) and District Executive War Committees (DWEK). At all levels, the DWEKs and SWECs involved significant civil-military coordination and decision-making. In Oman, where the British military supported the sultanate with limited forces and seconded

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Ibid., 284.

¹³¹Ibid., 284-289.

¹³²Ibid., 291.

officers, the British leveraged a different, far less robust apparatus to coordinate civil-military operations, known as the Civil Action Team (CAT). In both cases, and in other examples, the coordinating machinery was constructed and adapted from the foundation of existing political authority and infrastructure with military organizations and leadership added to affect symbiosis. According to Kitson, the major problem in achieving symbiosis centers on power and authority, which often requires paying a significant price in political, economical, and personal authority.¹³³

The second requirement of a workable campaign is establishing the right political atmosphere within which the government can introduce measures designed to counter the subversive and insurgent threat with a high probability of success.¹³⁴ The government starts with an initial disadvantage due to the hostile political atmosphere and negative public opinion created by the insurgents.¹³⁵ Propaganda remains a critical tool for both the insurgent and counterinsurgent. Kitson also writes that propaganda must also target the insurgent external lines of support.¹³⁶ In the modern context, Kitson is referring to information operations (IO) and psychological operations (PSYOP).

Additionally, Kitson argues that policy decisions made to address the insurgency always have unavoidable effects on human beliefs and opinions, regardless of the intent of the decisions.¹³⁷ Due to this unavoidable effect that emerges from government policy

¹³³Ibid., 285.

¹³⁴Ibid., 287.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid.

as well as individual soldier conduct on the street, COIN campaigns must always consider and attempt to anticipate the reaction of the population as a consideration in planning.¹³⁸

Kitson also recognizes the difficulty of the government in pursuing simultaneously IO and PSYOP. In IO, the government seeks to keep the public informed as rapidly and accurately as possible. In PSYOP, or propaganda, the government is seeking both a change in belief and a change in behavior, and may manipulate information to achieve this effect. The abuse or misuse of PSYOP can taint the IO efforts.¹³⁹

While it may be possible for some military leaders to avoid certain areas of IO when conducting a COIN campaign, senior military leaders cannot avoid the necessity of IO, including when it requires shaping international and domestic political opinion. The testimony provided by General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker to a joint session of the House Armed Services and Foreign Affairs Committees in September 2007 provides a clear example of Kitson's second requirement at work.¹⁴⁰ Petraeus and Crocker, through careful testimony and the avoidance of traps and polemics, essentially sold the extension of the Iraq War to Congress and the American people, thus generating

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰Opinion of the author. Kitson doesn't describe his second requirement as one of creating a political climate for domestic purposes, but the example of Petraeus and Crocker shaping the political climate in the U.S. Congress in a favorable way resulted in the increased political support for the unpopular Iraq War, which in effect gave both Petraeus and Crocker more time to execute the campaign.

the political will and support to provide space for the strategy to work. This is particularly remarkable considering the political atmosphere of the time in Washington D.C.

The third pillar in the framework is intelligence. Kitson's emphasis on intelligence is a common theme amongst COIN theorists. In Kitson's view, domestic intelligence apparatuses are insufficient in organization to deal with the threat of insurgency as they are overly centralized and managed, and do not produce the information required in the form of operational intelligence to enable the military to target the insurgency effectively.¹⁴¹ Similar to the creation of the coordinating machinery, reorganizing intelligence organizations for COIN is difficult and politically risky.¹⁴² Decentralization and expansion of intelligence systems imports risk into the equation, but it is perhaps the only way to rapidly generate operational intelligence in support of the COIN effort.¹⁴³ As organizations function autonomously in COIN, any autonomous element, even down to the company level, must retain an expansive intelligence collection capability. Thus, in order to think operationally—to exploit a latent potential in operational art—commanders must gain continuous useful intelligence on the enemy and the environment.

Operating within the law and demonstrating a concern for legality define the fourth requirement for an effective framework.¹⁴⁴ The conditions and liberties of a free

¹⁴¹Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, 287.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, 288.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 289.

society can serve to enable and protect the insurgent organization.¹⁴⁵ Laws and procedures may require amending and temporary modification to equip the government and security forces with the tools necessary to dismantle insurgent infrastructure and defeat the insurgency.¹⁴⁶ The government, regardless of the political risk, cannot afford to protect all the liberties and benefits of a democratic society at the expense of its constitutional duty to protect the integrity of the state and the people.¹⁴⁷ Operational art in COIN thus requires commanders and units to innovate and adapt to legal constraints in order to effectively use combat power to seize and maintain the initiative.

The framework is straightforward in principle, but difficult to implement in practice. The localized nature of insurgencies and the particular considerations imposed by the terrain and the enemy requires decentralization of authority down to the lowest levels of military organization. The framework, or campaign, is simultaneously centralized in concept but decentralized in application. If the framework is overly centralized, whether via directive or organizational culture, it risks ceding the initiative to the insurgency and thus extending the campaign in time to a point of political exhaustion and the attrition of will. If too decentralized or inconsistent in application across unit boundaries and transitions, if commanders and units lack latent potential in operational art, the framework risks losing harmony of effort and operational momentum critical to

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

defeating subversion and insurgency. In both cases the results are beneficial to the insurgency.¹⁴⁸

Kitson on the Essential Capability in COIN,
and War in General

Officer leadership provides the essential means towards bridging the gap between pursuit of strategic objectives as described in the framework and the operational and tactical means used. The commanding officer serves as the medium through which ideas are generated, reflected upon, adapted, and reapplied. When organizational conditions are favorable for success in the COIN environment—when offensive means are available and the restraints of higher echelons of command are not too burdensome—then it is often the quality of the command leadership that creates the favorable conditions for mission success.¹⁴⁹ In the modern context concerning military organization fighting in COIN, the most determinant quality includes the latent potential for operational art within commanders in the field. This quality combines pure operational capability combined with an operational approach—a campaign—adequate towards the ends of strategy. In essence, Kitson is making a claim that command leadership in COIN in its purest form is expressed in the application of operational art. One could, however, make this claim war in general, and not simply COIN. But, the implications of combining Kitson’s thinking with the particular and local nature of COIN environments means that operational art is also required in smaller units more traditionally aligned with tactics.

¹⁴⁸This paragraph is the opinion of the author.

¹⁴⁹Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, 297.

This requirement for operational art in small units tacitly acknowledges the limitations of the senior military and political leadership to effectively leverage control over the execution of the COIN campaign at the local level, regardless of the trends in historiography to assign success to leaders such as Templer and Petraeus.¹⁵⁰ The inherent limitations of both understanding and control in decentralized execution places a tremendous burden on subordinate leaders, and thus the necessity for operational art and thinking. The hand of hierarchical control and authority may prove so light as to seem virtually non-existent, and thus necessitates trust in the ability of those leaders to operate independently of continual oversight. The development of military officers, particularly future commanders, preparing them to operate in such an environment is the essential capability for pursuing campaign objectives in COIN, and perhaps in all war.¹⁵¹

Kitson's experience as an army officer demonstrates the essential role of the military officer in implementing COIN strategy, in thinking and acting operationally, and he writes extensively on developing the officer corps and units through education and training. In *Bunch of Five* Kitson writes that the requirement for military commanders to understand and execute COIN is absolute, as it ultimately centers on fighting.

¹⁵⁰Understanding the decentralized nature of command in COIN, while attempting to attribute campaign success in COIN to a few high authorities is very simplistic and poor history. At its worst, it is poor history bereft of a true detailed understanding of the diversity of events taking place at local level. One can argue that it is simply an attempt to overlay the Great Man Theory of history onto COIN.

¹⁵¹In the author's opinion this is the essential requirement for the effective application of military force in COIN. Developing the capability refers to educating officers formally in academically rigorous settings throughout their careers emphasizing military history and then assigning them to a wide variety of postings to gain broad experience and perspective.

But when the fighting starts the soldier will not only be expected to know how to conduct operations, he many also have to advise on other government measures as well. We have seen that it is only by a close combination of civil and military measures that an insurgency can be fought, so it is logical to expect soldiers whose business it is to know how to fight, to also to know how to use civil measures in this way. Not only should the army officers know about the subject, they must also be prepared to pass on their knowledge to politicians, civil servants, economists, members of the local government and policemen where necessary. The educational function of the army at these critical moments is the most important. Amongst senior officers in particular, ignorance or excessive diffidence in passing along such knowledge on can be disastrous.¹⁵²

Kitson argues that military commanders must retain a detailed understanding of the nature of fighting in the COIN environment, of the dominating contexts.¹⁵³ He also argues that in his time the British Army assumed that officers trained and educated in one form of warfare are suitable for command in another form of warfare.¹⁵⁴ In essence, the narrowness of training, education, and experience were not seen as inherently negative in selecting officers for command. Such a method of selection, of determining an officer's suitability for command, is not unlike the current U.S. Army's method, where successful service in any developmental position, regardless of the scope of the job or relevance to the next assignment, is the determinant factor in selection for command. Relevant experience is ultimately required in the effort to collect knowledge, due to the limits of theoretical knowledge and the requirement for refinement to shape intuition and hone decision-making skills.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵²Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, 300.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 301.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*

The education and training requirements for officers and units preparing for fighting in the COIN environment contains four separate aspects. The first aspect is the requirement to fundamentally understand the nature of insurgency and subversion, as well as gain significant knowledge and insight of the particular mission and enemy facing a unit preparing to conduct COIN operations.¹⁵⁶ The burden to educate the officers falls on the army, wherein the soldiers are the beneficiaries of good officer education.¹⁵⁷ Studying campaigns of insurgency in military history is the basis for knowledge.¹⁵⁸ Thus, building an able force requires officers historically educated in the study of campaigns in military history. As officers gain experience in particular campaigns, education serves as a reference point for reflection. All other things being equal, the quality of education of the commanders will indelibly shape the learning habits of organizations in combat.

The second aspect of education is developing and educating officers to plan and execute a COIN campaign using a combination of civil and military measures to achieve a single government aim, to generating a harmony of effort along multiple lines of

¹⁵⁶Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations*, 165; Clausewitz, 88-89. One could argue that this claim is a derivation of Clausewitz's claim that "the first, supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature." In this sense, the operational commander faces a similar burden at a smaller scale. The commander must determine, based on previous experience and education in military history, the scope and quality of the problem he faces in the context of COIN. Without this determination or orientation, there is perhaps no way that a commander can hope to effectively leverage control of the environment.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 166.

operation.¹⁵⁹ This is more than developing lines of operations and strategy flow charts. Commanders require a highly tuned reasoning ability, sensitive intuition, and a sophisticated understanding of all the tactics, resources, and means available towards generating complementary effects.

Additionally, commanders must understand the temporal and mission effects regarding the use of certain means or tactics. As COIN is inherently local, the use of particular tactics in one area does not mean that the same tactics will achieve the same success in another area. The unreflective and inconsiderate poaching of tactics or methods in COIN can significantly increase the risk to the overall campaign, particularly if those tactics involve significant violence and physical coercion.¹⁶⁰

The third aspect is teaching officers and future commanders how to direct or allocate their forces within the COIN fight, or in other words, how to effectively apply military means against this complex problem.¹⁶¹ Achieving tactical objectives in COIN hinge on the ability of the commander to effectively collect, analyze, and assess information and intelligence in order to drive operations, to remain physically and cognitively engaged with the operating environment to gain and retain the initiative.¹⁶² Kitson argued that while significant materials existed regarding various approaches to this problem, a gap existed in describing the tactical framework required for the use of

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶²Ibid.

certain techniques.¹⁶³ It is arguable that this gap is persistent and overarching, as it essentially involves small unit commanders executing operational art. It also recognizes, de facto, the limitations of the control mechanisms inherent in military organizations, as successful prosecution of COIN strategy is almost always decentralized. Commanders, when faced with complex operational environments and problems will always be forced to adapt existing organizational structures as required. Kitson's limited writing on the third aspect simply reflects the fact that it may not be possible to distill a theory adequate to the task of creating an overarching and universal operational concept for countering insurgency. Thus, there are simply no indispensable or universal tactics, techniques, or organizational structures in COIN.

The fourth aspect of training and education involves the teaching and application of particular tactics and techniques.¹⁶⁴ Kitson views this problem as relatively straightforward in that plenty of materials exist to address this problem in a comprehensive manner.¹⁶⁵ Thus, while adapting tactical doctrine is necessary and continuous, it should also be relatively easy. Learning and adapting is a function of daily interaction with the environment and the enemy and remain cognitively engaged in the fight. The issue then becomes ensuring that the training is relevant and realistic to the conflict environment.¹⁶⁶ The British Army retained significant experience in the mid-twentieth century that reflects Kitson's fourth aspect. The establishment of the Jungle

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 167.

¹⁶⁵Ibid.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

Warfare School in Kota Tinggi, Malaya, in 1949 serves as one example. More recently, the British Army's Northern Ireland Training and Advisory Team (NITAT) provided another example. In both cases, training for deploying army units was highly particularized for local conditions and led by training cadres with extensive experience in theater.

Kitson argues that officer education on the subjects of insurgency and subversion requires career-long instruction as a formal part of professional military education, taught progressively depending on rank and experience.¹⁶⁷ Kitson emphasizes that subversion and insurgency must not be taught or treated as specialized fields where relatively few officers benefit from focused education.¹⁶⁸ He elaborates further:

Fighting subversion or insurgency is no more of a special subject than is the fighting of conventional war. It is all part of the same subject, i.e. fighting, and the only rational way of approaching the problem is to teach it as a perfectly normal phase of war. Thus, aspects relevant to cadet schools such as Sandhurst, and aspects relevant to staff officers and unit commanders must be taught as Staff Colleges such as those at Camberley and Latimer.¹⁶⁹

Thus, as a part of military history, campaigns in countering insurgency and subversion must be taught continuously. Kitson then provides general recommendations regarding the type of education and training officers ought to receive when attending army schools, from cadet schools to senior staff colleges. The instruction of campaign

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 169.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 168.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 169.

development, on thinking operationally and on operational art in the COIN environment, is pushed down to the company commander level.¹⁷⁰

Kitson avoids the either-or debate concerning the allocation of training time to COIN and conventional war tasks.¹⁷¹ Immediate necessity and constraining political and military contexts will ultimately drive organization and training requirements, and training tasks associated with COIN are invariably particular and subject to the same constraints and contexts. At this point, education—particularly the education of officers and future commanders—parts ways from the immediate necessity of organizing and training units in preparation for particular forms of warfare. Where training and organizing focuses on the particular, education in military history broadens to emphasize the general through in-depth study and reflection on experience. For the future commander, the former is ultimately subordinate to the latter, as the commander can control the particular application of force, but cannot control the contexts that ultimately shape when, where, and how force will be used in general.

The education of future commanders is thus of critical importance, with its object not being the creation units capable of fighting COIN, but the development of effective commanders and an officer corps capable of carrying out their duties and responsibilities in the COIN fight.¹⁷² Thus educated, the officer corps is capable of shaping unit-level training and education in preparation for deployment in support of COIN, or other forms of warfare, regardless of the limits of time and resources.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 173.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 174.

¹⁷²Ibid.

Kitson also writes that senior commanders require more instruction in the planning and execution of COIN campaigns. Traditionally, however, the British Army's senior staff colleges focused less time on the planning and conduct of COIN campaigns than more junior schools.¹⁷³ Compounding this problem was the ability to objectively evaluate the performance of officers and commanders in the COIN environment.¹⁷⁴ It is certainly more difficult as rank and responsibilities increase, but Kitson believes that such an evaluation would demonstrate that senior leaders and commanders require more instruction in campaign development and the critical requirements of continuity over time and harmony of effort.¹⁷⁵

Experience and education must serve to augment and enhance the other. Small unit commanders, e.g. company-level and below, inherently gain more tactical experience in COIN than more senior commanders due to the nature of the COIN fight. The relationship between authority and direct experience is thus inversely proportional; the junior leader has or gains more concrete experience, but retains less authority, whereas the senior leader has less concrete tactical experience and but retains more authority.

This mismatch of experience and authority can challenge commanders with no experience countering insurgency. Thus, during the initial years of a COIN campaign, this paradigm can impose significant risks to harmony of effort. Cognitive isolation born of fighting in unfamiliar ways with vague tasks may prove ameliorable only through the passage of time, where experience hones inherent competence, enabling an officer to

¹⁷³Ibid.

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵Ibid.

learn and think operationally. Commanders uncomfortable with their inferior position in experience may react in ways that while not directly damaging to the overall COIN campaign, are nonetheless disruptive of harmony of effort and impede continuity in the long run.¹⁷⁶ Such a reaction might include attempting to assert restrictive, complicated, and hierarchical control measures on organizations facing complex problems, denying the initiative of subordinate commanders, without recognizing that no such control, outside of one's own forces, can be gained. Thus, Kitson argues, preparing for COIN through education remains an absolute requirement.¹⁷⁷

Kitson's distilled argument is that well educated commanders and officers with a talent for fighting can fight—and command—in any conflict environment, with the COIN environment proving no exception. The limitations of a conventionally organized, hierarchical military force conducting COIN are negated or mitigated through good leadership. Doctrine serves to enable fighting competence, but is itself adapted from a continual process of learning in action, accommodating the use of force to the contexts involving the enemy and terrain.

Thus, armies are not inherently limited by organization, training, or doctrine. Armies are limited by the quality and vision of their leaders and commanders, and the impacts of command leadership that in effect predetermines whether or not an

¹⁷⁶The U.S. Army certainly experienced this for the first four to five years of fighting in COIN. Company grade officers within the battalions and brigades may have more experience and education concerning COIN. Intellectual humility in the COIN environment is actually a virtue. Traditionally within military hierarchy the more senior commanders are significantly more experienced and educated than subordinates. Commanders are not evaluated for intellectual hubris or humility.

¹⁷⁷Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations*, 175.

organization has leaders with a latent potential for operational art, a critical antecedent condition to organizational adaptation and learning. Educating officers to fight in COIN, or war in general, particularly through the study of military history of operational art in counterinsurgency, can positively serve to shape officer leadership through the honing of judgment and intuitive decision-making. As Kitson argued, for as long as fighting insurgency remains under the broad banner of war fighting, and thus the responsibility of the professional military, the officers serving in the military must learn about it through the study of military history. In that vein, reading Kitson's detailed and descriptive, approach to countering insurgency is a good way to start.

Focusing one's attention on Kitson as COIN theorist without consideration of his broad knowledge of the phenomenon of war is to fail in general to understand the whole of his thinking on war. Indeed, to claim Kitson as an expert in countering insurgency and subversion, while ignoring his other writings concerning warfare as a whole, is to ultimately fail to understand him not only as a commander of forces, but also a theorist and student of war and warfare, something that he warns against.

Kitson argues against the tendency to over particularize war and warfare—to separate and describe warfare through its tactics instead of its purpose—and thus separating that which cannot be clearly separated. He appears far less concerned with the dominating trends in tactics, organizations, and equipment, and how associated thinking on such topics influences the vernacular of warfare and the jargon of the day. No, those factors are a direct response to the dominating contexts of the period. He is, however,

seriously concerned with officer education and development, that which develops a general and historical understanding on the phenomenon of war.¹⁷⁸

Kitson believed officers must learn to think clearly, expand knowledge through study, and gain experience. Expansion of knowledge is the product of continuous learning and reading. Experience enables one to learn in action.¹⁷⁹ Thus, experience and study of history are the two ways to understand war. However, Kitson reminds us that the reading of history does not equate to the study of history.¹⁸⁰ He warns:

It is all too easy to read military history without studying it. It is no good reading a campaign history through as a novel and leaving it at that. It is first necessary to extract the various plans from the narrative and then to examine them from the point of view of a staff officer to whom the commander has given them for comment. The next thing is to look at the way in which the commanders put their plans into effect and finally to see how the plans worked out. In other words, read the narrative to absorb the background, isolate the various plans made at different times during the campaign by both sides and then reread the narrative to see what happened.¹⁸¹

Kitson's arguments presume the availability and quality of military history for the purposes of in-depth study. They have to, as study without descriptive and detailed military history is at best superficial and sloppy and at worst wrong and corrupting. The study of military history is of similar importance as experience in military affairs, particular command experience. Thus the study of military history and direct experience are inseparable components of officer education and development. Kitson was reflecting

¹⁷⁸Frank Kitson, *Warfare as a Whole* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 2.

¹⁷⁹Frank Kitson, *Directing Operations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 83.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁸¹*Ibid.*

on campaign histories in COIN that began almost 60 years ago. What does recent US Army history in COIN tell us about operational art?

Operational Art in Recent COIN History:
A Black Hole

Perhaps one of the greatest difficulties in describing operational art in COIN is the lack of a comprehensive historical record of how commanders thought and acted in OIF, from the company level on up. Instead of a comprehensive record we get so-called lessons learned as well as tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), which are all highly particular and contextual. Such a record would account for context and expose the link between abstract thinking about fighting in the COIN environment in OIF and how the campaign actually took place, and if such thinking occurred.¹⁸² The lack of descriptive military history in the form of comprehensive commander interviews, debriefs, and oral histories from commanders that served in OIF makes writing on the history of operational art in OIF very difficult indeed. The COIN environment, particularly as seen in Iraq and perhaps in other insurgent environments as well, requires descriptive military history to enable scholarly pursuit on the truth of operational art in COIN in OIF and its latent potential within combat units fighting insurgency.

¹⁸²Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (Abingdon, UK: Frank Cass, 1997), 15. Naveh coined the term cognitive tension to describe the relationship between operational level commanders and planners and their subordinate tactical level commanders and units, where the operational level of command has to divine, intuit, extract, distill, etc., appropriate and clear tactical tasks to subordinate units from abstract and broad political and strategic aims or objectives. Naveh does not specifically address insurgency in this regard; See also McLamb, 32-37.

A major problem in writing the history stems from the devolution of responsibilities of pursuing campaign objectives down to small tactical units, even down to the company level.¹⁸³ This decentralization is layered over the top of an operational environment and human terrain that defies broad categorization and requires deep familiarity and understanding, just as the study of COIN in military history requires, as there is no operational concept or theory sufficient to the task of educating the practitioner on insurgency, or perhaps war in general. For the historian or scientist conducting research, such conditions require a far broader and deeper collection and analysis of information on the conduct of COIN from the company level on up, one that leverages descriptive military history. A definitive history of operational art in COIN, at least regarding COIN campaigns invested with tremendous resources over extended periods of time such as that in OIF, requires a much more detailed study based on the collective knowledge of commanders and units from the company level on up.

Such a history or collection of knowledge or reflections does not exist. The Army has only made halting and inconsistent efforts at collecting the oral and intellectual histories of units and commanders that have participated in OIF.¹⁸⁴ A true understanding

¹⁸³Opinion and experience of the author. This requirement for companies (i.e. company commanders) to conduct missions in support of campaign objectives seems obvious and also doctrinally challenging, but it is much more intuitive than an appeal to common sense. The problem revolves around understanding the ability and vision of commanders at all echelons to command units in the COIN environment and how their abilities and vision interacted with operational environment. It is not clearly linear or hierarchical. Some company commanders, battalion commanders, and brigade commanders experienced significant

¹⁸⁴There is no Army policy that mandates the formal debriefing or after-action reviews (AARs) of units that have returned from Iraq or Afghanistan. Some units do AARs, but there is no requirement. Some military organizations, such as the Center for Military History, the Combat Studies Institute, the Center for Army Lessons Learned

of operational art in COIN requires access to such a body of knowledge, which could serve to tell the Army how it actually learned, adapted, and improved in operational art over time. It may also serve to show how the Army's success in Iraq occurred in spite of itself or ideas of doctrinal determinism, and may provide sufficient evidence to support the claim that unity of effort was never truly achieved from the strategic to the tactical level.¹⁸⁵ Instead, harmony of effort emerged as the latent potential of operational art increased in Army units conducting COIN. This improvement stemmed from improved command leadership, as commanders learned, reflected, and adapted from their interaction with the operating environment, as well as from their education. Commensurately, unit performance also increased as improved potential for operational art led to organizational learning and adaptation.

This is not to imply that much has not already been written on Iraq. There are several memoirs published by former commanders in Iraq detailing their experiences in COIN.¹⁸⁶ There are several books centering on the top-down strategic and operational histories of particular periods of time in the war, often backed up by gripping tactical

(CALL), etc., do interview former commanders and collect oral histories. Some think tanks, such as RAND and the Council on Foreign Relations, also collect historical information and data. But this is scattershot and not uniform; and when done, it is often years after the deployment ended.

¹⁸⁵The claim that the Army succeeded in spite of itself refers specifically to policies that ought to inhibit success in the COIN environment. This includes the unit rotation model, where entire brigade combat teams rotate out at a time. This can serve to exacerbate the qualitative differences in leadership in each brigade, where the quality of the leadership can have a tremendous impact in the conduct of the units conducting COIN operations. An individual rotation model, particularly for certain leaders, would ensure that organizational memory and knowledge and continuity in progress are maintained.

¹⁸⁶This includes Peter Mansoor's *Baghdad at Sunrise*.

narratives.¹⁸⁷ There are also countless articles in military and scholarly journals that detail individual experiences at various levels of command.

There is nothing written, however, as comprehensive, and thus critical, as a thorough account of the evolution of command leadership in OIF, one centered on ideas of operational art and thinking during OIF. Instead, the narrative, rather than center on organizational evolution and adaptation, centers on transition points and particular tactics, and often on particular commanders, where FM 3-24 serves also as a timely transition point and a basis for argument. That commanders and units did learn and adapt is undeniable, but there is no comprehensive body of information to leverage that can serve to inform how and why units adapted beyond abstractions, one that captures how thinking changed over time. Perhaps the only way to understand how the Army fought, learned, and adapted in Iraq is through vicarious learning, through the eyes of individual commanders asked the same questions after returning from combat, from the company-level on up, as they reflect on thought and practice.

The quality of the writing that does exist varies significantly, as does perspective. Knowledge of events, detail of research, and the purpose of the writing vary tremendously. The sum of the parts of all that is written is not a substitute for an

¹⁸⁷This includes Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006); Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008); Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006); Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*; David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Carter Malkasian, "Counterinsurgency in Iraq: May 2003-January 2010," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern War*, eds. Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

institutionally driven collection of knowledge and insight from those leaders that have fought in Iraq, many for multiple tours of duty. Much of that is now perhaps lost to history, or lost in binary code, in digits.

A second major problem in writing the history of large COIN campaigns is the use of available data collected for the purposes of shaping assessment and informing decision-making during the time of the conflict. More specifically, it is the use of this data to inform or buttress historical claims or arguments, when the quality, sufficiency, and fidelity of the data are highly suspect.

The problem of assessment from abstract data points is not new. The use of the Hamlet Evaluation System or HES in Vietnam by the CORDS program during the Vietnam War is a good example. The HES modeling tool was the primary method used by CORDS and the Department of Defense to assess the effectiveness of the pacification programs used in the Vietnam countryside.¹⁸⁸ Consisting of eighteen metrics, HES graded the level of pacification in the Vietnamese countryside through the eyes of US military and civilian personnel assigned to CORDS as advisors.¹⁸⁹ The data collected was used to shape policy and operational decisions in the war.¹⁹⁰

The data, and perhaps the entire founding assumptions that drove the collection mechanism, was often flawed and manipulated to the extent that may prove impossible to use the historical HES data for supporting claims on the efficacy of the pacification

¹⁸⁸Gregory A. Daddis, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 122-125.

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰*Ibid.*

program and the CORDS program as well.¹⁹¹ Structural contradictions and conflicts of interest also impacted the pursuit of objective assessment, where organizational desires to show progress could serve to preempt or influence contrary assessment.¹⁹² Army FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency, cites CORDS as a useful model for future hybrid civil-military organizations operating in the COIN environment, while also appealing to HES data.¹⁹³

The written history of OIF remains in its infancy, but the Army's failure to collect the experiences of its combat units and leaders, in descriptive personal accounts, will certainly impact that ability of military historians to get closer to the a truth and better narrative, particularly on how operational art evolved over time. The surviving data, which awaits declassification and categorization in a byzantine variety of locations and formats in the Army's digital networks, may prove dominated by an impossibly large amount of abstract statistical data, driven by arbitrary metrics, and lacking in context. History written from such data will prove as controversial and problematic as that informed largely by HES data.

¹⁹¹Ibid; Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 214-216, 223. Race argues that HES measured superficial information, and created a highly misleading picture; BA030, former Army officer serving in CORDS, Interview by Aaron Kaufman and Dustin Mitchell, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 24 February, 2011; Interviewee served as a district advisor in CORDS in 1971, and stated that HES was essentially a fiasco. He was not equipped with enough manpower or experience to collect the information. Deadlines drove everything in the report. His best quote was figures do not liar, but liars figure. Bill Colby put a lot of stock into the HES report.

¹⁹²Daddis, 122-125.

¹⁹³Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 2-12 to 2-13; Ross Coffey, "Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq," *Military Review* (March-April 2006): 24-34. Coffey advocates for the establishment of a CORDS-like program to pursue pacification in Iraq.

The gap in historical knowledge and understanding of operational art in COIN, and OIF in particular, results in arguments that mainly center on methods and tactics, as described in doctrine and applied in COIN, as well as some emphasis on strategy in COIN. Tactics prove too particular as a source for a comprehensive historical argument regarding the change in the security environment during OIF, as they are subject to the contexts of time and location, even in OIF.

Broader strategy arguments concerning US intervention or participation in COIN often center on whether or not the US should fight insurgencies, particularly as they rarely pose an existential threat to national security but have proven extremely costly in resources.¹⁹⁴ If US foreign policy was always rational and possessive of great foresight, where politicians retained a clear and unified understanding of the threats to the nation and its interests, then policy makers would clearly see the risk inherent in military adventures that either involve COIN or perhaps may morph into COIN, and thus gain an incentive to avoid risk and the moral hazard that such wars often bring. If anything, recent wars have indicated that US foreign policy overestimates the effectiveness in military operations in solving strategic problems. The lack of a clear national security threat defined as existential means that uncertain and politically aligned perceptions of national interest will continue to influence US foreign policy, even more so when those interests are retained in the governing political party in Washington DC. Thus the moral aspects of strategy—such as whether or not the Army should fight insurgencies—must

¹⁹⁴Douglas MacGregor, “Lean, Mean, Fighting Machine,” *Foreign Policy*, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/26/lean_mean_fighting_machine (accessed 26 April 2011). MacGregor, a former Army officer, is an ardent opponent of using US forces to fight insurgencies, as it is not in US national interest.

not serve to preempt or undercut the value that the study of operational art in COIN provides to those that may find themselves countering insurgency in the future.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, the study of military history in counter insurgency, in the education of future commanders, is arguably far more important than getting the organizing, training, and equipping of organizations right. Fighting skill can militate against failures of organization or equipment, but it cannot make up for poorly educated officers and commanders.

Methods and Tactics in Counterinsurgency

Subtracting arguments of strategy and operations, which includes the lack of historical understanding of operational art in recent COIN, leaves only arguments surrounding methods and tactics. In the Army, the main moral arguments surrounding COIN, whether from a perspective of population-centric or enemy-centric approaches, pivot on the historical correctness and rationale behind official doctrine, namely FM 3-24. Thus doctrine serves again, perhaps incorrectly, as the point of departure for argument, where the spoils of victory for the winner of the argument become manifest in the institutionalization of the winning idea into the character and culture of the Army, and determines the way the Army will fight in the future.

There are no indispensable tactics or methods in pursuit of the campaign or strategic objectives in COIN in a broad sense, no strategy by slogan or euphemism in COIN such as hearts and minds or courageous restraint, or perhaps in any other form of

¹⁹⁵Opinion of the author. Nor can the Army or the Department of Defense create doctrine that dictate the terms of the employment of military forces, such as seen in the Weinberger Doctrine and its famous derivative, the Powell Doctrine.

war.¹⁹⁶ The efficacy or utility of any method or tactic in COIN is often highly particularized to the local environment and the enemy, and are not inherently fungible.¹⁹⁷ Commanders of units that could rightly be termed learning organizations in OIF are often the same commanders with a talent for operational art and thinking. These same commanders, particularly at the brigade level and below, learned, adapted, and re-evaluated continuously while fighting in Iraq, and did so often without close oversight and sometimes in the face of higher headquarters that lacked the same qualities.

Tactics and methods in this context were simply a manifestation of combined education and experience, of the quality of command leadership. Experience in the form

¹⁹⁶Dave Dillegge, “Hearts and Minds,” *Small Wars Journal*, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2007/10/hearts-and-minds/> (accessed 24 April 2011). Hearts and Minds was a term first attributed popularly General Sir Gerald Templer during his service as Director for Operations and High Commissioner of Malaya during the Malayan Emergency in 1952. The original quote was “The answer lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the Malayan People.” In this context, public perception on who was winning the fight was essential. Convincing the people that their interests lay with the government and COIN intervening force was essential. If they thought the government was going to win, then their interest lay in siding with the government and COIN force. Their heart, or emotions would follow. The euphemism, however, has created the impression that hearts and minds means being nice or coddling of the local population. Templer’s efforts were highly coercive and forceful, however. The misunderstanding persists today.

¹⁹⁷Mike Shuster, “Iraqi Leader Breaks with U.S. Plan for Security Wall,” Interview on National Public Radio hosted by Melissa Block, 23 April 2007, <http://m.npr.org/news/front/9783129?singlePage=true> (accessed 15 April 2011). Personal experience of the author. An example of the misapplication of successful tactics occurred in Baghdad in 2007. The 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division used extensive neighborhood compartmentalization as a method to control violence and insurgent movement beginning in late 2006. The wall proved effective. By April 2007, attacks and murders dropped significantly. Contrast this with the reaction of the Sunni enclave in Adamiyah in East Baghdad. The compartmentalization of Adamiyah by 2nd Brigade, 82nd Division began in March 2007, based on the success application of the tactic in West Baghdad. The wall proved to be an information operations disaster and required significant damage control. The major failure involved promoting the plan effectively and gaining support from the besieged community.

of multiple deployments also helped to inform and shape command leadership and the conduct of operations in its pursuit of campaign objectives over the course of a twelve-month deployment.

CHAPTER 4

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM: A WAR OF MANAGEMENT

Operation Iraqi Freedom: A Synopsis

Operation Iraq Freedom began officially on 19 March 2003, with the ground invasion of Iraq from Kuwait.¹⁹⁸ The initial combined air and ground offensive to defeat the Iraqi Armed Forces and occupy Iraq would last until around 4 May 2003.¹⁹⁹ In May 2003, under the authority of UN Resolution 1483, the Coalition Provisional Authority would be established to assume the political control of Iraq after the end of major combat operations, under the leadership of L. Paul Bremer.²⁰⁰ The transition from combat operations to stability operations, would transfer regional strategic and operational command from 3rd Army, Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) to an interim Combined/Joint Task Force headquarters, formally known as CJTF-7.²⁰¹ The US Army's V Corps would assume command of CJTF-7 in May, with Lieutenant General (LTG) Ricardo Sanchez replacing LTG William Wallace as V Corps Commander. Thus, V Corps, normally an operational level headquarters, but a tactical headquarters during the major combat phase of OIF, would assume control over military strategy and

¹⁹⁸Gordon and Trainor, 552.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 554.

²⁰⁰Donald P. Wright and Timothy R. Reese, *On Point II, Transition to the New Campaign: The United States Army and Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003-January 2005* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: CSI Press, 2008), 26.

²⁰¹Ibid., 27. CFLCC stands for Combined Forces Land Component Command. CFLCC commanded under the authority of CENTCOM.

operations in stabilizing transitional Iraq with the objective of pulling the vast majority of land forces out of Iraq by 2003.²⁰²

Operational and strategic turbulence served to disrupt the plan to pull occupying US forces out of Iraq by September 2003. In May 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) issued its two most controversial orders, CPA Orders 1 and 2, covering de-Baathification and the dissolution of the former Iraqi intelligence and security apparatuses.²⁰³ Beginning in June 2003, US forces began to experience the initial manifestations of nationwide insurgency that would rapidly escalate in the following months, with the most devastating initial attacks occurring against the Jordanian Embassy and against the UN mission to Iraq in August 2004.²⁰⁴ Political progress proved slow in the background of increasing violence stemming from a growing Sunni insurgency and political discontent within the Shia community. Despite this, President Bush ordered the CPA to develop a plan to transition sovereignty to an Interim Iraqi Government (IIG) by June 2004.²⁰⁵

The lack of stability and progress in security forced the occupation to extend, and beginning in January 2004, the US Army and Marine Corps began a unit rotation plan that involved rotating combat formations and support elements for fixed tours. In May 2004, CJTF-7 was split into two headquarters, designated Multinational Forces-Iraq (MNF-I), and Multi-National Corp-Iraq (MNC-I). The split reflected the necessity of

²⁰²Ibid.

²⁰³Ibid., 26.

²⁰⁴Ibid., 32.

²⁰⁵Ibid., 37.

placing theater-strategic command under a four-star headquarters, MNF-I, where MNC-I would assume responsibility for the command and control of US forces conducting combat operations to defeat the growing insurgency.²⁰⁶ The CPA formally dissolved after the establishment of the IIG in June 2004, nominally transferring political sovereignty back to the Iraqis.

The security situation appeared to stabilize after the capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003 proved fleeting. April 2004 saw a massive and violent uprising against the occupation and CPA by the followers of Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in the cities of Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala, and Kut.²⁰⁷ Defeating this uprising required the extension and rapid redeployment of the Army's 1st Armored Division to the south of Iraq. Concurrently in Al Anbar province, the US Marine Corps forces witnessed the coalescence and increased militarization of the Sunni insurgency and rejectionist movements, manifested in strength in the city of Fallujah. US Army forces, particularly elements of the 1st Infantry Division operating in Salah ad-Din Province experienced the same in the city of Samarra.²⁰⁸ These movements eventually posed a strategic and operational threat to both political and security progress, particularly with the first Iraqi elections approaching in January 2005, forcing a series of major combat operations in the fall of 2004 to clear the cities of Samarra and Fallujah of insurgents, formally known as Operation Baton Rouge and Operation Al Fajr.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶Ibid., 176.

²⁰⁷Ibid., 39.

²⁰⁸Ibid., 43.

²⁰⁹Ibid.

The advent of Army General George Casey as the commander of MNF-I on 1 June 2004, saw the first manifestations of a theater-strategic campaign plan, along multiple lines of operations that sought to link political transition in Iraq in the form of elections to security operations to defeat the insurgency and build the Iraqi Security Forces.²¹⁰ This campaign plan detached Coalition Forces from occupational authority towards a path emphasizing partnership with the Iraqi Government.²¹¹ Concurrently, the development of the new internal and external security apparatuses fell on a new headquarters subordinate to MNF-I, designated as the Multi-National Security Transition Corp-Iraq (MNSTC-I).²¹²

The MNSTC-I, with its three-star headquarters, would serve under a broad mandate to build the capacity of the ISF through initial entry training, unit set fielding of equipment, developing the institutional training and education base, and personnel recruitment and unit manning.²¹³ Perhaps, most importantly, MNSTC-I was responsible for the coaching and mentoring of operational ISF units, and would use small teams of officers and NCOs, labeled transition teams and, according to one account, modeled on the British Army Training Teams (BATT) that served in Dhofari Rebellion, to accomplish this mission.²¹⁴ The MNSTC-I mission was complementary to, but separate

²¹⁰Ibid., 177. The title of the campaign plan was “Partnership: From Occupation to Constitutional Elections.”

²¹¹Ibid.

²¹²Ibid., 450.

²¹³Ibid., 451-454

²¹⁴BL020, UK Battle Group Commander in Operation Telic, Interview by Aaron Kaufman and Tom Walton, Warminster, UK, 31 March 2011. The interviewee stated that

from, the MNC-I security operations aimed at defeating the insurgency. As the ISF developed capacity and capability over time, US forces conducting COIN could be replaced with capable ISF in line with the politico-military strategy of transition to Iraqi and ISF control.

In 2005, the transition strategy continued apace with the execution of three major political events. The first event was the provincial and national elections that occurred in January 2005. In October, Iraq held its constitutional referendum, followed by the Iraqi parliamentary elections in December 2005. The security environment appeared to stabilize somewhat in 2005, particularly in Baghdad and other population centers, whereas other areas saw the reestablishment of insurgent safe havens.²¹⁵ In general, the insurgency continued to adapt in lethality and efficiency. Gains within the security environment proved ephemeral in February 2006, when Sunni insurgents destroyed the Shiite shrine known as the Al-Askariya Mosque in Samarra.²¹⁶ This act set alight the sectarian fires that led to civil war and a huge expansion of violence along sectarian lines, primarily between Sunni and Shia Arab.

The year 2006 can be roughly be characterized as an Iraqi civil war, a civil war not of conventional means, but one executed through the destruction of civil society and norms at the hands of Sunni nationalists and Al Qaeda allies, and perhaps more destructively at the hands of Iranian-backed Shia militia elements. US commanders

the concept of the Transition Team stemmed from the advice of a British Army officer working for MNSTC-I in 2004.

²¹⁵This includes, but is not exclusive to, Mosul, Tal Afar, and Ramadi.

²¹⁶Malkasian, 301.

would attempt and fail to contain this violence, particularly strong in Baghdad, in a series of operations heavily reliant on ISF units incapable of conducting COIN and often tainted primarily by Shia sectarian influence.²¹⁷

The civil war thus served to place the transition strategy on a temporary hiatus until the security environment could be stabilized to the extent that it did not threaten the ability of Iraq to exist as a viable state. The recognition of local security as the critical element in stabilization, preceding transition, led formally to the increase of US forces and General David Petraeus assuming command of MNF-I.²¹⁸

The immediate operational and strategic effects of the surge are relatively well known. Violence decreased precipitously in late 2007 and 2008. The capability and number of ISF units also increased apace. Arguably this was due to the recognition that the transition team model for partnership was inadequate, that in the context of the complex COIN environment of Iraq, improving ISF capability without the resources of regular forces, particularly conventional Army and Marine Corps units, is impossible. The Army formally began deploying brigade combat teams labeled as Advise and Assist brigades in 2009, ostensibly trained and augmented for advisory capacity that followed the implementation of the US-Iraq Security Agreement mission in 2009 that would continue past the end of US-lead combat operations in 2010.

The broad overview of the campaign in Iraq and the success achieved should not serve as a vindication of organizational and institutional adaptation, learning, and

²¹⁷Ibid., 303. This includes Operations Together Forward I and II in summer of 2006.

²¹⁸Ibid., 304.

development. While units engaged in COIN certainly learned, adapted, and reformed, it is unclear whether the military bureaucracy did the same, beyond thinking of the war in six to twelve month increments, or looking for the next available BCT to deploy.

Preparing for Deployment: Taking Bureaucracy to War

The way in which military organized, planned, and conducted the extended COIN campaign in Iraq brings into question the commitment to operational and strategic progress during Operation Iraqi Freedom and later Operation New Dawn. Superficially, the needs of the various headquarters and bureaucracies in managing the war appeared to trump a requirement to achieve and maintain continuity in the operating environment through unit transitions and changing strategy.²¹⁹ The requirements of the campaign appear secondary to those of the bureaucracy and its managerial approach to warfare, and serves to highlight Secretary of Defense Gates' comments on how the Pentagon is proficient at war planning but not war execution.

²¹⁹The needs of the planning bureaucracy—the needs of the supply side of the war effort—are not necessarily aligned with the needs of the campaign to maintain continuity and progress over time. The combatant commander, e.g. CENTCOM, submits Request For Forces (RFFs) that are validated and approved through the Joint Staff and tasked to service components to fulfill. In OIF, operating under the unit manning and rotation model, this applied to corps-level staffs and below. Other individual and joint billets for personnel are often filled with people that lack any qualification or experience to function effectively in their assigned duty, as often seen in the advisory efforts. The normal human resources bureaucracy, such as Army Human Resources Command (HRC) works to fulfill the requirements as determined by the planning bureaucracy. The needs of the theater campaign, for ensuring continuity and progress, may be better served through recycling individuals and units with particular experience and proven success into the same areas where they served previously. See also BC010, Field Grade Officer, Interview by Robert Green and Aaron Kaufman, Fort Bragg, NC, 1 March 2011. See also BG030, Battalion Commander, Interview by Mark Battjes, Nathan Springer, and Thomas Walton, Fort Irwin, CA, 14 March 2011. Both interviews discuss the frustration of working with people arbitrarily selected for serving as advisors, without any particular qualification or skill.

Structural impediments to continuity, progress, and learning were built-in from the beginning of OIF.²²⁰ All units deploying to Iraq beginning in 2003 would serve discrete tours, maintaining unit integrity through a unit replacement system and not an individual replacement system. Army units would train, deploy, fight, and redeploy as cohorts. Unit replacement was promoted as an antidote to the failed replacement system as seen in Vietnam and critical to unit integrity. Unit integrity, however, was hardly maintained once units arrived to Iraq.²²¹ Rather, the efforts to manage the war, to ensure

²²⁰Thomas A. Ball, “Bureaucratic Decision Making in Troop Rotation Policy for OIF-2” (National Defense University, 2004), 8. See also John D. Winkler, “Stability and Cohesion: How Much is Needed,” in *The New Guard and Reserve* eds. John D. Winkler and Barbara A. Bicksler (San Ramon, CA: Falcon Books, 2010). Winkler argues that cohesion may be overemphasized as a justification for unit rotation. See also Roger Kaplan, “Army Unit Cohesion in Vietnam: A Bum Rap,” *Parameters* 17 (September 1987). Individual rotation policy may have had deleterious effects on unit cohesion, but there were many more contributing factors. Personal experience of the author. Vietnam was cited by various leaders as justification for the unit rotation model. BA040, Brigade Commander, Interview by Aaron Kaufman and Dustin Mitchell, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 23 February 2011; BE060, Brigade Commander, Interview by Mark Battjes and Thomas Walton, Fort Irwin, CA, 9 March 2011. Former commanders discuss the frustration of having their units stripped from them after arriving in theater. While an individual replacement is certainly detrimental for building combat teams training for deployment, a hybrid approach involving individual and unit replacements at some level may have proven more effective, such as rotating battalions and companies, and not brigades. Headquarters personnel and more senior commanders could rotate out individually.

²²¹BA010, Brigade Commander, Interview by Richard Johnson and Thomas Walton, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 22 February 2011; BA040, Interview; BC020, Brigade Commander, Interview by Robert Green and Aaron Kaufman, Fort Bragg, NC, 2 March 2011; BD010, Battalion Commander, Interview by Benjamin Boardman and Dustin Mitchell, Fort Know, KY, 14 March 2011; BE060, Interview; BH020, Brigade Commander, Interview by Mark Battjes, Ben Boardman, Robert Green, Richard Johnson, Aaron Kaufman, Dustin Mitchell, Nathan Springer, and Thomas Walton, Washington, DC, 21 March 2011; BH030, Iraq Veterans Panel, Interview by Mark Battjes, Robert Green, Aaron Kaufman, and Dustin Mitchell, Washington, DC, 22 March 2011. During the time before the surge and during the surge, Army BCTs were often stripped of organic battalions, and not often informed of the plans until they arrived in Kuwait prior to onward movement to Iraq. From experience, this included, 1st and 2nd brigades of the 1st Cavalry Division, 2nd and 4th brigades of the 1st Infantry Division, 2nd Brigade 1st

that the relatively small, professional Army in its fragility deployed in a sustainable and supportable fashion appeared to trump the needs of commanders and units in Iraq attempting to transform the security environment in pursuit of transition.

This approach to warfare gives the impression that bureaucratic necessity often supersedes operational requirements, or did in the context of the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Tactical and operational progress and the ability to gain and maintain the initiative as well as sustain it over time—through unit transitions—appeared less important than meeting bureaucratic requirements in force management. This model of providing forces anticipates disruption to continuity over time, but retains no mechanism to mitigate predictable effects. In other words, the deployment and employment model sacrificed continuity with little guarantee of a positive return.²²² The circumstances of war as determined by the relationship between US forces, the enemy, and the environment did not necessarily serve to inform managerial decisions that may prove deleterious to campaign progress in OIF.²²³

Armored Division, 2nd and 3rd Brigades 3rd Infantry Division, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade 2nd Infantry Division. This is not all inclusive, but reflects a general approach to managing the COIN campaign through the harvesting of battalions.

²²²BD010, Interview. During the initial part of OIF, OIF I to II and perhaps later, the impression of units operating in Iraq that the strategy was to get out of Iraq, that the war was a plan of the next six months; BH030, Interview. Force management decisions prior to 2006 were heavily weighed towards decreasing the number of brigades in Iraq in line with the transition strategy, and not the operational or tactical requirements. Operational decisions that involved the rapid shifting of combat power in Iraq, as well as the extension of unit deployments, to ameliorate crises were the norm from 2003 to late 2006. Operational examples includes Al Kut, Karbala, and Najaf in spring 2004, Samarra, Fallujah and Mosul in the fall and winter of 2004-2005, Ninevah in 2005, Al Anbar in 2006, and Baghdad in 2006.

²²³Lionel Beehner, “U.S. Military Strategy in Iraq,” <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/us-military-strategy-iraq/p10434> (accessed 19 May 2011). Beehner cites several comments

The Army's approach to force management is titled Army Force Generation, or ARFORGEN.²²⁴ The ARFORGEN model is the bureaucratic tool the Army uses to generate trained, equipped, and ready forces to support the requirements of the joint force or combatant commander conducting operations in a theater of war, as well as other Army requirements. The ARFORGEN model seeks to ensure that units are properly resourced in personnel and equipment, and properly trained prior to employment. The ARFORGEN model is cyclic and continuous, and all operational forces in the Army, whether deployed or recently redeployed, are categorized in some form under ARFORGEN.²²⁵

The planning methodology and bureaucratic-managerial approach to limited war, particularly in COIN, imposes significant risk to operational continuity and success. In the context of OIF, little consideration was made for the preservation of unit experience, learning, and adaptation across multiple deployments, beyond TTPs. Additionally, in order to position forces in theater, units were assessed—in the abstract—of similar capability and thus equally capability, whether an infantry battalion or field artillery battalion, which has far less people. Other factors, such as organizational leadership,

regarding the unit rotation policy in Iraq and how it imposes turbulence rather than stability in the environment. Cited academics include Stephen Biddle and Andrew Bacevich.

²²⁴Department of the Army, Army Regulation (AR) 525-29, *Army Force Generation* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, March 2011).

²²⁵*Ibid.*, 1. The categories of unit readiness under ARFORGEN are Reset/Train, Ready, and Available. Subcategories under ARFORGEN include equipment, manning, funding, and training. ARFORGEN enables the Army the ability to forecast requirements for ensuring proper levels of equipping, manning, and funding align with training requirements.

culture, and previous experience in order to position forces in theater did not inform decisions regarding force employment.

ARFORGEN ensures this problem will persist. Generating forces across the Army for deployment necessitates the disassembly and harvesting of unit officer and NCO leadership to place in other units after a deployment. Thus organizational leadership and character can vary significantly from deployment to deployment. Further aggravating the risk to operational continuity is the failure of the Army to mandate and collect detailed, critical, and introspective after-action reviews (AARs) and oral histories of commanders from the company level on up that could serve to inform how Army leaders and units learned and adapted over time, employing, or not, operational art and thinking to problems encountered.

All that remains to mitigate risk to operational progress and continuity during unit transitions is the fourteen-day relief in place (RIP) typical of unit transitions in Iraq and Afghanistan. The ability of units to forecast areas of employment in theater, and thus the ability to gain a more detailed understanding of their future operating environment, has proved unreliable in the past, both in Iraq and Afghanistan.²²⁶

The ability to improve tactically and operationally in war, including COIN, requires the proper positioning forces to effectively interact with the environment, which is in essence maneuver, both physically and cognitively. Once positioned, forces can properly orient efforts and thus take advantage of emergent opportunities to gain and maintain the initiative through the sequencing of tactical actions in time, space, and

²²⁶BA010, Interview; BH020, Interview; BH030, Interview; BE090, Battalion Commander, Interview by Robert Green and Aaron Kaufman, Fort Irwin, CA, 7 March 2011.

purpose. Fundamentally, dispersed, wide-area operations require deep understanding, familiarity, collective learning and adapting—all contingent on the latent potential in operational art in the unit and commander—in order to achieve progress in campaigns and sustain momentum. OIF demonstrated that the primacy of force generation—to finding another BCT to deploy—often occurs at the expense of requirement to achieve sustained operational momentum over years and multiple deployments.

The ARFORGEN process does contribute to preparing units to deploy, directly through training and education programs and mission rehearsal exercises (MREs), and indirectly through the recycling of leaders and soldiers with deployment experience into units preparing to deploy. Experiential learning, however, is not organizationally maintained; it is individually maintained. Thus, experiential learning is hypothetically distributed through cross-pollination, or a trickling down of experience throughout the operational force.

The efficacy of trickle-down learning is controversial, however, as it often lacks contextual and collective understanding and is comprised of many particular experiences that have often have significant moral considerations. Distributed particular experience may lead to adaptation within military units that have the right leadership climate, one that fosters dialogue and expects critical thinking. Complementary to establishing the right climate, good leaders must also subject previous experience to critique, as individuals new to a unit may come burdened with poorly informed ideas as to what is effective in COIN stemming from previous deployments, lest those methods infect

subordinate organizations with bad habits.²²⁷ The dismantling of particular ideas through well-articulated arguments is as critical as it is difficult, as there are often deep emotions associated with previous experiences. The learning organization in the context of US units conducting COIN in Iraq, rather than being a natural manifestation of varying and distributed experience coalescing to breed learning and adaptation while in combat, is the product of command leadership at the brigade level and below.

The Surge in Context: Towards a Better Equilibrium

In many ways, the reinforcement of Iraq with 20,000 additional US forces, known as the surge represented less of a drastic change in strategy, operations, and tactics than is commonly portrayed. While the impacts of top-level leadership decisions are certainly important, the surge in essence represented a period of time when strategy, rather than being isolated from events, was better aligned to environmental reality, where strategy could take advantage of tactical and operational progress that Army and Marine Corps

²²⁷Personal experience of the author. Several examples of poor or questionable tactics serve to highlight the persistence of bad ideas. The validity of warning shots as a force protection measure for patrols is one example. Another example involves the use of baited sniper ambushes. One of the main justifications for the use of warning shots in OIF was to protect patrols and convoys from the suicide vehicle-borne IED (VBIED) threat, and it requires an assumption that a suicide VBIED threat can be deterred through warning shots. This assumption is questionable at best; particularly after US forces received a full complement of up-armored motor vehicles. The use of baited sniper ambushes is also highly questionable, both morally and practically. Killing insurgents is certainly a part of COIN warfare, but it is also a question of killing the right people. Baited ambushes tend to kill the low-level insurgent, or perhaps a man paid to take the bait. The use of lethal force in this context may serve only to motivate the COIN force, and serves no broader practical purpose in either defeating the insurgency or in stabilization. It is force for its own sake, and thus morally suspect.

leaders units had achieved locally and regionally over several years.²²⁸ The most consequential decision overall was President Bush's decision to shift from a transition strategy to a local security strategy. This decision, backed by additional military and civilian resources, effectively enabled commanders from General Petraeus down to company commanders the ability to assume risk in innovation and take advantage of emergences in the COIN environment, most notably the Anbar Awakening. The additional forces enabled the MNC-I commander, General Odierno, the ability to implement his operational vision instead of having to harvest and reposition forces already engaged in COIN.²²⁹ The surge provided the MNC-I commander the capability to leverage a true operational force rather than resort to tactical palliatives supplied by forces already on mission in Iraq. For eighteen months, beginning in January 2007, strategy was better aligned to the operational and tactical realities as determined by the relationship between coalition forces, the terrain, and the enemy.

The surge did not necessarily represent a radical shift in approach that manifested in greater unity of effort, whether within US forces or between US forces and Iraqi Security Forces, and thus leading to better outcomes. Operationally and tactically, many commanders conducting COIN felt unconstrained in the implementation of their

²²⁸James A. Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011). Russell's book was published in April 2011 as this thesis was being written. Russell's book is a detailed study of several Army and Marine Corp units at the brigade and battalion level that experienced significant success in Iraq, and he attributes the success to innovative leadership and culture that learned and adapted from the bottom-up without the assistance of doctrine and within a culture and environment of decentralized leadership.

²²⁹BH030, Interview.

collective visions, similar to units pre-surge, often due to either a lack of guidance or vision on the part of more senior commanders and staffs. Additional forces and resources, the decreasing size of operational areas, and the assuming of risk by the President and MNF-I enabled commanders to innovate and seize the initiative as opportunities arose. In this environment, commanders pulled their military staffs forward and were able to operate without the risk of strategic decisions derailing progress or reactionary operational decisions to address immediate crises.

Indeed, perhaps the surge represented only a temporary hiatus in the transition strategy. In the context of the surge, brigade, battalion, and company commanders operated in the same operational environment since the beginning of OIF in 2003, an environment often characterized by little oversight and broad authorities.²³⁰ As compared to 2003-2004 however, many commanders and leaders had the benefit of significant experience in the COIN environment through multiple deployments.²³¹ Perhaps this better explains the synergy and harmony of effort that emerged as the effects of the surge took hold. This experiential and historical learning served as a catalyst to organizational adaptation—in essence operational art—born of better command leadership, vision, and understanding of the environment, and thus to different approaches to COIN in OIF.

²³⁰BG100, Brigade Commander, Interview by Mark Battjes and Nathan Springer, Fort Stewart, GA, 16 March 2011.

²³¹BG040, Brigade Commander, Interview by Nathan Springer and Thomas Walton, Fort Stewart, GA, 15 March 2011. While not absolute, some commanders had extensive experience in non-traditional assignments that enabled them the ability to adapt quickly.

Various examples exist of well-led Army and Marine Corps unit achieving operational progress pre-surge, particularly in the provinces of Anbar and Ninevah.²³²

Theater strategy during the surge represented a true capitalization of local and regional progress generated through innovative and adaptive commanders with a longer-term vision towards continuity and stability. Previous to the surge, constrained resources and the drive to transition meant that local security was a short-term metric to justify repositioning of forces, transitioning to newly formed and often incapable ISF units, and a decrease in US brigades deployed to Iraq.²³³

There is risk in appealing to moral ascendancy when looking at the surge historically, to claim that perhaps the US and its forces in Iraq finally figured it out during the surge, and thus proved victorious not only over the insurgency but also over internal dysfunction manifested strategically and often operationally. The experience of commanders in Iraq after the surge tends to refute claims that internal dysfunction was defeated.

Perhaps the US Army could stand to learn from the British Army in its retrospective analysis of the failure of the British to pacify Basra, which ended ignominiously in 2008 and led to the Iraqi-led, US-enabled Operation Charge of the

²³²Commonly cited pre-surge examples include the 101st Airborne Division operating in the Ninevah Province in OIF II, the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment operating in Ninevah Province in 2005, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division operating in Anbar Province in 2006, and 1st Battalion, 7th Marines operating in Anbar in 2005.

²³³The drive to decrease the number of brigade combat teams and transition to ISF control in line with the transition strategy led to several reactionary operations in 2006 to address the rapidly escalating civil war occurring in Baghdad in mid-2006 following the bombing of the Al Askari Mosque in Samarra. The named operations were Operation Together Forward I and Operation Together Forward II.

Knights.²³⁴ Juxtaposing the US approach with the British approach could lead one to conclude that because the British Army did not participate in the surge, the US approach in strategy and operations was superior. This conclusion, however, is insufficiently self critical and perhaps ahistorical.

Arguably, the surge does not represent a vindication of the war in Iraq throughout its various phases, as good operations are no substitute for strategic failures and other miscues that extended the conflict. However, the Army ought to retain a deep reservoir of fighting experience from OIF and OEF, one that should provide depth of knowledge and wisdom regarding operational art, regardless of strategic and policy failures. The true legacy of OIF should be frank dialogue, inter-Army introspection, leading to conclusions that the Army, in its institutional traditions and norms, in its hierarchical organizations with large staffs predisposed to scientific processes, and most important in its professional military education of officers and future commanders, was poorly prepared to fight in win in the COIN environment and incapable of the task of winning all wars.

In the end, the history of OIF may find fertile ground in management theory and problem solving, as arguably the records of how the Department of Defense and the Army generated and managed forces in support of OIF are stored in the United States, separated from the turbulence and ambiguity of the war. History in this form may show us how the military overcame internal sources of friction to provide the commander with adequate numbers of forces. It will not, however, provide military practitioners and students of military history any reasonable basis to argue as to how the US Army learned

²³⁴Alex Alderson, *The Validity of British Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine After the War in Iraq 2003-2009* (November 2009).

and adapted over time while in combat. Gaining a better understanding on how the Army learned and adapted in Iraq will not start from general arguments concerning big ideas or arguments. Rather, it will start from interviews conducted with commanders and planners with direct experience and significant responsibility.

CHAPTER 5

DEDUCTION FROM DIRECT EXPERIENCE: GENERAL THOUGHTS ON LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS IN OIF

The interviews and articles cited for the bulk of this essay center mainly on commanders and other officers that retained significant authority and direct experience in OIF throughout the entire campaign. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to claim general principle from the available sources, the interviews do provide an emerging case for how units learned and adapted over time. This chapter highlights general ideas concerning command leadership, leadership climate, learning organizations and how these things enabled learning and adaptation while in combat.

Command Leadership and Learning Organizations

Perhaps the most consequential variable in determining the ability of an Army combat unit to become a learning organization, to achieving progress in the COIN environment, is the quality of command leadership at the company, battalion, and brigade levels. The character of the commander has a significant influence on how the unit fights, learns, and adapts in contact with the environment and thus portends a general operational impact.

However, bureaucratic necessity, not operational necessity, dominates the approach to command selection in the US Army, even in the wartime environment of OIF and OEF. Whereas company commanders are selected from a slate of officers in Army brigades, battalion and brigade commanders are selected from a centrally managed board in a process that has not changed in decades. Selection for command depends less on

previous experience and success in the COIN environment, or competence is warfare, and more on achieving success in institutionally mandated career benchmarks. The suitability of this traditional bureaucratic method remains unclear; although in fairness, the process has proven relatively good at selecting the right commander.

On 15 May 2011, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates reflected on his experiences in a *60 Minutes* interview with Katie Couric. Gates remarked that his greatest challenge as the Secretary of Defense was “leading an organization that is good at planning for wars, but not at waging them.”²³⁵ Gates comments appeal to change, but it remains to be seen if any change to the way our war bureaucracy functions in the long term actually manifests. Fundamentally, his statement indicates the persistence in the way military bureaucracy operates, even in war. Thus, the emergence of learning organizations as a function of the quality of the command leadership at all levels occurred perhaps in spite of the bureaucracy and not because of it. While the surge in 2007 and the strategic priority placed on local security may represent a better alignment of strategy to environmental and tactical reality, Gates’ frustration may serve to temper any idea that the military-bureaucratic management approach to war had anything to do with operational success in Iraq, although the bureaucracy did prove capable in providing new forces when required and during the surge. The problems of bureaucracy are not only a problem for large organizations, but also within traditionally organized military staffs.

²³⁵Robert Gates, interview on *60 Minutes* with Katie Couric, 15 May 2011.

Learning Organizations in OIF:
Wither the Military Staff?

One of the greatest challenges facing commanders at the battalion level and above is aligning the various appendages of staff to the vision of the commander. Traditionally and doctrinally, the military staff seeks to get ahead of the commander through anticipating the commander's requirements in understanding, visualizing, and describing the operational environment, and then directing subordinate units through the orders process. In theory, the staff provides the majority of information and analysis a commander requires in order making tactical and operational decisions. Layered within this paradigm are tools and processes that separate relevant and critical information, empower the staff to make better recommendations to enable command decisions, and thus keep the unit oriented to its purpose and objectives. Battles and operations are managed from collective analytical staff brain in command and control nodes to ensure unity of effort and synergy.

The major problem in COIN warfare, and perhaps in all of war, is that the staff in its structure and organization is too distant to directly interact with the environment. While staff processes exist to assist the commander and subordinate units, the processes in essence are internally focused and oriented. Organizational, technical, and operational complexity all conspire to cognitively isolate the staff—and possibly the commander—from the environment, leading to fixation on internal dynamic interactions, thus preventing adaptation to rapidly changing external circumstances.²³⁶

²³⁶Frans P. B. Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 183.

The military staff in the US Army tradition has increased in size and complexity significantly since the early 1900s. Operational doctrine regarding staff operations has also correspondingly developed apace. The current Army Field Manual 5-0, *The Operations Process*, is the distant offspring of the 1940 US Army Field Manual (FM) 101-5, *Staff Officers Field Manual: The Staff and Combat Orders*.²³⁷ Evolutionary changes in US Army staff doctrine can give the impression that extremely detailed and analytical processes are the *sine qua non* of staff operations and planning and the precursor to successful operations.²³⁸ Progress and evolution in staff doctrine is thus simply an improvement on the science of control and administrative planning, perhaps based on an assumption of doctrinal superiority.

The experience of commanders in Iraq indicate indirectly that the growth in the staff and associated information technology did not manifest in better intuitive leadership, or even better situational understanding locally, where empirical data in the form of metrics might provide a greater impulse to change methods. Learning and adaptation, the qualities of a learning organization and the manifestation of operational thinking and art, were born of intuitive leadership and inductive processes stemming from deliberate choices by commanders to gain the most information through direct experience and

²³⁷Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 101-5, *Staff Officers Field Manual: The Staff and Combat Orders* (Washington, DC: The War Department, 19 August 1940).

²³⁸Christopher R. Paparone, "US Army Decisionmaking: Past, Present, and Future," *Military Review* 81, no. 4 (July-August 2001): 50. Paparone argues that decision makers may be more comfortable or competent conducting MDMP's procedural aspects. They may give inadequate attention to the less-structured, but more important, step of generating stratagems in the first place. Arguably, this is the consequence of providing extremely detailed guidance in doctrine regarding procedure, perhaps leading to doctrinal fixation.

continuous dialogue with subordinate commanders, and not of information gleaned from doctrine, staff processes, and PowerPoint slides.

The Impulse to Learning, Adaptation, and Innovation

The environment facing commanders in OIF flipped the staff-centric paradigm on its head. Historically, this lesson has been learned before, with the stimulus often being resource scarcity, environmental constraints, or outright military defeat. British Field Marshal Sir William Slim learned this lesson in Burma while commanding the 14th Army of the British Indian Army fighting against Japan.²³⁹ Slim claims the US military successfully adapted tactically in the Pacific in WWII in the context of ever increasing resources. Adaptation in this context was more in response to the enemy versus constrained resources.²⁴⁰ Thus the greatest impulse to change, to evolve towards a learning organization is the commander after facing clear defeat.

Perhaps the only similarity with US forces operating in OIF and Slim's forces in Burma and India is the relatively small size of experienced, quality forces operating within the larger backdrop of unfamiliar expanses of terrain against a threat both armies were not prepared initially to fight. The British Indian Army was organized and equipped mainly for internal security and aid to civil power duties within British India, unprepared in organization, leadership, training, and equipment to face the Imperial Japanese Army

²³⁹Field Marshal Viscount Slim, *Defeat Into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1942-1945* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 540-541. Slim argues that scarcity and necessity forces innovation.

²⁴⁰*Ibid.*

at the beginning of WWII.²⁴¹ The US Army was unprepared in many ways to face an insurgency in Iraq, but this was perhaps largely a function of command leadership. Whereas the Indian Army was facing potential annihilation at the hands of the Japanese, the US Army was never at risk of being overrun or destroyed at the hands of insurgents.

Danger, whether experienced personally in fighting the enemy, or danger to one's mission and forces born of command responsibility are powerful motivators to change, to learn and adapt.²⁴² The amorphous, indirect enemy threat as seen in various forms in Iraq, while amplifying the complexity for units engaged in fighting, where soldiers were killed or wounded but units remained intact as fighting organizations, nonetheless may have proved incidental—if not distracting—to the larger campaign for units in contact. The violent menace shifts focus from the big mission—the operation or campaign objectives—to the tactical engagements of killing those that attempted to kill US soldiers. In that sense, the menace causes myopia and takes the attention away from the greater menace to the mission of establishing conditions for transition, such as the enemy's population control infrastructure.²⁴³ Thus danger, in OIF, may have proved a distraction rather than a motivation to think differently on how to destroy the enemy's infrastructure.

²⁴¹Marston, *Phoenix from the Ashes*, 247.

²⁴²Clausewitz, 113, 120. Danger is a component of friction, one that makes things that seem easy become hard, and is born from interaction with a thinking and lethal enemy. In the case of OIF, certainly personal danger was a factor for those conducting security operations on a daily basis. However, there was rarely a circumstance where mission danger came into play as a motivator for changing the way a unit conducts operations. In other words there was little chance that an insurgent group could defeat a large US force, even at the platoon level.

²⁴³Osinga, 183.

Slim's introspective and self-critical memoir *Defeat into Victory* reflects not only his leadership and character, but also how catastrophe and danger to the mission can impel an army to adapt or die. That US forces learned and adapted, that some units proved to be learning organizations in Iraq is more of a product of visionary leadership at various levels, and expression of internal operational art and thinking potential, rather than an external stimulus born of mission danger.

As compared to Slim's forces in Burma, the only true resource limitation facing US forces in Iraq was the number of soldiers available in the fight. If scarcity and necessity are the mothers of innovation, then clearly US commanders and units often wanted for little outside of additional companies and battalions.²⁴⁴

The scarcity of other resources, particular money for projects and reconstruction in Iraq was relatively late phenomenon, and in the end not necessarily viewed as detrimental by some commanders.²⁴⁵ Massive amounts of resources were, in general, always available to US forces in Iraq, ranging from money, material, and equipment for life support and military operations, as well as the rapid fielding of new technologies in

²⁴⁴The sufficiency of troop levels is highly subjective to the factors a commander considers when viewing the totality of forces available. If the commander is considering only available US forces, then he may indeed feel that troop levels are insufficient. When factoring only the singular factor of US troop availability, arguably the entire war from beginning to end has been an economy of force.

²⁴⁵BG010, Battalion Commander, Interview by Nathan Springer, Fort Stewart, GA, 14 March 2011. The commanders discussed the benefit of a lack of funds under the CERP program. The severing of funds actually improved relationships with local and tribal leaders in Iraq, where previously commanders were seen as nothing but gravy trains. In essence, it had a normalizing effect. Craig A. Collier, "Now That We're Leaving Iraq, What Did We Learn?" *Military Review* 9, no. 5 (September-October 2008). Collier's argument is that rather than help the war effort in Iraq, large-scale expenditures and projects actually funded and perpetuated the insurgency.

response to insurgent adaptation. Large amounts of money for big projects, rather than serve as weapon system in recent Army jargon, in fact often serves as a weapon of mass disruption and distraction, corrupting the local environment and destabilizing security efforts. In this environment of resource largesse, immersion and direct interaction in the COIN environment of Iraq, while an absolute requirement for situational understanding and achieving true progress, was highly subjective to the will and foresight of the commander. Due to the level of resources in Iraq and the size of military staffs, it is easy to see how a commander could view learning through the lens of manipulating staff processes and systems towards the optimization of process and efficiency in the allocation of resources.

Commanders, by choice, and staffs by default, could easily isolate themselves physically and cognitively from the operating environment without worrying about the overall mission consequences. Sometimes, due to the size of the areas, particularly as brigades assumed larger and larger areas, isolation and a lack of understanding was perhaps unavoidable, particularly the higher the echelon of command.²⁴⁶ Generally, the insurgent stood little chance of scoring a clear tactical defeat of US forces. Thus, success throughout the deployment could be defined through the eyes of US forces, without consideration of the environment or the enemy.

If commanders can choose isolation to suit preference and experience, then it is arguable that, in general, military staffs live in imposed isolation, by design and in reality. Many commanders have recognized this fact of war as seen in OIF. Some commanders took a variety of steps to ensure that limitations of the staff do not undermine effective

²⁴⁶BG010, Interview.

mission command and impede operational progress.²⁴⁷ One former battalion commander in OIF comments:

I know doctrinally that campaigns are done at the operational level. In effect, battalions and companies have been doing campaign-type analysis, constructing a holistic approach that leads to greater mission accomplishment down the road, which I think you could define as a campaign. The way that you approach your staff processes will directly impact how you approach the campaign. If you don't have an iterative approach to understanding, to what is going on, and you don't have systems in place that create dialogue naturally, it just doesn't happen on its own. You will be consumed by your battle rhythm and consumed by events. It is a conscious choice. The commander has to make a very deliberate choice and develop an approach that meets his intent. I would argue that the short train-ups have not prepared a lot of units for that kind of approach. We took a very deliberate approach. I kept re-focusing the staff and re-focusing the staff and had a very deliberate battle rhythm of dialogue, that forced the dialogue to occur. I think that if you don't do that you can be overwhelmed by the staff battle rhythm, which trumps your dialogue. The way you organize your approach is critical to developing what you need. The typical large staff, especially at division level and above . . . it takes them three months to develop a plan, figure out what is going on and publish an order. Then they are done. They are riding out the rest of the

²⁴⁷BH020, Interview; BG070, Army Field Grade Officer, Interview by Nathan Springer and Tom Walton, Fort Stewart, GA, 15 March 2011; BA040, Interview; BA020, Battalion Commander, Interview by Mark Battjes and Ben Boardman, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 23 February 2011; BD040, Company Commander, Interview by Dustin Mitchell and Ben Boardman, Fort Knox, KY, 15 March 2011; BE060, Interview; BB030, Brigade Commander, Interview by Mark Battjes and Nathan Springer, Fort Bliss, TX, 3 March 2011; BC020, Interview; BG060, Battalion Commander, Interview by Mark Battjes, Fort Stewart, GA, 15 March 2011. A general theme in all interviews is that the military staff at the brigade and battalion levels simply could not, in OIF, function as organized in accordance with doctrine and tradition. The isolation of the staff from the environment, from the context of reporting, prevents the staff from getting ahead of the commander, or from devising metrics that lead to predictive planning. Instead, the commander directs the staff continuously, and the staff must remain attuned to the dialogue the commander has with subordinate commanders. In this sense, the subordinate units are *de facto* tasking the higher staff for resources, and the insights of commanders are informing staff products perhaps more than staff products are informing commanders. Some commanders view that the staff as organized cannot overcome the inherent limitations that the COIN environment imposes, although the CTC rotations can give this impression. Commanders have used various methods to overcome this. Staffs adapt and must self-synchronize to the COIN reality, around the commanders' dialogue and guidance. Some commanders have completely reorganized their staff around the mission, instead of traditional functions, to make the staff more effective in the COIN environment.

year. If our decision cycle is one year, then we are clearly not agile or adaptive. So I think that you have to change your approach and make it much more design-focused. It has to be light, easily adaptable, and built into your battle rhythm.²⁴⁸

In OIF, the intuitive leadership born of inductive processes of the commander assumed primacy as a locus for dialogue and sense making, and developed over time through experience and better situational understanding engendered through direct interaction with the COIN environment. The rational-analytic approach manifested through staff processes and staff leadership isolated from the environment can at best only play a complimentary role towards a better total synthesis.

All things being equal, it is arguable that the intuitive leadership of commanders operating under mission command, manifested in better approaches, tactics, and operations played the most important role in determining whether or not a unit could rightly earn the title of a learning organization. Many commanders recognized that the COIN environment in Iraq requires leaders with an ear to the ground in order to sense transition and emergences. The sensing, management, and seizing of transition and emergent opportunities is often a function of the collective intellect and intuition of commanders, an expression of the latent potential for operational art in the COIN environment, and not the product of military staff analytic and technical ability.

Leveraging the collective brainpower of leaders and commanders requires open dialogue towards a common and evolving narrative concerning the operating environment, trusting those with demonstrated skill and ability. This implies an inherent receptiveness to initiative and new ideas, and a willingness to take risk. The leadership climate of the command will ultimately shape how successfully the unit can harvest the

²⁴⁸BG060, Interview.

experience, intellect, and intuition of subordinate commanders and leaders for the benefit of operational progress.²⁴⁹ If anything, recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan closed the experience gap that existed between senior and junior leaders prior to the wars.

Acknowledging this requires the recognition of the limitation of individual commanders to retain a firm grasp of the operating environment, and necessitates perhaps humility of intellect and a clear rejection of overly sycophantic leadership culture that undermines open and frank dialogue between commanders.²⁵⁰ Perhaps the US Army could learn from the British Army in this regard.²⁵¹

Large military staffs, such as those seen the MNC-I and MNF/USF-I levels, may have proved unable to see the operational environment through the lens of commanders conducting combat operations at lower echelons. This lack of a common perspective can actually increase operational risk, particularly if guidance is issued that is contrary to the mission requirements of the commanders trying to reconcile operational approaches to fighting to what the environment requires and allows. Military staffs in isolation may prove deaf to the input of subordinate units and commanders, particularly concerning

²⁴⁹BG040, Interview.

²⁵⁰BF020, Civilian Advisor, Interview by Aaron Kaufman and Rick Johnson, Boston, MA, 11 March 2011. From the perspective of an outsider with many years of advising a senior US commander, many senior to subordinate relationships involving senior officers are sycophantic, and commanders are not challenged when inconsistent guidance is given, or is made in error due to poor understanding.

²⁵¹Opinion of the author. The British Army has a culture of the mess, the mess being where officers go to eat, drink, socialize, and dialogue. Within this culture there is a tradition of taking off the rank, where commanders' opinions and assessments are challenged freely without a risk of retribution. This is certainly easier in the British Army regimental system, where officers can spend decades in the same unit. This tradition, whether formal or informal, can serve to positively influence command climate through a respect of the opinion, intellect, and experiences of others.

operational guidance or directives that attempt to strictly circumscribe the actions of subordinate units. Two operations serve to highlight this problem.

The coalition forces support for the first elections in Iraq in January 2005 was delineated and circumscribed under Operation Seeds of Liberty, published by MNC-I in late 2004. Coalition forces were relegated to planning for the provision of outer cordon and quick reaction force (QRF) missions. The rest of the election support, ranging from the guarding and operation of polling sites, as well as arranging for logistical support to elections activities was to be the responsibility of the Independent Electoral Commission Iraq, or IECI. From October 2004 to early January 2005, coalition forces planned under the assumption that IECI, with ISF support, would take the lead role. Strategically, the greatest risk to Operation Seeds of Liberty, as seen by LTG Thomas Metz, the MNC-I at the time, was Iraq version of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam.²⁵² Anecdotally, another major strategic risk factor was the taint of possible election manipulation by US and Coalition Force partners.²⁵³

The actual risk, at least in the view of units at the tactical level, became manifest less than two weeks prior to the election, when it was clear that the IECI, at least in the context of Salah ad Din province, was incapable of planning, organizing, or executing the

²⁵²Wright and Reese, 175.

²⁵³Personal experience of the author. I served as a brigade planner in OIF II from March 2004 to February 2005. I participated in staff mission analysis conducted by G3 Plans, 1st Infantry Division, in Tikrit in October 2004, and was witness to the planning guidance issued by MNC-I. I also was privy to the coordination meetings held between 1ID and the Salah ad Din IECI director, Dr Zehki. In essence, the IECI director acknowledged all requirements for the elections, and was provided at least \$1.5 million USD to pay for all workers, worker training, and logistics. IECI proved incapable of meeting the requirements to both plan and execute the election, despite the acknowledgements.

elections without tremendous support from coalition forces. In essence, MNC-I guidance hamstrung units towards planning for incidental support to a critical mission, based on the assumption that mission failure centered not on the ability of the IECI to execute the election, but rather on an informational disaster indicating US manipulation of the election. This, in essence, precluded planning for the resource intensive support ultimately provided by US forces in response to IECI false promises. Only the tremendous and tireless efforts consisting of last-minute crisis planning and tasking of subordinate units by coalition forces ensured that the election actually happened. Whether or not MNC-I learned any salient lessons from this event is unclear.²⁵⁴

Another more recent example concerned the implementation of the Iraq-US Security Agreement that took effect in June 2009. The Security Agreement, in essence, was a revisit to the transition strategy that took a backseat during the surge in 2007 and 2008. The initial part of the Security Agreement signified a pull out of US forces outside of cities, ostensibly to larger FOBs, and an end to US-only operations. The formal end of US combat operations occurred on 1 September 2010, with the redeployment of the last

²⁵⁴Personal experience of the author. I served at the 2nd Brigade, 1ID action officer at the distribution and collection node for the Salah ad Din Province in support of Operation Seeds of Liberty, located at the Public Distribution Site warehouse just south of Tikrit. This job was a last minute task due to the recognition that IECI had failed in its responsibilities. I later participated in the MNC-I after action review held at Al Faw Palace on Camp Victory in February 2005. I was one of two tactical-level (brigade and below) participants, the other being a captain from 3rd Brigade, 1ID (Diyala Province). The AAR was led by the C-9 section (Civil-Military Affairs) of MNC-I, and most of the AAR consisted of praise on the successful outcome of the elections, with some improvements recommended for corps level staff and planning. I raised the point that the elections approached failure, due in no small part by the planning constraints placed on subordinate divisions. The planning constraints and assumptions did not enable effective contingency planning to address the greatest risk to the election, which was the inability of IECI to actually conduct the elections. I am unsure if this lesson was placed in the executive summary of the elections AAR.

US combat brigade to Kuwait. Concurrently from the beginning of Security Agreement, the footprint of US combat outpost and small base infrastructure would decrease apace with the withdrawal of US forces.

The mission requirements for US forces did not decrease during this period however, particularly as unit areas of responsibility increased exponentially. The mission of US Army units deploying to Iraq in late 2008 through 2009 was primarily to build and develop the capability and capacity of ISF and government officials towards the stabilization of Iraq. While this may have been the mission of US forces at the brigade level and below, it is not clear that higher-level staffs at MNC-I and MNF-I retained the same focus. The way the Security Agreement was promoted at the national level by USF-I gave the impression that civilians would no longer see US forces on Iraq streets, which proved false.²⁵⁵ For many units the tempo of operations actually increased, as well as the dispersal of US combat forces to remote locations, living in and amongst the ISF.²⁵⁶ Commanders were forced to devise innovative ways to get around restrictions in order to achieve stability goals in the wake of security gains made during the surge.²⁵⁷

From the perspective of some commanders operating under the Security Agreement, the main effort in partnering with and building the capacity of the ISF and government of Iraq was subject to disruption and reactionary decisions by higher commanders and staffs. The major effort of corps-level staff appeared to focus on the

²⁵⁵BL290, Battery Commander, Interview by Rick Johnson, Larkhill, United Kingdom, 1 April 2011; BE090, Interview; BH030, Interview.

²⁵⁶BE090, Interview.

²⁵⁷AA201, Brigade Commander, Interview by Ken Gleiman and Mike Dinesman, Fort Drum, NY, 20 August 2010.

breakdown of outposts and thus decreasing the presence of US units on the street. If successful, the mission as assigned to units partnered with the ISF would have been undermined.²⁵⁸ The strategic, yet ultimately administrative requirements of the responsible redeployment of forces, or RRF, appeared to supplant the operational and tactical requirements of forces conducting partnered stability operations in the Iraqi provinces, whether deployed as a regular Army BCT or as a BCT configured as an Advise and Assist Brigade (AAB).²⁵⁹ Reactionary decisions by senior commanders, resulting in the wholesale re-tasking of entire units partnering with ISF also had the same effect.²⁶⁰ At this point in the campaign, however, Army units and commanders harvested the benefits of years of learning and adapting in Iraq by innovating, reorganizing forces, and adapting at levels perhaps unseen when the availability of forces and resources were far greater.²⁶¹ Scarcity served to spur innovation.

Whether or not large staffs in the US military tradition as seen in OIF could adequately adapt to the requirements of the COIN environment remains unclear, particularly when policy and strategy do not mesh clearly with operational and tactical requirement. Understanding the nature of learning organizations in the context of OIF, how they innovated and adapted, requires divorcing the art of command and command leadership from any technical or doctrine-centric perspective. If anything, the war in Iraq

²⁵⁸BE090, Interview; BG010, Interview.

²⁵⁹BE090, Interview; BG010, Interview.

²⁶⁰BG010, Interview.

²⁶¹Ibid. This commander likened CERP to a drug, and that cutting it off was good in a way as it made the relationships more normal. Working around this problem was something that neither he nor his unit had prepared for.

demonstrated that absolute critical role the commander plays, from the combat arms company commander to the brigade combat team commander.

Command Leadership and Climate: The Keystone
of the Learning Organization

In OIF the worldview of the various echelons of staff often differed significantly from that of commanders. In the context of subordinate commanders and units operating under the staff of a higher commander, the subordinate commander may be forced to act outside of the directives of orders from higher echelons. This spectrum of deviance in OIF extended from decisions made with no delegated authority to actually ignoring directives in extreme circumstances, where the execution of an ostensibly lawful order would prove contrary to progress.²⁶² In some cases, such as the Anbar Awakening in 2006, higher headquarters were effectively dealt a *fait accompli*, where there appeared no other sensible option but for higher commanders and staffs to embrace what a lower commander has initiated

The claim that command leadership played the central role in achieving security and stability gains in Iraq is certainly uncontroversial, if not overly simplistic. Command leadership is central in all war. Uniquely, for an Army that has roots in Western military

²⁶²BF020, Interview; BH030, Interview; AA103, Brigade Commander, Interview by Brian McCarthy and Jesse Stewart, Fort Riley, KS, 16 August 2010. Several examples of this from interviews involve the targeting of High Value Individuals, directed from higher echelons to subordinate units. Targeting lists at higher echelons may fail to understand the role of the HVI in civil society, clinging instead to a black and white approach to the enemy in the COIN environment. The black and white approach to targeting may actually expand the insurgency and disrupt efforts to decrease violence and increase stability. Various commanders have ignored targeting directives, created restricted target lists (RTIs), or left HVI targeting to subordinate commanders with a better understanding of the environment.

thought, both in Clausewitz and de Jomini, good commanders often demonstrated traits more in line with Sun Tzu and ancient Chinese military thought.²⁶³ Reconciling the military science bias of Army tradition—a bias that can give the impression that it is possible lift the fog and minimize the friction of war through better processes—towards an approach that clearly understands the limits of knowledge, control, and understanding, is truly the art of command and the sole charge of the commander. The art of command in COIN is demonstrated through operational art and thinking in practice.

Thus the commander is key to unlocking the latent talent within the unit, talent that learns, adapts, and innovates in war, to the true emancipation of the learning organization from a tendency towards internal fixation. Highlighting some traits or characteristics of good commanders, considered in general as well as informed through interviews of former OIF commanders, can serve to inform broadly as to how learning organizations formed. More importantly, perhaps, the descriptive history of OIF as described through the eyes of commanders at the brigade level and below can serve to re-center military thought and professional military education more on military history and the art of command.

Commander Traits and the Learning Organization

The nature of the COIN environment in OIF and its granular characteristics proved highly particular and complex, from town to town, urban to rural, mulhalla to mulhalla as seen in Baghdad, from neighborhood to neighborhood. Overlaying the environment, the human terrain and its taxonomic complexity in social-economic,

²⁶³Martin van Creveld, *The Art of War: War and Military Thought* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 37-38.

familial, tribal, ethnic, and religious variables added perhaps a virtually infinite number of permutations to problems that serve to thwart even the most sophisticated modeling or problem solving process. For the commander attempting to use combat power and available resources to address problems as they arose, gaining a better understanding of the environment was perhaps the most important, difficult, and continual challenge of command leadership in organizations often wedded to particular problem solving techniques and technological solutions. Thus intuitive leadership, informed through deep personal and concrete experience and inductive reasoning, through interaction with the environment and the enemy, may prove superior to a rational-analytical approach to decision-making and leadership.

Arguably, intuitive command leadership in OIF led to certain organizational traits roughly characterized as flexibility in the face of the enemy and circumstance, adaptive and changing methods of operations and organization, and at times an artful use of deception and trickery; all within the context of winning with an economy of force. The mission compelled commanders and forces to embed deeper within the terrain and environment of Iraq in order to address the reality of the COIN environment on its own terms. But intuitive leadership is arguably a product of personal experience and subject to various biases. The right kind of intuitive leadership is the manifestation of particularly good traits or characteristics of the commander, traits that force the commander to recognize the limits of knowledge and understanding and address bias when it is recognized. The demonstrated potential for operational art in commanders and units was a both a product of experiential learning while in contact and a preexisting potential informed by learning habits and personal traits.

Such traits include self-awareness, intellectual humility, and empathy, and can be roughly characterized as leadership virtues. While some commanders may be innately endowed with such traits, it is arguable that these traits are from universally distributed within hierarchical military organizations. Leaders endowed with command authority may just as easily possess, without career consequence, the traits of egotism, self-importance, and intellectual hubris. Additionally, leaders simply cannot claim to become self-aware, intellectually humble, and empathetic when necessity demands. These leadership virtues can be developed cognitively over time, as a product of education and experience. The detailed study of military history may lend to the development of intellectual humility, as the more history it informs the more questions it can generate. The practitioner faces the problem of study and reflection in the context of the duties and responsibilities associated with officer leadership, of turning ideas into action. Thus, detailed study ought to lead the practitioner to intellectual humility, perhaps more so than the academic who does not retain such responsibility.

The idea that empathy is a virtue of the counterinsurgent is not uncommon. Mark Moyer highlights empathy as one of the ten critical traits of the counterinsurgent.²⁶⁴ A common definition of defines empathy as “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated.”²⁶⁵ Empathy represents the potential for vicarious learning, which is

²⁶⁴Mark Moyer, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 10.

²⁶⁵Merriam-Webster, s.v. “Empathy,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy> (accessed 21 May 2011).

critical for command leadership. Empathy, along with compassion and kindness are also described as weapons of the counterinsurgent in FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*.²⁶⁶

Empathy is also described in Army leadership doctrine, FM 6-22, as “The ability to see something from another person’s point of view, to identify with and enter into another person’s feelings and emotions.”²⁶⁷ One Army officer writing on empathy in irregular warfare advocates operationalizing empathy in the form of a normative principle, in this case the Golden Rule, as a precursor to legitimacy vis-à-vis the local population.²⁶⁸ There are several problems with the understanding of empathy as a trait or ability that FM 3-24 fails to consider, which may serve to undercut its usefulness. Equating empathy and compassion to weapons gives the impression that both are means to be applied to an end. They are not. Empathy is a trait, or a characteristic of an individual. Compassion is a controlling emotional force, one predicated on a compelling emotion to act and alleviate suffering.²⁶⁹ Furthermore, compassion is often not viewed as virtuous, particularly as it

²⁶⁶Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 7-2.

²⁶⁷Department of the Army, FM 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 4-9.

²⁶⁸John Bauer, “The Role of Empathy in Irregular Warfare,” *Military Review* (July-August 2009): 100.

²⁶⁹Merriam-Webster, s.v. “Compassion,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/compassion> (accessed 21 May 2011). Merriam-Webster defines compassion as a sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it; see also Robert Roberts, “Emotions in the Christian Tradition,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition). The claim compassion is good, or virtuous, has perhaps more to do with a particular Judeo-Christian tradition and worldview that exalts suffering, both actual and vicarious, and pity, more than perhaps a universally consistent philosophical perspective; Personal opinion of the author. In the context of the field commander, when the emotion of compassion becomes manifest in the pity and vicarious suffering of others, preceding a compulsion to ameliorate the suffering, the commander is risking the consistency of his intellect to the extremes of emotion, and thus perhaps biasing decisions to the immorality of unreason and irrational forces. His subordinates are,

has roots in pity and shared suffering. The benefit of empathy is that it serves as an aid to learning and reflection, and as such arguably increases the potential for operational thinking and art in commanders.

Empathy is useless, and in effect has no basis, without the contextual understanding that the study of history provides. Additionally, the overuse of TTPs, lessons learned, and other such methods in developing skill in warfare arguably ignore empathy. For commanders, this is especially superficial and dangerous. In essence, TTPs and lessons learned approaches to learning focus on the action, or what units did to achieve a positive outcome. However, commanders must focus on what other commanders were thinking, trying to logically integrate the impacts of the various contexts of the period had on decision making. The study of military history can help provide the contexts. Thus, if a commander can better understand what a historical commander was thinking, then we could better assess actions in context towards the purposes of reflection and aiding in making our own decisions. Empathy is thus a product

in turn, exposed to the same. Compassion is perhaps at best amoral and highly particular to the character of the commander and the ability of the commander to control and temper the influences of compassion. Compassion may be an emotional manifestation of empathy, but it is not equivalent to or a requirement of empathy. As a company commander operating in East Baghdad in 2007, appealing to simple justice and fairness when conducting combat operations was a way to develop empathy among leaders and soldiers. Internal perceptions of one's moral worth or virtue fail to consider how we were seen by the Iraqi culture that was as foreign to us, e.g. as foreign occupiers, non-Arabs, a disrupter of stability, with free reign to do as we pleased with few consequences. Understanding that Iraqis would never view us as we often viewed ourselves forces one to question our perceptions of our own virtue and righteousness. Viewing ourselves as a force for good, endowed with the compassion to ameliorate the suffering of Iraqis, would deny us introspection and a critical eye towards our own limitations that our presence and combat operations cause. This emerging empathy proved critical in more effective combat operations that in effect brought stability and enabled the defeat of local insurgent groups.

of education and not indoctrination, through the deep contextual understanding that the study of history provides. The qualitative moral assessment of leader thinking and actions is arguably only possible through empathy, and not through a process that evaluates the quality of action through its outcome. Simply put, just because a unit won an engagement does not mean that it was due to the quality of the commander. Friction and chance may have provided the means to victory more so than the thinking and decisions of the commander.

Arguing that empathy, or any other trait can be actualized through the use of normative tools such as the Golden Rule oversimplifies the difficulty in actually acquiring such traits. Something as simple as the Golden Rule, or in the case of the Army, the Army Values, the Warrior Ethos, etc., presumes that they are effective in achieving a better outcome.²⁷⁰ In the case of the Army, the outcome is morally superior leaders and soldiers. In relationship to cause and effect, there is perhaps little evidence to confirm this presumption, despite the continual efforts to select the right ethos or values.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰Challans, *Awakening Warrior*, 103, 203. Challans challenges the utility of the Golden Rule using a quote from Bertrand Russell, who states “do not do unto others as you would have them do unto you; they may have different tastes.” Challans also writes that “the Golden Rule turns out to fall short of giving guidance on at least three counts: People may have different tastes (there are many masochists out there); people should be treated differently based on age, position, education, situation (a judge would not rule in the case of a minor or incompetent based on how he wants to be treated); and the rule says nothing about how we should treat ourselves.” Thus, the Golden Rule in implementation can fail to adequately consider the things that distinguish individuals from different cultures and traditions that shape belief and thinking.

²⁷¹Matthew Moten, “The Army Officers’ Professional Ethic: Past, Present, and Future” (Monography, Strategic Studies Institute, February 2010). Moten argues that the Army officer corps needs a concise statement of its ethical values to codify the diffuse understanding that currently exists. On page 19, Moten contends that “the essence of the professional ethic needs no radical change. The ethics of a professional officer serving this constitutional democracy have evolved toward an understanding of the military’s

Simplistic tools do not serve to lend an intellectual hand to the complex, difficult, and unique situations that commanders often face in war.²⁷² Such tools may prove sufficient in describing and shaping conduct within a garrison environment, in relationship to shaping obligations to others within the organization, but may prove relatively useless in war when the obligations of the commander extend beyond an internal, organizational fixation, and extend to the people where the organization is conducting military operations.

Empathy fundamentally requires a deep desire to learn and understand, a desire that is coupled with no rigid adherence to fixed opinion or idea. Closely tied to empathy is humility. In ancient Greek thought, humility is the opposite of hubris, and is closely tied to respect, often manifested in a willingness to listen and take counsel in the opinions of others.²⁷³ Humility ought to be a product of education as well. For the military practitioner as student of the profession of arms, it means that commanders of the past

place in and duty to society, a high level of professional expertise, a sense of military service as a full-time occupation and a long-term calling, a subordination to duly elected and appointed civil authority, an ethos of positive and responsible leadership of subordinates, and a moral-ethical compass fixed on the laws of war and the Constitution.” In essence, the professional ethic of the Army officer corps is internally focused in its duties and responsibilities to the society and government it serves; Perez, “The Army Ethic and the Indigenous Other,” 1. Perez argues “the military professional, besides being a lethal warrior, serves also as a cooperative and creative political actor in the operational environment. It follows that any adequate configuration of the military ethic ought to integrate the soldier’s ethical and political obligations toward the indigenous other.”

²⁷²Challans, *Awakening Warrior*, 103.

²⁷³Christopher D. Kolenda, “What is Leadership? Some Classical Ideas,” in *Leadership: The Warrior’s Art*, ed. Christopher Kolenda (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Foundation Press, 2001), 19.

faced problems as complex as those of today, that I am not special. Hubris thus serves no purpose than to narrow perspective and limit the potential of vicarious learning.

In war, this implies that a commander, consciously or unconsciously, sees a virtue in being wrong, to the extent that being wrong leads to better ideas and actions before the crisis of military defeat destroys fixed perspectives and compels a different approach. Empathy is the result of becoming self-aware of the limitations of one's knowledge and experience, through the exposure of the one's mind, ideas, bias, and worldviews to substantive critique that forces reflection and introspection. Exposing one's deeply held ideas or beliefs to critique can force a mental and emotional reckoning with intellectual error. Once this reckoning occurs, the virtue of being wrong results in intellectual humility that opens the mind to the ideas of others, to the potential of vicarious learning.

Self-awareness enables knowing one's own ability and limitations, of seeing oneself in the broader context of the environment. Intellectual humility recognizes the limits of knowledge, experience, and understanding. Empathy enables knowing one's enemies. Thus, gaining command leadership endowed with these leadership virtues is indispensable in all war. In OIF, and perhaps all COIN fighting, where force often remains in relative economy, self-awareness, intellectual humility, and empathy are perhaps the *sine qua non* of effective command leadership. In COIN, the necessity of command leadership endowed with these particular leadership virtues may be greater, as clear distinctions between the enemy and non-combatants are far from clear as compared to other forms of warfare and experience in a more traditional or conventional war context. A commander in this environment, in order to gain contact with the enemy, to remain in cognitive and physical interaction with the enemy, requires a deep

understanding of the environment, one that can only come through daily close contact with the enemy and the population. The artificial environment of the TOC may simply serve to project a US-centric interpretation of reality, one that exists as a function of choosing to remain cognitively isolated from the environment.²⁷⁴ In choosing to remain isolated, however, the commanders is ultimately undermining the mission and serving the interests of the enemy. In conventional war, isolation precedes defeat and destruction. In COIN warfare as seen in OIF, cognitive isolation preceded operational and tactical mediocrity or failure and inhibited initiative, but not tactical defeat or physical destruction, which is perhaps why few commanders in OIF were relieved for incompetence.²⁷⁵

Despite efforts to create simple and concise statements that circumscribe a professional military ethic, there is no tool, aphorism, mnemonic, heuristic, etc., that can lead to anything other than superficial claims of the utility of such tools. However, theory is study as Clausewitz claims, and study centers on military history. There is no short cut to personal development towards a talent for war than rigorous, accountable study of

²⁷⁴BG060, Interview.

²⁷⁵Osinga, 195. Osinga writes on Boyd's thinking regarding command and control and how it affects initiative. In essence, when a commander remains cognitively isolated from the environment, he is de facto stifling initiative. The command and control system thus remains too internally focused to enable interaction with the environment and in consequence too slow and cumbersome to detect emergences, transitions, and opportunities; Arguably, empathy develops only through internal struggle, as it requires a perpetual cognitive battle against one's own biases and influences, those that have shaped and often define us, but that also may serve to inappropriately assign and characterize the actions and behavior of others, as well as assess motivation. Self-awareness and intellectual humility are perhaps just as difficult to develop, particularly so as a leader advances in age and assumes positions of higher command. Rank and authority may blend better with egotism and hubris than self-awareness and intellectual humility.

military history followed by experience, and thus there is not potential for operational art and thinking without a habit for the disciplined study of military history.

In the context of developing the potential for operational art, in developing empathy, self-awareness, and intellectual humility, attempting to actualize these virtues as tools is invariably useless. Rather than tools to be applied or used when required, these virtues are the character traits of the commander, inseparable from effective command. If empathy, self awareness, and intellectual humility are difficult character traits to acquire, and not simply instrumental means to be summoned at will or used when necessary, then it follows that they are neither tools to be wielded when needed nor amenable to attempts to indoctrinate them into being or existing into the character of a military organization through the use of internally focused institutional values.

Learning in Action: One Common Thread

While the actions and decisions commanders made in OIF to address complex problems vary widely in innovative quality, one common thread appears throughout the interviews. Personal interaction is often central to effective learning. Instead of relying on rational-analytical decision making processes informed by abstract empirical information, many commanders chose to develop intuitive understanding through constant dialogue and interaction with a variety of actors in the COIN environment. Environmental interaction serves as the contextual basis for demonstrating operational art and thinking, for adapting military systems and integrating them into the environment to achieve a more desirable set of conditions.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁶Osinga, 230-231. Osinga writes extensively on the overused and poorly understood OODA (Observation, Orientation, Decision, and Action). The most critical

The primary means that most commanders used to gain intuitive understanding, to reorient thinking in contact while in Iraq was constant battlefield presence and circulation, tied to continual dialogue with all stakeholders, including subordinate commanders and leaders, ISF and civil leaders, regular civilians on the street, and at times insurgent leaders.²⁷⁷ This placed a tremendous physical and intellectual burden on the commander, but afforded simultaneously a broad, deep, and particular perspective that can lead to keen insight and cognitive shift away from a organizational-centric frame of reference—the culture of the BUA—to one more aligned with the environmental reality.

History and Clausewitz teaches us that the feelings and effects of danger and courage in war are unavoidable. In the context of commanders at the brigade level and below in OIF, changes to thinking did not occur due to losing a tactical fight. Tactical defeat to US forces due to the violent efforts of insurgents never occurred. The enemy killed US soldiers, but did not destroy whole units. The risk to the mission born of tactical defeat appeared fleeting. Thus, the aspect of courage centers on the moral factors of accepting responsibility for both the mission and lives of soldiers, where the mission did not appear at risk but where soldiers still died, could overemphasize the importance

aspect is the orientation frame, where commanders and units must constantly reorient in contact with the environment and enemy to detect changes that emerge over time. Cognitive isolation prevents reorientation, and thus preemptively negates the ability to detect change and efficiently apply limited military resources create initiative, exploit opportunities, and mitigate mission risk.

²⁷⁷BG010, Interview; BG040, Interview; BE090, Interview; BH020, Interview; BH030, Interview; BC020, Interview; BG100, Interview.

of the limited and incidental means of the insurgents.²⁷⁸ Violence, fighting, and danger, all sources of friction in war that forces commanders to learn and adapt, or risk death and defeat, were all incidental in the lethal interaction between US forces and the enemy. Stated simply, the enemy could not impose defeat, so there was no overwhelming impetus to drastically change. Tactics, techniques, and procedures certainly changed throughout OIF, but TTP changes are marginal changes that often only deal with the immediate tactical and lethal interplay between the enemy and US forces.²⁷⁹ Orientation on tactics, however, has little to do with operational art.

The choice to place emphasis on learning through presence and dialogue indirectly indicates that some commanders were either innately endowed with the potential for operational thinking and art born of critical self-awareness, intellectual humility, and empathy, or developed the potential over time through experience, education, introspection, and reflection. Regardless of how commanders developed these traits, it represents a personal victory over an Army tradition that doctrinally emphasizes staff-intensive and process-centric rational-analytic decision-making processes, and that while emphasizing the necessity of certain traits, fails in describing how to develop them in future commanders.

²⁷⁸Clausewitz, 101.

²⁷⁹The evolution of TTPs in OIF was steady and constant, stemming from unit and enemy abilities to adapt to a thinking opponent. This included radical changes in equipment and patrol tactics in response to increasingly lethal IEDs. The improvement in offensive capabilities in US forces also benefitted from technology, but was perhaps more dependent on the improved ability of our leaders, working embedded in the population. Technology in this aspect served to complement more effective practices.

Mission Command in OIF or Simply an Environment of Autonomy?

Interviews of OIF commanders that led forces under in OIF indicate that to various extents, many commanders either possessed or developed the capacity for operational art and thinking, which proved essential to organizational learning, adapting, and innovation. Some commanders, particularly at the brigade level and below, chose to face the COIN environment of Iraq more on its own terms than simply attempting to impose their own view of the problems on subordinate commanders. Mission command, while certainly requiring an atmosphere of trust between superior and subordinate commanders, is not inherently good in its own right, nor is trust. Trust must be earned and is demonstrated through competence, which requires education and development. Thus, we can state that while mission command was demonstrated in Iraq, it only retains moral worth when the subordinate commander has earned the trust demonstrated through competence. Rather than frame the environment of Iraq as an environment of mission command, it is perhaps more worthwhile to frame it under the idea of moral autonomy.

Moral autonomy, manifested in choice, is critical to understanding why particular leadership virtues are essential traits for the commander. In OIF, commanders often faced no motivation to see things differently as a function of external factors that would compel different approaches to gaining situational understanding. Specifically, since US forces never truly faced the threat of tactical defeat at the hands of the insurgent groups, the insurgency could never truly compel a commander to change in the face of tactical crisis. Furthermore, commanders rarely, if ever, felt compelled via directive from higher echelons to adjust thinking or problem understanding. How the commander chose to gain

understanding, and thus shape the understanding of the staff, was at its most basic a function of the commander's character and ability.

Some may argue that such a choice simply represents different forms of problem solving, that—assuming the right problem is identified—it is a function of actualizing the right model or methodology, of seeking efficiencies within processes. If it were that simple, then solving problems is hypothetically a matter that involves choosing the right problem solving methodology, whether it is MDMP or something else. While elegant, this fails to consider how the experiences, culture, beliefs, biases, and worldview of the actor making the choice come to predetermine approaches. In the context of US Army commanders, the problem of choice is actually a problem of the internal struggle and self-assessment that occurs within the commander. The commander either chooses, or does not choose, to struggle with his own beliefs and understanding, challenge his assumptions and worldview, and address inconsistencies. Choosing to address inconsistency is perhaps the purest demonstration of moral courage, and much harder than simply demonstrating physical courage, which involves placing oneself in harm's way, such as in going on patrol with one's subordinates.

Many commanders at the brigade level and below did, in the course of addressing the tactical and operational problems they faced in OIF, choose to fight with their own beliefs, bias, and worldviews on a continual basis.²⁸⁰ This choice—perhaps the

²⁸⁰Personal opinion of the author. This is an inference based on the numerous interviews conducted by the team, informed through discussions of mission command in OIF, the unique approaches that many commanders took to achieve progress, often with no guidance or directives from higher headquarters. This inference speaks highly to the character traits of the commanders interviewed, as it is arguable that without the right character traits, commanders would not have chosen to methods that they did while

fundamental first step—ultimately led to many unique and innovative methods and operations particularized in time and location. This moral autonomy manifested in choice is a demonstration of moral courage and does not preclude a general categorization of leadership styles and traits that can serve to broadly describe how commanders came to lead the way they did. The latent potential of operational art and thinking was seen in action through commanders that chose to immerse their minds in the local problems they faced to address the drivers of instability. While cognizant of the strategy and intent that broadly shaped campaign objectives, good commanders constantly sought to define, redefine, and reframe problems, through incorporating the perspectives of many and diverse sources of information, including all parties in the COIN environment of Iraq, including insurgents. Commanders sought direct personal contact on a daily basis with the messiness of the COIN environment in Iraq, personal interaction and dialogue to place events and perception into context, and a continual willingness to invest time and energy towards the critiquing their intent, previous assumptions, ideas, and approaches.

Personal interaction with subordinate commanders exposed the more senior leader to the insight and ideas of leaders with more direct and concrete experience in the operating environment and fostered an environment of open and frank dialogue broadly characterized as a positive command climate. This environment of dialogue and inquisitiveness strengthens the bonds of mutual respect between senior and subordinate. The potential for operational art expanded as commanders demonstrated the power of a good command climate by expanding the dialogue.

serving in OIF, as there was no crisis or hierarchical control factor that could compel innovation.

The proper command climate preceded operational art and stemmed directly from reasonably self-aware, empathetic, and intellectually humble commanders. Command and leadership climate were arguably the most important antecedent conditions that enabled commanders and units to learn and adapt effectively in OIF, and thus effectively demonstrate the latent potential of operational art that existed in the organization. Units, in essence, truly became learning organizations, where learning went far beyond the adjustment of TTPs in the face of an adapting and lethal enemy. In gaining a good understanding of the environment in OIF, commanders often faced difficult conditions with significant moral considerations, particularly regarding the effects of military operations on the local population.

Environmental Truths in OIF: Reconciling Inconsistency in Belief and Practice

Perhaps the first hard truth is that COIN force is not simply an external actor that simply decides to do things or impose its will, albeit with good intentions, but an actor whose very presence changes the environment, for better or worse. The COIN force is not inherently moral or good because it believes it is such, and this claim exists regardless of the emotions and pride any commander feels for the forces he or she commands and suffers with.²⁸¹ Recognizing this can lead to a better understanding of the environment

²⁸¹Opinion of the author. In developing and maintaining unit cohesion, commanders are often obligated to create and sustain the unit's perception of its inherent virtue, to appeal to common emotions, patriotism, unit history and mythology. The commander must reconcile the warrior-leader persona, one that extols the virtues and moral nature of the unit's mission and operations in combat, with the larger realities as they actually exist in the environment. It is risky to perpetuate mythology that does not conform to the experiences of what units, leaders, and soldiers experience in the combat environment.

and the role that the US forces in OIF—an occupying and foreign force—actually played in an alien Iraqi society not apt to view the actions of US forces as good or beneficial. In other words, empathy is a prelude to self-critique and more effective leadership and military operations, and thus also a critical factor in operational art.

Commanders were no longer automatically convinced of the virtues of their efforts when seeing things through the eyes of Iraqis. Self-aware, intellectually humble, and empathetic commanders are perhaps more attuned to inconsistency when it arises between belief, perception, and facts. Addressing this cognitive inconsistency in a truthful way may lead to commanders taking quite radical, innovative, and risky actions to place the actions and operations of the COIN force on a path that leads towards stability, security, and progress. This also places the commander and unit in the position to sense and take advantage of emergences and transitions. Events in Anbar in 2005-2006 and in Baghdad in 2006-2007 serve to highlight local emergences within the Sunni populations and the actions several commanders took to achieve better local stability at the expense of the insurgency.

The political isolation of the Sunni population was directly attributable to the decisions made in 2003 by the Coalition Provisional Authority to disband the former Iraqi Army and institute strict measures that denied many former Ba'ath Party members both political participation and access to government resources and jobs in the new Iraq. The torture and abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib reinforced this perception. Even necessary operations, particularly the attack and reduction of the Sunni insurgent stronghold of Fallujah in late 2004 by Coalition Forces served to further entrench the perception of the Sunnis. Broadly speaking, Coalition Forces were perceived as de facto

proxies of Shia and Iranian interests, bent on destroying the Sunni population of Iraq. Various Sunni groups, ranging from Arab nationalists to Al Qaeda terrorists and foreign fighters, could easily coalesce around a common perception of injustice, fear, marginalization, and weakness to attack a common group of enemies, to include Coalition Forces and all state apparatuses of the new Government of Iraq. In essence, US forces and strategy caused the insurgency. In order to defeat the insurgency at the local level and achieve stability, commanders at the brigade level and below would have to recognize the US and CF role in creating and motivating the insurgency, not only broadly, but also in depth at a local level. Understanding affords taking advantage of opportunities, or emergences, as they arise. A simplistic understanding of the enemy that fails to consider individual or group motivations can drive poorly informed insurgent targeting and operations.

The Anbar Awakening is a well-known example of an emergence that led to a dramatic transition in the security environment. The event is often mischaracterized as an effect of the surge, or an event isolated to Al Anbar, independent of the surge and separate in context with the beginnings of the Sons of Iraq movement in Baghdad in 2007. Both arguments are demonstrably false. The Awakening movement was heavily supported by US forces from the beginning, where several USMC battalion commanders aided and supported their former Sunni insurgent adversaries in their efforts to rid Al Qaim of Al Qaeda forces.²⁸² Following the Marines, a US Army brigade combat team directly supported the Anbar Awakening that began in the summer of 2006 under Sheikh Abdul Sattar Abu Risha. The movement, considered in its entirety, was supported and

²⁸²Russell, 64-68, 110-116.

shepherded from forward thinking Marine Corps and Army brigade and battalion commanders from their inception. Arguably, without this support most if not all local movements would wither and die in their infancy.

The commanders that experienced the emergence of internecine fighting amongst erstwhile allies, between Al Qaeda and particular tribes, and between feuding tribes sensed an emergence that portended a transition, or perhaps return towards traditional stability in Al Anbar. This emergence provided visionary commanders an operational point of leverage and initiative to align the military campaign with environmental trends, to rethink operations and take new approaches to solidify advantage. Some commanders and units saw internecine fighting as good, simply because the insurgents were fighting and killing themselves.²⁸³ Arguably, at levels higher than the brigade, few if any commanders or staff members sensed what was actually happening in Anbar in late summer 2006.²⁸⁴ Indeed, the famous leaked intelligence assessment published in September 2006, claiming that Anbar is lost, conflicted clearly with the assessment of brigade and battalion commanders on the ground.²⁸⁵ Commanders that had supported the evolving Awakening movement that began in Al Qaim in 2005 can rightly claim that they

²⁸³BA010, Interview; BA020, Interview.

²⁸⁴BA020, Interview.

²⁸⁵BA010, Interview; BA020, Interview; Thomas E. Ricks, "Situation Called Dire in West Iraq," *The Washington Post*, 11 September 2006. This article quotes from several officers that concur with the analysis. Arguably, not a single officer quoted in the article has knowledge of what is actually happening on the ground, and perhaps no knowledge of the Awakening movement.

did so with little or no guidance, and sometimes without support from more senior commanders and staff.²⁸⁶

The Sons of Iraq program that began in early 2007 under a variety of different titles in Ghaziliyah and Ameriyah neighborhoods in West Baghdad had direct ties to members of the Awakening movement in Anbar, including the Abu Risha tribe.²⁸⁷ The brigade commander for Western Baghdad at the time stated the program that would later be titled the Sons of Iraq was born out of the desires of local Sunni leaders in several West Baghdad neighborhoods to counteract the effects of the campaign of exhaustion being waged on Sunnis by Shia militias, Iraqi Security Forces, and the Government of Iraq.²⁸⁸ At its most basic, the Sons of Iraq movement began as a quest for simple justice and fairness for an increasingly beleaguered Sunni minority.

Sunni neighborhoods wanted the ability to secure their own areas with forces often characterized as an armed neighborhood watch. However, US commanders were not allowed to create or arm such forces.²⁸⁹ Arming a neighborhood watch, particularly ones in Sunni neighborhoods, could be conflated as a threat to the legitimate government of Iraq and the ISF. Seen from a Sunni perspective, US forces, rather than contributing to

²⁸⁶BA010, Interview.

²⁸⁷BH020, Interview.

²⁸⁸Ibid.

²⁸⁹Personal experience of the author in 2007. Local Iraqi leaders always expressed their desire for neighborhood watches in order to give people the perception that they had the ability to secure themselves in an environment that often even lacked basic rule of law. Insurgents, criminals, gangsters, etc., appeared to control the environment more than ISF and CF. Commanders were explicitly prohibited from creating neighborhood watch programs.

security and stability, were enabling the sectarian cleansing efforts of certain Shia politicians, ISF leaders, and militias. Empathy enables the commander to see this, and it quickly becomes clear that the path toward progress in such an environment will force the commander to deal with the inconsistency of trying to support legitimate governance and security efforts while enabling its sectarian proclivities by denying a minority population the ability to secure itself.

Dealing with the operational inconsistency of supporting the ISF and GoI without at the same time enabling sectarianism forced reflective commanders to assume risk and take innovative approaches to address the problems in the security environment, problems that required operational art and thinking. The local security programs as manifested broadly in the Sons of Iraq program was one approach among other complementary efforts in West Baghdad in 2007.

Another major effort complementary to the Sons of Iraq program, initiated at the brigade level, sought to expose and ultimately defeat the most egregious component of sectarian injustice, namely the official corruption and criminality of government officials and ISF leaders that operated below the surface in Baghdad in promotion of sectarian interests. Tolerance of corruption, at least regarding Western norms and tradition, is often seen as unavoidable in Iraq, and the Middle East in general, due to culture and tradition.²⁹⁰ A commander in OIF could certainly could appease his internal moral compass regarding corruption and appeal to T. E. Lawrence's fifteenth article by arguing

²⁹⁰Bribery in particular is problem seen by many commanders and units in OIF.

that it is better to let the Iraqis do it tolerably well, than for US forces to do it perfectly.²⁹¹

But this appeal to simple aphorism fails when official corruption succors the roots of insurgency.²⁹² In the context of Baghdad in 2007, a reflective commander saw clearly that official corruption and criminality, in the form of kidnapping, extortion, murder, and resource denial are a threat not only to Sunnis, but also to the mission in general.

Operationalizing efforts to counter official corruption and criminality in Baghdad came with significant risks that extend to the highest levels of politico-military authority and partnership, as both Iraqi and US. Army units conducting COIN could not simply target, detain, and imprison corrupt officials as required, as the GoI retained veto authority on the arrest and detention of officials.

One brigade designed a particularly innovative and successful operation that directly and indirectly attacked official corruption in the GoI and ISF, titled Operation Seventh Veil. As described by the brigade commander, the purpose of the operation was to “remove all protective coverings from Iraqi governmental officials, Iraqi military

²⁹¹T. E. Lawrence, “Twenty-Seven Articles,” *The Arab Bulletin* (20 August 1917). Lawrence’s fifteenth article states, “Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is.”

²⁹²Personal experience of the author. During one cordon and search operation in the Adamiyah district of Baghdad in 2007, I witnessed an ISF unit collecting countless antique swords and knives from the home of a widow in a Sunni neighborhood under the justification that such item constituted a security risk and were thus unlawful, which is both untrue and not legally factual. The antique swords and knives belonged to the deceased husband, who until his death owned an antique weapons shop. The senior military advisor, a major at the time, justified the behavior by appealing to the authority of the Iraqi Army commander, saying that it’s their country, they can do what they want. Anecdotaly, this arbitrary confiscation of legal property by ISF leaders was a common occurrence in Baghdad.

leaders, deny them the protection afforded them by their position or their duties, and then hold them accountable for anything that they had done wrong. It was to defeat complicity inside the ranks of the Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi political leadership.”²⁹³

The brigade leveraged its organic capabilities to collect intelligence and conduct formal investigations to build dossiers on corrupt officials. The dossiers were then used as a leverage point to either force a corrupt official to confront, account for, and modify his behavior, or as a way to gain the authority, via senior US and Iraqi channels, to detain and remove bad actors.²⁹⁴ This type of leverage created opportunities and enhanced the efficiency of combat organizations to effect transition of the security environment to more favorable conditions, towards a stasis more broadly in line with strategic objectives.

Developed at the brigade level, Operation Seventh Veil quickly gained support from senior commanders, including the MNF-I commander, General Petraeus.²⁹⁵ The immediate tangible benefit to this anti-corruption effort was to restore, at least partially, the public perception on the efficacy of the rule of law. Concerning the efforts to combat the insurgency and militia gangsters, the operation exposed and cut off the official-backed ratlines that simultaneously supported sectarian violence and attacks against US forces.²⁹⁶ More than simply a desirable end, decreasing official corruption proved inseparable from pursuing COIN campaign progress, to improving local security and

²⁹³Kimberly Kagan, “Operation Seventh Veil: Malign Officials and the Rule of Law” (Case Study 1, Best Practices in Counterinsurgency, Institute for the Study of War, 1 April 2010), 1.

²⁹⁴Ibid., 2.

²⁹⁵Ibid.

²⁹⁶Ibid.

stability, and also for preserving the lives of US soldiers. Operation Seventh Veil was clearly among the most innovative operations initiated in Iraq from 2006 through 2008, and clearly demonstrated the power and necessity of operational art and thinking at the BCT level and below.

Operationalizing the Learning Organization:
Deviance and Innovation

Arguably, within the experience of US forces in OIF, events and operations such as the Anbar Awakening, the Sons of Iraq movement, and Operation Seventh Veil will always start through the initiative and leadership of officers at the brigade level and below. Brigade, battalion, and company commanders, within their scope of their responsibilities and their proximity to the COIN environment, are well placed to sense emergences and take advantage of transitions. All other factors being equal, the primary and perhaps predetermining factor on whether or not a unit will be able to sense emergences and take advantage of transitions is the quality and character of the commander, a commander endowed with a capacity for operational art and thinking often informed by leadership traits such as self-awareness, intellectual humility, and empathy.

Such traits are not sufficient, however, as they are not decisions or tools. They do not compel action or change, but may enable the commander to sense or see the necessity of change. Additionally, acting on an idea, especially one that has no clear approval or protection from higher commanders and staffs is always risky, particularly when the enemy cannot force your defeat. The maintenance of the status quo, perhaps the low risk option and a product of short-term thinking, remained very tempting in the context of OIF. Thus, a commander may understand the problems in his sector, but may ultimately

determine that addressing the problems, as they exist, entails too much risk to merit the consideration of anything other than marginal operational changes. The decision to act innovatively and perhaps radically to seize the initiative has an immediate disincentive due to the consequences of failure, whereas maintaining the status quo in the OIF operating environment often entailed little overt risk, as the status quo is already de facto sanctioned by political and military authority.

The exercise of command authority as seen in the context of OIF, in the expression of autonomy manifested in adaptive and innovative operations that have no clear hierarchical sanction or approval, is perhaps the highest expression of operational art. Simply put, when commanders endowed with operational thinking, with traits such as self-awareness, intellectual humility, and empathy, combined with the moral courage to take responsibility decided to do things differently, the learning organization could adapt, take risk, and pursue innovative approaches. Commanders could morally justify innovative and perhaps deviant approaches to operations without clear guidance, and perhaps did not seek guidance, as they knew such innovation would be killed when subjected to staff analysis and critique at the division level and higher. In essence, commanders and their subordinate units demonstrated positive ethical deviance, a deviance born of operational art and thinking and a sense of moral responsibility to improve the security environment.²⁹⁷ Whereas arbitrary deviance is the antithesis of effective military

²⁹⁷Laura Hartman, Fiona Wilson, and Denis Arnold, "Positive Ethical Deviance Inspired by Moral Imagination: The Entrepreneur as Deviant," *Journal for Business, Economics, and Ethics* 6, no. 3 (2005): 344; Christopher R. Paparone, "Design and the Prospects for Deviant Leadership," *Small Wars Journal*, 8 September 2010, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/530-paparone.pdf> (accessed 16 May

operations and hierarchical control, positive ethical deviance is perhaps ultimate expression of the potential for operational art under mission command in OIF. But good leadership in combat organizations fundamentally requires the right type of unit to pursue towards the pursuit of innovative approaches fundamentally requires organizations with a high-level of basic fighting competence. Organizations that exist to fight must learn to fight first, and demonstrate that basic competence in training.

The Fundamental Requirement for Tactical Organizations in COIN:
Basic Fighting Competence

The argument for basic fighting competence in organizations designed and preparing for war is hardly revolutionary. Concerning the preparation and training for units deploying to Iraq in support of OIF, much has been written on the training of particularly COIN tactics and for devoting training time to specialization and regionally focused requirements, at the expense of more conventional, fire and maneuver oriented training against an organized and well-equipped enemy.²⁹⁸ Some argue for a complete adjustment to standard army organizations, either pre-deployment or doctrinally towards a force better organized and suited for low-intensity warfare and COIN.²⁹⁹ The

2011). Paparone discusses creative deviance as a form of adaptive command, which can be seen, improperly, as a form of insubordination.

²⁹⁸Bruce Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq* (RAND Occasional Paper, June 2004), 9. Hoffman argues in 2004 that US conventional forces in Iraq are failing and training may not be sufficient to address the problem. In essence, the Army requires a peacetime approach to reform, in the form of doctrinal, organizational, and ethos reform.

²⁹⁹Jeremy L. Peifer, "Training and Organization for COIN Conflicts: A Historic Perspective with Contemporary Applications" (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, December 2010), 71; John A. Nagl, "Let's Win the Wars We're In," *Joint Forces Quarterly* no. 52 (1st Quarter 2009): 25.

underlying assumption is that conventional military combat organizations, trained to fight near-peer threats, are unsuited for low-intensity conflict and COIN. In fact, some claim that as COIN is the graduate level of warfare, commanders that can command in COIN can do so in high-intensity conflict.³⁰⁰ History may lend support to that argument, but it also lends support to its counterargument: military forces, and commanders, trained solely for countering insurgency and subversion may prove ill-equipped to fighting conventional adversaries.³⁰¹

This poses a huge challenge for the relatively small, but tremendously expensive professional military of the US, particularly the forces of the US Army. On the one hand, deliberately organizing, training, and equipping forces specifically for low-intensity warfare, including COIN, may make sense when considering recent experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. On the other hand, to the extent that fighting such wars are less a strategic US imperative and more a problem of mission-creep born of a lack of true strategy, such wars have proven tremendously expensive in operational costs and expose the fragility of the all-volunteer force that is perpetually at war. Thus, creating Army brigades specifically tailored to fight low-intensity war may actually make less sense strategically, as it may entail more costly and unsustainable overseas adventures with indeterminate ends. This also includes the idea of creating large corps of military advisors

³⁰⁰John A. Nagl and Paul L. Yingling, “New Rules for New Enemies,” *Armed Forces Journal International*, 144 (October 2006), <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2006/10/2088425> (accessed 15 April 2011).

³⁰¹Marston, *Phoenix from the Ashes*, 2, 247. The Indian Army in 1939 was an internal security apparatus, ill prepared to face the Imperial Japanese Army in Burma; Gian Gentile, “A Strategy of Tactics: Population-centric COIN and the Army,” *Parameters* 39 (Autumn 2009): 14.

to assist the developing of host nation security forces in conflict areas, particularly when those advisors are themselves involved in fighting, as seen in Vietnam prior to 1965. Advisory efforts can rapidly escalate to full-scale intervention, again threatening the viability of an all-volunteer army and exposing the nation to fiscal risk for little strategic gain.

Problems of grand strategy and future military reform are not the concern of brigade and battalion commanders when training forces to deploy to either Iraq or Afghanistan, or for any other war. The major limiting resource for commanders preparing forces to deploy is time, where time forces commanders to establish specific training requirements to develop and master certain military capabilities subject to the constraints of the ARFORGEN process. Virtually all commanders interviewed, ones that trained and prepared forces for OIF, even those forces deploying under SFA, established fighting competence as main priority for deployment.³⁰² Complementary capabilities and competencies, including language training, cultural awareness, and the integration of new technologies did not assume priority over fighting competence. The emphasis on establishing fighting competency for combat formations, rather than inhibit the ability of leaders and units to adapt once in theater, actually enabled adaptation. Leaders and units that believe they can fight and defeat their armed adversaries in any circumstance

³⁰²BG080, Battalion Commander, Interview by Mark Battjes and Tom Walton, Fort Stewart, GA, 16 March 2011; BG020, Brigade Commander, Interview by Mark Battjes and Tom Walton, 14 March 2011; BA040, Interview; BE060, Interview; BC020, Interview; BB020, Battalion Commander, Interview by Mark Battjes and Nathan Springer, Fort Bliss, TX, 2 March 2011; BG060, Interview; BG040, Interview; BH020, Interview; BA090, Brigade Commander, Interview by Ben Boardman and Mark Battjes, Fort Riley, KY, 24 February 2011; BD010, Interview.

develop the confidence and ability to deal with the emotion of fear that is born of uncertainty.

In the context of COIN in OIF, and perhaps other forms of low-intensity warfare, the necessity of developing fighting competence and training for complementary capabilities weighs most heavily on companies and platoons. Fighting and lethal engagement at the company and platoon level are far more likely than at higher echelons, and thus company commanders and platoon leaders must be able to effectively maneuver forces and integrate fires, and demonstrate that competence in training. The requirement of the brigade and battalion headquarters, rather than maneuvering forces, is to de-conflict airspace, clear ground for direct and indirect fires, and provide additional resources. Large scale brigade and battalion controlled offensive operations are the exception, not the norm.³⁰³

Fighting is the first competency of any military organization in any form of warfare, and developing the fighting capability of the subordinate combat organization most likely to engage in the fighting through realistic training must remain the first

³⁰³Arguably, had a commander chose to sacrifice tactical fighting competence to gain an advantage in complementary capabilities in OIF, he would do so at the expense of companies and platoons prior to a mission rehearsal exercise at a CTC. A commander could do this through mandating specialized individual and small unit training that disrupts organizational cohesion and leadership, especially when units are beginning to reestablish combined arms maneuver competence in the form of live-fire activities, situational training exercises, and combat systems gunnery at the company and platoon level. The former brigade and battalion commanders interviewed clearly understood the risks of failing to develop tactical competence at the company and platoon level. None lamented the loss of battalion and brigade sized combined arms maneuver competence against a near-peer enemy during their unit train-ups for OIF, although some stated that the Army must reestablish that capability at some future point. Although Army CTCs, during mission rehearsal exercises, did inject scenarios in the form of out of sector (OOS) missions that required brigade and battalion level planning, command, and control of multi-company or battalion-sized offensive operations.

priority of commanders. The charge that the Army's conventional war fixation prior to OIF led to its failures in Iraq after the invasion may retain merit when discarding the effects of strategic error, but it may be more of an indictment of command leadership and vision, on officer development and education that failed to develop the capacity for operational art in small units, versus simply an overarching organizational indictment. Indeed, as long as units attained basic fighting competence, the effectiveness of units in OIF was perhaps far more dependent on the quality and ability of command leadership with respect to operational art. Thus a broad organizational charge, one that claims the only way to fix the Army to prepare for low-intensity conflict is to effect radical and permanent changes in tactical organization, training, and doctrine, is misguided.³⁰⁴

Competent, disciplined, and cohesive fighting organizations are the offspring of realistic training and serve to temper the effects of the inherent terror and fear that almost every soldier faces in some form in combat.³⁰⁵ While the character of the war in Iraq was different than that of WWII or Vietnam, the emotions experienced by individual soldiers were certainly similar. The needs of self-preservation are met when soldiers have confidence in the ability of their leadership and their unit's ability to fight through any problem. Failing to invest properly in the development of fighting skills in combat units

³⁰⁴Army platoons and companies, organized for fighting conventionally, proved adept at fighting in a variety of conditions from the beginning of OIF. As a function of command leadership and a latent potential for operational art, many units proved very capable learning, adapting, and innovating in OIF, more so as command leadership arguably improved through education and experience over multiple deployments.

³⁰⁵Van Creveld, 122-124. Ardent du Picq's influential *Battle Studies* is perhaps the most well known of a theme of military scholarship seeking to understand why soldiers fight, when individually most men are cowards, and to understand and harness the moral forces that create cohesion that enable an Army to fight.

risk undermining cohesion and trust, where self-preservation instincts can feed off of fear and mere survival becomes the main objective. Moreover, it is arguable that forces fundamentally good at fighting, with leaders good at applying and controlling force, are actually far less apt to use indiscriminate and excessive violence than those forces that lack good, basic fighting competence, even when violence is less typical and more incidental in combat as perhaps seen in OIF.³⁰⁶ In Iraq, soldier fear was arguably less of a threat to unit effectiveness than it was to the random civilian driving anywhere in the vicinity of a US convoy poorly led and manned by scared soldiers with overactive trigger fingers.³⁰⁷

Additionally, the decentralized nature of combat operations and relative economy of forces in OIF, in some areas far more than others, mandated internal self-sufficiency in organizational tactical ability, to include casualty treatment and evacuation. Any commander, when faced with limited time and resources to prepare unit for combat—including low-intensity warfare as often seen in OIF—that sacrifices training time devoted to developing fighting competence to the development of complementary capabilities of secondary importance, demonstrates suspect judgment. Such a decision not only risks the lives of soldiers, but also the mission in general.

³⁰⁶Personal experience of the author. In both OIF II and OIF 06-08, on several occasions, soldiers in CLPs often lacked tactical acumen in identifying threats, and thus used force as a response to uncertainty. Leaders on CLPs, most often logistics officers, are not trained to control force and assess threat. Training scenarios for logistics patrols center on the convoy live-fire, which involves using maximum force against a threat and then driving away. Multiple incidents occurred on MSR Tampa in OIF II, where brigade units even found cars with dead people still in them after they had been shot by a CLP. The brigade commander's vehicle was shot on MSR Tampa at night, even after giving recognition signals.

³⁰⁷BA020, Interview.

The comments and insights of commanders, ones that experienced significant success in OIF through highly innovative and unique approaches to fighting and problem solving, suggest that Army tactical doctrine for combined arms warfare was a good tool for building the critical baseline of tactical competence necessary for units preparing to deploy to Iraq. Adaptation and innovation in combat resulted as a product of the command climate and the commander's ability, on the potential for operational art and thinking within the organization. This potential, however, fundamentally relies on units that can fight first.

The richness of experience that ought to inform the historical record of OIF, particularly in detailed accounts in primary sources is perhaps the largest gap not only in this essay, but also in other histories written concerning the conduct of military operations in OIF. The cited interviews, however, do provide the outline of what commanders ought to be when considering leadership traits and how learning organizations think and act in the COIN environment as seen in OIF, and perhaps in war in general. The scope of this essay denies a scientific approach to a general and simple theory of how the US Army learned and adapted in OIF and how operational art and thinking became manifest; that is, beyond the Clausewitz claim that theory is study. To that end, detailed military history is essential, as its study throughout a career can negate the negative influences of tradition and culture on learning and adapting. We must first, however, revisit the history and narratives of OIF as they exist.

CHAPTER 6

THE PROFESSION OF ARMS, MILITARY HISTORY, AND THE POTENTIAL FOR OPERATIONAL ART AND THINKING

The military history of OIF and its ramifications for the US Army will coalesce over the next several decades. A history that centers on big narratives and claims, on external factors imposing change on the conduct of the war will prove useless to a profession attempting to understand and learn from the past. The rest of what's left, mainly books on TTPs and lessons learned will teach us nothing beyond aspects of particular tactics—field craft—which are all relatively useless as sources of learning when taken out of context. This scenario anticipates a future debate concerning the profession of arms and its critical relationship to military history, which ultimately centers on two factors. First, military history is essential to the development of future officers and commanders. Second, the military is also responsible for the shaping of military history. In this vein, the military must first seek to preserve contextual experience in the form of documents, oral and unit histories and other primary sources, as well as enable timely declassification of documents.

The exponential growth of data storage capability, unit and equipment turnover, and over classification of electronic products have all conspired to undermine the ability of the Army to preserve its own experience beyond what stored in the minds that served in OIF. Massive data storage means that organizing thinking and files and removing old or irrelevant material is not that important. Electronic folders filled with data are better than floors and shelves piled with documents. Policing this digital realm is often beyond the means of the so-called knowledge managers, the gate keepers of database storage and

organizing of information. Classified electronic documents and media had to remain in theater, so even if the gate keepers could keep information organized, there were still significant hurdles to getting it home. In any case, the necessity of declassifying gigabytes of data through formal procedures makes any formal effort to preserve experience even more difficult. Furthermore, the unit rotation model ensured that collected experience and its interested human agents were soon separated from the unit that captured it. Additionally, the lack of a consistent and continual effort to collect the experiences of commanders and primary staff officers in the form of oral histories that ask the right questions further compound the problem of primary source collection. The management aspects of the war as well as the failure to interview officers in a systematic way during or immediately following deployment appear to have dealt history a potentially fatal blow from the beginning.

This paper and the interviews that supplied much of the information serve to underscore the organizational failure that continues to emerge concerning the collective histories of the war not only in Iraq but also in Afghanistan. It also serves, however, to refute some dominant narratives highlighted in the introduction concerning the conduct of the US Army in Iraq. The rejection narrative, or the narrative that claims the US Army rejected COIN in the 1970s, provides no causative basis for making claims about the Army's conduct in OIF, and is refuted by the contexts of the period. The doctrine as strategy—and thus the doctrine that won the war idea—is also refuted easily by the interviewed cited in this paper. The final narrative, that doctrine is determinant in recent Army history requires more detail to refute, but is refuted in the end.

On the Utility of Doctrine

Assigning value to doctrinal literature is difficult, as determining the efficacy of the product is subject to so many influencing contexts that any conclusion may prove easily refutable. Nevertheless, the US Army and most western armies are certainly wedded to doctrinal literature. However, the utility of doctrine should neither be considered in a holistic sense, in a take it or leave it approach, nor as a qualitative factor in a point for historical discourse concerning the Army in OIF. Field manuals in the context of current Army tactical organizations, particularly at the company and platoon level, have proven their usefulness. Arguably, achieving mastery of tactical doctrine towards the integration of combined arms through training is fairly straightforward given the time and resources, even when considering the turbulence of ARFORGEN. Furthermore, tactical doctrine lends itself to rapid adjustment when the environment and circumstances change, as it easy to assess efficacy when it fails to work; it is susceptible to immediate feedback and with the right leadership and baseline of training has built-in adaptability. The main body of operational doctrine, including FM 3-24, must serve a different purpose than tactical doctrine, and is of a different character altogether.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸Whereas tactical field manuals along with the right leadership leads to adaptability in combat, operational manuals can prove intellectually rigid when those that use the doctrine have no way of evaluating its efficacy through both education and experience. Stated simply, failing to see the different nature and purpose of tactical and operational doctrine may lead an officer to conclude that operational manuals, such as seen in FM 3-24, is as authoritative as tactical doctrine. However, tactical doctrine enables adaptability in action. There is no correlation with operational doctrine. Adaptability in thinking is the product of education and experience. Operational doctrine as seen in the past, such as the various iterations of FM 100-5, must be evaluated on their own, factoring in the operational concepts and contexts of the time when attempting to articulate their efficacy and usefulness. Concerning empirical methods of analysis, operational doctrine is extremely difficult to formally evaluate. Feedback mechanisms attempting to inform determinations of doctrinal efficacy are fundamentally indirect,

Thus, to avoid claiming an authority that never truly exists, COIN doctrine—rather than being authoritative and prescriptive—should be considered informative and descriptive. It is a book of ideas, and not a cookbook, and thus avoids the polarization of opinion regarding its supposed effects on the force. Arguments on doctrinal authority in the case of FM 3-24 and OIF become moot, and ultimately distract from about how units became learning organization under leaders with a capacity for operational art. If the value of FM 3-24 is dissociated from any clear notion of intellectual and moral authority, and instead is grounded in evolving ideas that serve to inform rather than direct or control, then perhaps it can better serve in the intellectual development of leaders and commanders that continually face problems in war that defy any particular approach.

COIN Doctrine and its Place

Approximating the value of FM 3-24 for commanders that led forces in combat in Iraq is difficult. Interviews indicated that a clear understanding and knowledge of FM 3-24 varied significantly. Most commanders had read the manual, but opinions on its utility and sufficiency varied widely. Some commanders clearly saw value in FM 3-24, appealing to certain principles and the value of developing a long approach to problem

abstract, and often untimely. This assessment of doctrine efficacy must also navigate the concealed institutional and organizational bias of leadership that have an interest in promoting their ideas either in doctrine or concerning doctrine. Perhaps objectively evaluating operational doctrinal efficacy is truly impossible, particularly when institutional consensus instead of enemy actions will often serve to assess the efficacy and quality of doctrine. Instead of fixating on the debate on the efficacy of FM 3-24, on its deficiencies and impact, officers should simply acknowledge that it will change as new thinking coalesces, and that it may ultimately prove impossible to evaluate its efficacy and unnecessary to assess its deterministic effects.

solving in the form of campaigning.³⁰⁹ Others saw contradictions in doctrine that conflicted with significant operational experience.³¹⁰ One commander clearly viewed FM 3-24 as only a set of ideas that must be disassociated from other doctrine approaches and MDMP.³¹¹ Another commander remarked on the tendency of doctrine to establish a mindset, one that allows common men to appear uncommon.³¹² One commander credited FM 3-24 in shifting paradigms and mindsets, but also remarked that doctrine too often fails to reconcile inconsistencies; it is simply rewritten, which can lead to confusion because it is supposed to be a foundational education document.³¹³ Another former brigade commander remarks that he was told during his operational out brief at the COIN Center For Excellence in Taji, Iraq, not to worry about FM 3-24, as his organization was already learning and adapting.³¹⁴ Commenting indirectly on his peers, one commander claimed that the perception of doctrine as an instruction manual exists, including FM 3-24.³¹⁵ Concerning operational planning, in the form of campaign development and

³⁰⁹BG100, Interview; BA040, Interview.

³¹⁰BG010, Interview; BG040, Interview.

³¹¹BC020, Interview.

³¹²BG040, Interview.

³¹³BG060, Interview.

³¹⁴BA010, Interview.

³¹⁵BA020, Interview; Highlighting several inconsistencies that challenge FM 3-24 as authoritative operational doctrine serves to inform on the cognitive difficulties facing commanders in OIF. Regarding the definition of insurgency and the role of intervention forces, one US commander emphasized doctrinal inconsistencies manifested in the experiences of US forces fighting in Iraq. Problems facing commanders in Iraq often did not mesh with the doctrinal approaches as defined in FM 3-24, where US forces, instead of always trying to support the legitimate government of Iraq and ISF, were actually

execution, some commanders viewed that traditional staff functions and processes defined doctrinally did not serve to aid the commander in addressing the operational problems as seen in OIF.³¹⁶ That this concern was manifested at the brigade and battalion levels, where the feedback on the efficacy of the campaign is more closely tied to realities of the environment, it is arguable that at higher echelons this problem was even greater.³¹⁷

Concerning the development of small unit organizational effectiveness and tactical competence prior to deployment, there is perhaps broader consensus, particularly when concerning tactics, especially TTPs, but not at the expense of developing fighting

fighting elements of the government and ISF and supporting former adversaries. See BH020, Interview; BB030, Interview; Unity of effort, a traditional principle of war and an imperative in FM 3-24, may have never been achieved, and was reflected by the comments of a US Army advisor to the Iraqi Ground Forces Command.³¹⁵ Terms like partnership and reconciliation, promoted at all levels in 2007, were used to guide the efforts of tactical forces, but it is unclear whether or not this was achieved at echelons above the division level. The decentralized execution of the campaign combined with the perception of many commanders, in general, of feeling unconstrained as to the approaches they took, challenges notions of control that unity of effort assumes. BC010, Interview. US units and Iraqi senior leadership did not have a unified vision of the threat environment or the enemy, nor were the Iraqis concerned with COIN. Partnership was never truly achieved between IGFC and MNC-I.

³¹⁶BC020, Interview; BB030, Interview.

³¹⁷Adjusting and adapting to the realities of the environment was mostly a deliberate choice of the commander at the brigade level and below, and doctrine was never cited as the motivating sources of this choice. See BE080, Battalion Commander, Interview by Aaron Kaufman and Rob Green, Fort Irwin, CA, 7 March 2011; see also BD010, Interview. This commander attributed his adaptability in combat not to doctrine, but to a generational gap in thinking born of an inability to effectively box in the enemy into doctrinal templates that began in the 1990s, where snippets of ostensibly objective empirical evidence serve to broadly categorize the enemy capabilities and intentions; see also BH030, Interview. This commander remarked that proficiency in COIN is a function of commanders assessing unit and leader capabilities and giving them missions within their capabilities.

competence first.³¹⁸ As far as an educational tool for preparing leaders and soldiers for COIN, one commander remarked that FM 3-24 was only one of many books, historical case studies, and theories used in a comprehensive leader development program prior to deployment.³¹⁹

Many of the commanders interviewed provide a much broader, descriptive, and intuitive lens into the military history of OIF that defies an historical analysis or narrative that seeks to place FM 3-24, or any other theory, as the source of reform and adaptation that led to operational success. At best, FM 3-24 served to inform, at worst, it was ignored or disregarded. The true military history of OIF thus defies a doctrine-centric perspective, to the benefit of future commanders and military leaders. Learning the history of OIF requires both broad historical context and a highly particular understanding of command leadership, thinking, and decisions across multiple deployments. When studied and learned properly, the descriptive military history of OIF will serve as a far better tool in developing the thinking and decision making of future commanders than any doctrinal manual or scientific theory can provide.

Overcoming Tradition and Culture Through Education

In the context of OIF, US Army commanders had to overcome an organizational bias towards the science of war, to the prescriptive versus descriptive aspects of military theory, that both heavily influences Western military thought and US military tradition and professional military education. This bias has deep roots, and perhaps extends as far

³¹⁸BE060, Interview.

³¹⁹BE090, Interview.

back in Western medieval warfare, when aristocrats and commanders had broad access to the Frontinus and Vegetius, and their thoughts on particular tactics, organization, and equipment, but lacked the continuity in thought, worldview, and insight into that could serve to provide context to the means and methods described by both Roman military theorists.³²⁰ The bias towards theory extends from the French Enlightenment, where philosophers believed that as humans are part of the physical world, and the physical world is rational and subject to the laws of Newtonian physics, so too are humans subject rational laws.³²¹ War as a human event is thus an engineering problem, subject to rational laws and principles, and science would reveal the secret laws of war. Army doctrine, particularly planning doctrine, can give this impression, and its emphasis in PME can imprint the idea that war is a problem requiring a scientific approach in order to run staffs, and fight brigades and divisions. Thus the weight of instruction in PME must revolve around gaining proficiency and efficiency in processes.

³²⁰Van Creveld, 45-58.

³²¹Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenments* (New York: Random House, 2004), 151-152. In the view of the philosophers of the French enlightenment, include Diderot, Voltaire, and others, viewed that a broad collection of knowledge of human relations and affairs would reveal, through the use of reason and a scientific approach, the rational laws that govern society. Thus, rational and just government is simply a problem of finding the right scientific theory to engineer the best social outcome to the benefit of all peoples; Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2. Gat argues that many scholars have failed to understand the cultural roots of military theory bound upon the French Enlightenment, with its emphasis on using the natural science as a model to be applied to a Theory of War. De Jomini and his book *The Art of War* is a product of this thinking. Clausewitz as the offspring of the German Enlightenment, or rejectionist movement, argued that studying human society, interaction, and war in this way is wrong, thus there can be no theory. Clausewitz is arguably much harder to understand than de Jomini, but because of this is inherently more valuable.

War can serve to overcome the shortcomings of PME where experiential learning combined with good learning habits leads to adaptation and change.³²² Shortcomings in PME, however, can prove detrimental the conduct of war and impose risk from the outset of conflict. Retired Marine Corps General Paul K. Van Riper attributes failures in US military PME that overemphasized the science of war out of context, focusing on systems analysis and management, at the expense of military history, art and theory, as a factor contributing in the Vietnam debacle.³²³ Following Vietnam, visionary leaders such as Admiral Stansfield Turner reinstated the study of history, military art and theory as the centerpiece of education in the curriculum at the Naval War College. Van Riper argues that the PME trends in the decade following the First Gulf War returned to the follies of the past, where predictions that technology and systems management tools could change the nature of war. He states:

The promise of information technology and the rewards that it seemingly offers in terms of automated command and control, surveillance and reconnaissance, and precision-guided munitions holds a place in the minds of many defense leaders similar to the technological advantage allegedly provided by systems analysis, nuclear weapons, and computers in the 1950s and 1960s. Methodical planning techniques like those currently promised by advocates of “effects-based operations” and “operational net assessment” stand in for Robert McNamara’s systems engineering of military decision making. Having been a victim—along with an entire generation of American military officers—of such shallow thinking, I find myself habitually warning those who will listen of the potential for repeating the tragic mistakes of the 1950s and 1960s.³²⁴

³²²Paul K. Van Riper, “The Relevance of History to the Military Profession: An American Marine’s View,” in *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession*, eds. Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36.

³²³*Ibid.*, 41.

³²⁴*Ibid.*, 53-54.

There is no substitute for the study of military history, and academic historians are an integral part of this effort. Thus, Van Riper also offers words of caution regarding moral ascendancy that can arise when a military officer with command experience assumes that the academic historian has nothing to offer the seasoned officer.

I learned an important lesson reading Keegan's book: not to downplay the ability of those without active military service or actual combat experience to write meaningfully about battle. I nearly went no further than the first sentence in *The Face of Battle*, in which Keegan states, "I have not been in a battle; not near one, nor heard one from afar, nor seen the aftermath." I again thought of closing the book two pages later when the author revealed he had never served in uniform. Luckily, I chose to ignore my prejudices and pressed on. As a result, I learned much from this now-famous military historian, not the least being that it is possible to become schooled in the profession through vicarious means, and in some cases, even more so than those who spend an unreflective lifetime in military attire.³²⁵

The last sentence in Van Riper's comment appeals to the insufficiency of a closed system of professional learning for the military officer, even when adding on the additional benefit that experiential learning confers. The learning and education of military officers, particularly future commanders, cannot solely consist of institutional professional military education, or on experiential learning alone. The requirements for professional knowledge in military affairs place a demand on literacy and familiarity with military history, and are not solely met through expertise in doctrine and experience.

The Army's efforts in institutional education face several organizational and cultural problems that lead to officers to devalue PME as an important developmental step in one's career beyond simply checking the block towards promotion. Officers are technically evaluated during PME in the form of an academic evaluation report, or AER, but the evaluation does not serve any function beyond codifying that an officer has met

³²⁵Ibid., 42.

the baseline requirements to pass the course; it does not inform on the officer's suitability for command or promotion. Selection boards do not consider the AER when assessing an officer's suitability for promotion or command. Demonstrating academic performance and potential, and ostensibly intellectual capability vis-à-vis one's peers are not considered.³²⁶

Culturally, the Army does not reward academically rigorous and difficult intellectual pursuits that graduate education can provide. Officers may risk their career future when choosing to spend one or two years at graduate school at the expense of time in the operational force.³²⁷ Experiential learning born of deployed experience and time in the operational force provides the credentials that confer suitability for promotion and command. As General David Barno testified in 2009:

One of the pernicious dangers of the current system, particularly in the Army, is that there is increasing potential for the most intellectually gifted officers, beginning at the rank of captain, to be weaned away from the operational, or command-track, career path in order to become specialists who will neither command nor in most cases ascend to senior rank. If this trend takes hold, many of our future commanders may become among the least broadly educated and the least intellectual members of the force—hardly a recipe for sustained military success. In some ways, this outlook harkens back to the rightfully maligned British interwar system wherein the 'regimental officer was seen to be most highly esteemed by his peers—in part, because of his utter lack of outside education and experience beyond the regiment.³²⁸

³²⁶United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Armed Services, *Charting the Course for Professional Military Education: Hearing before the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee*, 111th Cong., 1st sess., 10 September 2009, 88.

³²⁷*Ibid.*, 23.

³²⁸*Ibid.*

Concerning the benefits of the military officer in attending civilian graduate school, Barno claims that civilian graduate school is better at improving thinking than Army education.³²⁹ He also states that future “strategists (either full-time specialists or future generals) absolutely need civilian graduate education to fully hone their skills and expand their thinking to the broadest dimensions of strategy in a non-military, intellectually diverse academic environment.”³³⁰ Barno’s claims give weight to the argument the Army bureaucracy is failing to incentivize academic achievement, which in turn results in officers unprepared for positions requiring strategic thought and insight.

Arguably, fixing education and incentivizing academic achievement within PME is not sufficient on its own to address the problem. Van Riper notes that the study of military history requires life-long inquisitiveness and careful reflection, manifested through careful personal study outside of PME and a promotion of reading and learning within the operational force. The development of habits of thinking and study are crucial in order benefit from education. An iterative approach to learning, where an officer studies military history only within the confines of institutional education, is not sufficient to creating officer that are prepared to lead at levels beyond the tactical and think strategically.³³¹

³²⁹Ibid., 6. Barno is specifically referring to resident graduate programs at quality institutions.

³³⁰Ibid., 88

³³¹Ibid., 89. See Murray’s testimony; See also, Sinnreich, “Awkward Partners: Military History and American Military Education,” 55-77. Sinnreich devotes significant effort to describing how military history must form a central part of officer education, and must start well before an officer receives a commission.

In this vein, fixing the curriculum at the Army service schools is only part of the answer. Hypothetically, if the strategic thinking of senior leaders is deficient, then the fixing of instruction and curriculum at Army services schools would place the emphasis on addressing shortcomings at the Army War College first, and then perhaps at the Command and General Staff College. However, as one former Army officer and service school instructor notes:

The vast majority of people who struggle hard and long enough to earn their doctorate have developed habits of mind that enable them to grow intellectually. I find cadets in their undergraduate years to be good learners. And majors in their mid-thirties as well. But colonels are typically not good when it comes to learning. Their curiosity is replaced with certainties they have acquired through their experience. In general reflection challenges us to change, and it is harder to change the older and more entrenched we become.³³²

Thus, fixing education, particularly the last official PME experience at the end of an officer's career will neither lead to better strategists and flag officer leadership nor address the bureaucratic and cultural problems that support anti-intellectualism in the Army. For the military professional, particularly those that will attain high rank and authority, the study of military history over a lifetime, combined with advanced education in civilian colleges and universities, can force a mental reckoning. This reckoning is necessary in the process that ultimately helps develop the critical traits necessary for operational art and thinking in the complex operating environments that war offers. Stated simply, it may prove impossible to develop the potential for operational thinking and art in a military educational environment that emphasizes a detached, insular, and heavily scientific approach to warfare and military thought where one's ideas are only ever exposed to those with he or she associates with the most.

³³²Challans, *Awakening Warrior*, 180-181.

Education as the Means to Fix Military Culture

As General Paul K. Van Riper noted, vicarious learning is often superior to experiential learning in improving the thinking and decision making of military professionals when done in the right environment. Experiential learning can serve to enhance intellectual development, but it can also serve to fix opinions and generate false consensus and groupthink when confined to the narrowness of a military-centric environment. Outside of evaluating officers for academic performance, perhaps only the way to force a cultural change in the Army towards seeing the value in the advanced study in military history is to subject their experiences and contextual thinking to broad critique from points of view that exist both inside and outside of military organizations and the classrooms of PME. Arguably, military professionals and commanders become better thinkers when they are forced to account for ideas and beliefs in front of peers and outsiders in an academically rigorous environment. The resulting intellectual humility and good learning habits thus serve to shape leadership style and persona, and perhaps destroy any trappings of hubris born of narrow operational experience and entrenched provincial thinking.

The Army, however, cannot afford to send all officers to civilian graduate programs for advanced education. Nor can the Army simply mandate that all officers gain job experience in broadening assignments. Officers that can expect to command tactical and operational forces in battle, that are specifically responsible for maneuvering forces, executing campaigns, and engaging the enemy in a variety of operational environments ought to be considered separately for advanced education in the humanities, emphasizing military history, social science, and philosophy. Based on recent operational experience

in Iraq and Afghanistan, in the context of the Army, this includes primarily the branches of infantry, armor, special forces, and artillery; and to a lesser extent engineer, aviation, military intelligence, and civil affairs. The technical, functional, and systems expertise of particular branches and career fields mandates another career and education path. While this idea may smack of elitism, there are clearly different command responsibilities between those officers in command of tactical and operational forces in oriented on fighting and those that command support forces or lead specific, non-maneuver staff functions.

While educational opportunities and requirements for officers may differ depending on ability and branch, this does not portend a radical shift in the way the Army organizes and trains for war. Organizational learning and adaptability, rather than being an outcome of top-down, often peacetime, source of reform such as doctrine, is more often of function of command leadership.³³³ Good leadership breeds adaptability, learning, and innovation. However, the means to gain better leadership in the long run, to achieve the goals the mission command, will require that the Army places the rigorous study of military history in the center of officer education and also fix the way in which it treats its own history, both in collection and in composition. Strengthening the role of military history in the development of future commander will lead to the expansion of the potential in operational art and thinking.

³³³Russell, 205. Russell does not talk about organizational adaptability and learning as a product of command leadership and climate. He defines innovation as the development of new organizational capacities on the field of battle that did not exist when the unit arrived. In essence, he argues that innovation is the product of a dialectical process influenced through experience.

Conclusion: The Imperative of Operational Art and Thinking

The war in Iraq demonstrated the necessity for operational art and thinking in Army brigades, battalions, and companies, or in essence units that operated on a daily basis not on particular, concrete tasks, but units that operated under mostly abstract, long-term tasks as communicated through intent and mission orders. The improvements in the security environment from 2003 through 2009 were often products of innovation, learning, and adapting stemming from a latent potential for operational art that existed in unit commanders. Viewing changes in the security environment as a product of doctrine, namely FM 3-24, is both wrong and overly determines its effects and consequences.

This approach to understanding the effects of operational art in OIF ultimately centers the debate in the cognitive realm, or how commanders reflected and thought about fighting in Iraq, and not simply on iterative, tactical actions taken to combat the insurgency. Tactical actions were critically important, but more so as an aid to cognitive interaction with the environment, towards decreasing the limitations of abstract experience, of fighting from the TOC. In that sense, tactical actions to position forces, such as the distribution of companies and battalions to outposts serve to aid direct experience, to enable continuous physical and mental interaction with the environment and the enemy. In essence, the relative positioning of forces in combat to gain advantage, commonly understood as maneuver in warfare, was a prerequisite to the ability of units and commanders to sense emergences, transitions, and take opportunities and calculated risks. In this case, the distributed positioning of forces—rather than securing the population—enabled cognitive maneuver, as it increased interaction with the environment, enabling units to conduct more effective security operations.

Additionally, positioning of forces enabled commanders that retained a potential for operational art the ability to reorient the focus of military operations at a more rapid pace, which in turn generated opportunities. As the local narrative of the problems evolved, shaped by the dialogue between tactical commanders and various other parties, commanders rapidly learned and adapted to the conditions, often taking radical and innovative actions to affect positive change. In sum, physical positioning enabled interaction, which is critical to enabling cognitive maneuver that relies on sensing and contextual sense-making of emergences, which in turn enabled the expression of the latent potential for operational art and thinking that existed in good commanders and units.

In the end, the understanding OIF through the lens of operational art is perhaps the only way for the Army and future officers to truly benefit consequentially from the experience in a way that shapes the professional development of future leaders and commanders. Future operating environments for Army forces will also arguably rely on small units operating under mission orders, necessitating operational art, unless the Army no longer expects to fight in expeditionary wars with a small professional Army. Detailed personal accounts, oral histories, and debriefs from OIF could provide the basis for a deep and descriptive approach to military history that could serve as a basis for study and reflection, building the next generation of operational artists, thinkers, and commanders.

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