“The Graduate Level of War”

Continuity and change in U.S. counter-insurgency strategy

Don Neill
DRDC CORA

DRDC CORA TM 2008-041
August 2008

Defence R&D Canada
Centre for Operational Research & Analysis

National Defence / Défense nationale

Canada

"The graduate level of war"

Continuity and change in U.S. counter-insurgency strategy

D.A. Neill
DRDC CORA

The reported results, their interpretation, and any opinions expressed herein, remain those of the author and do not represent, or otherwise reflect, any official position of DND or the government of Canada.

Defence R&D Canada – CORA

Technical Memorandum
DRDC CORA TM 2008-041
August 2008

Principal Author

Original signed by D.A. Neill, PhD

D.A. Neill, PhD

DRDC CORA Defence Scientist

Approved by

Original signed by Stéphane Lefebvre

Stéphane Lefebvre

DRDC CORA Section Head Strategic Analysis

Approved for release by

Original Signed by D. Reding

D.F. Reding

DRDC CORA Chief Scientist

Partner Group 0, Strategic and Future Security Environment Thrust

Defence R&D Canada – Centre for Operational Research and Analysis (CORA)

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2008

© Sa Majesté la Reine (en droit du Canada), telle que représentée par le ministre de la Défense nationale, 2008

Abstract

In December 2006, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) issued FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 *Counterinsurgency*. This new doctrine manual was billed as a significant departure from the U.S. military's previous approach to counterinsurgency (COIN) warfare, elements of which dated back to the immediate post-Vietnam period. This document has since been cited as the foundation upon which General David Petraeus built the "surge" strategy that has been credited with forestalling civil war and stabilizing the security situation in Iraq. This Technical Memorandum examines that claim by comparing the new manual to the publications that it superseded (FMI 3-07.22 *Counterinsurgency Operations*, issued by the U.S. Army in October 2004; and MCWP 3-33.5 *Counterinsurgency Operations*, issued by the U.S. Marine Corps in January 1980) with a view to identifying how the U.S. military's understanding of, and strategic approach to, COIN warfare was transformed by the new manual. It concludes that while most of the key strategic elements that enabled the COIN campaign in Iraq to succeed are drawn from earlier doctrine and historical experience, three factors—catering to the greater manpower requirements of COIN versus conventional operations, the importance of identifying and exploiting internal division in the insurgency, and the need to secure the population as the primary goal of a COIN force—were relatively recent innovations, and played a crucial role in the success of the surge strategy between June and December of 2007.

Résumé

En décembre 2006, le département de la Défense des États-Unis a publié le document FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 intitulé *Counterinsurgency*. Selon certains, ce nouveau manuel de doctrine s'écarte sensiblement de l'approche antérieure de la guerre anti-insurrectionnelle de l'armée américaine, dont certains éléments remontaient à la période qui a suivi immédiatement la guerre du Vietnam. Ce document aurait servi de fondement à la stratégie « d'intensification » du Général David Petraeus, qui aurait permis d'éviter la guerre civile et de stabiliser la situation en Iraq. L'auteur de ce document technique examine cette affirmation en comparant le nouveau manuel aux publications qu'il a remplacées (FMI 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, publié par l'US Army en octobre 2004 et MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, publié par l'US Marine Corps en janvier 1980) et tente de voir comment le nouveau manuel a transformé la façon dont les militaires américains envisagent la guerre anti-insurrectionnelle et l'abordent du point de vue stratégique. L'auteur en vient à la conclusion que, même si la plupart des éléments stratégiques clés qui ont permis à la campagne anti-insurrectionnelle en Iraq de réussir étaient inspirés de la doctrine antérieure et de l'expérience du passé, trois facteurs – les besoins accrus en effectifs qu'imposent les opérations anti-insurrectionnelles par opposition aux opérations conventionnelles, l'importance de reconnaître et d'exploiter les divisions internes des insurgés et la nécessité de faire de la sécurité de la population le but premier d'une force anti-insurrectionnelle – correspondent à des interprétations relativement récentes et ont joué un rôle crucial dans la réussite de la stratégie d'intensification, de juin à décembre 2007.

This page intentionally left blank.

Executive summary

"The graduate level of war": Continuity and change in U.S. counter-insurgency strategy

D.A. Neill; DRDC CORA TM 2008-041; Defence R&D Canada – CORA; August 2008.

Introduction or background: In December 2006, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) issued Field Manual (FM) 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5 *Counterinsurgency*. This new doctrine manual was billed as a significant departure from the U.S. military's previous approach to counterinsurgency (COIN) warfare, elements of which dated back to the immediate post-Vietnam period. It has since been cited as the foundation upon which General David Petraeus built the "surge" strategy that has been credited with forestalling civil war and stabilizing the security situation in Iraq. This Technical Memorandum examines that claim by comparing the new manual to the publications that it superseded (Field Manual-Interim [FMI] 3-07.22 *Counterinsurgency Operations*, issued by the US Army in October 2004; and MCWP 3-33.5 *Counterinsurgency Operations*, issued by the US Marine Corps in January 1980) with a view to identifying how the US military's understanding of, and strategic approach to, counterinsurgency warfare was transformed by the manual issued 17 months ago.

Results: The new strategic approach was designed and executed by General Petraeus, who, in January 2007, argued that securing the population of Iraq against insurgent attack should be the top priority of the transformed COIN campaign. This was a significant departure from previous strategy, which had assumed that security would flow from political reconciliation and capacity-building. With a new draft of troops in place, Petraeus launched the redesigned campaign, focusing first on Anbar Province and Baghdad. U.S. troops left their fortified camps and moved into new Forward Operating Bases (FOB), living among Iraqis, and conducting aggressive patrolling and COIN operations aimed at driving insurgents out of their strongholds, pursuing them, and capturing or killing them before they could regain their footing. Capitalizing upon a development from the previous autumn, Petraeus assisted Sunni tribal elders in establishing "Concerned Local Citizens" (CLC) organizations (later known as the "Sons of Iraq"), providing training and remuneration to irregular tribal security forces to entice them away from the insurgency and into the government's camp. The results were significant; violence and casualties, both Coalition and Iraqi, plummeted rapidly, while membership in the CLC groups and the willingness of citizens to inform on the insurgents grew. By November 2007, U.S. and Iraqi casualty rates had fallen by 80 to 90 percent, and the first of the "surge" forces began rotating home the following month.

Petraeus, reporting to the U.S. Congress in April 2008, credited the improvement in security to four developments: the U.S. surge (and an accompanying "surge" by Iraq, which had increased its police and military forces by more than 100,000 during 2007); the strategic shift towards aggressive COIN operations aimed at protecting the population; the "Sunni Awakening," that was increasingly causing Iraqis to away from the insurgency, and throw in their lot with the government; and a ceasefire by some of the various Shiite militias. While Petraeus deemed the

progress "significant," it remained "uneven," and was "fragile and reversible." Even qualified success, however, was a far cry from the civil war that had seemed imminent only a year earlier. To what should these important results be attributed? Of the four key factors identified by Petraeus, two (the Sunni "Awakening" and the Shiite ceasefire) were essentially local phenomena, while two (the addition of more troops and the adoption of a new strategy) were entirely under US control. This Technical Memorandum examines the latter, focusing on the strategy that served as the foundation for the "surge"—in particular, on the changes Petraeus effected to America's strategic approach to the insurgency. My goal is to determine whether, as conventional wisdom asserts, some sort of fundamental strategic shift did indeed underwrite the progress achieved between June and December of 2007.

In order to examine this question, I assess the recent evolution of U.S. COIN strategy. Did Petraeus' innovations constitute a fundamentally new strategic approach? Were they merely a reinterpretation of ages-old counterinsurgency practice? Or is the answer somewhere in the middle? FM 3-24 was not the Army's first COIN doctrine; it superseded a number of earlier documents, including, at the strategic level, FMI 3-07.22, the US Army's interim guide to COIN operations, published in October 2004; and MCWP 3-33.5, the US Marine Corps' guide to COIN operations, issued in January 1980. If the success of the "surge" was indeed the result of a transformed strategic approach derived from newly-published doctrine, then at least some aspects of that strategic shift should be reflected in differences between current and past doctrine manuals. Contrariwise, if the differences between the new manual and its antecedents are, in fact, minimal or insignificant, it would be necessary to look elsewhere for causal elements in the successes of the past year.

I conclude that Petraeus' COIN strategy for the surge was informed by a mixture of classical COIN doctrine and a number of relatively recent innovations. Seven key elements of COIN strategy are identified:

- political considerations must take precedence over military concerns in operational planning;
- all aspects of effort must be integrated into a single COIN campaign;
- restraint must be exercised in the use of force;
- legitimate and capable host nation institutions (especially security forces) must be built;
- more, and more extensively trained, manpower must be available for COIN than for conventional operations;
- any internal divisions in the insurgent camp must be recognized and exploited; and,
- securing the population against insurgent attacks must be the primary military mission.

These key elements represent a mixture of classical COIN strategy and more recent innovations deriving from the observations and doctrinal work of Petraeus and like-minded counterinsurgency experts. Most of these tend to increase individual risk for military and civilian personnel involved in a COIN operations. This tends to dilute the vast qualitative advantages enjoyed by Western, and especially U.S., military forces, with the result that casualty ratios are likely to be higher in COIN warfare than in a conventional campaign.

Sommaire

"The graduate level of war": Continuity and change in U.S. counter-insurgency strategy

D.A. Neill; DRDC CORA TM 2008-041; R & D pour la défense Canada – CORA; Août 2008.

Introduction ou contexte: En décembre 2006, le département de la Défense des États-Unis a publié le manuel de campagne (FM) 3-24/manuel de guerre du Marine Corps (MCWP) 3-33.5 intitulé *Counterinsurgency*. Selon certains, ce nouveau manuel de doctrine s'écarte sensiblement de l'approche antérieure de la guerre anti-insurrectionnelle de l'armée américaine, dont certains éléments remontaient à la période qui a suivi immédiatement la guerre du Vietnam. Ce document aurait servi de fondement à la stratégie « d'intensification » du Général David Petraeus, qui aurait permis d'éviter la guerre civile et de stabiliser la situation en Iraq. L'auteur de ce document technique examine cette affirmation en comparant le nouveau manuel aux principales publications qu'il a remplacées (le manuel de campagne provisoire [FMI] 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, publié par l'US Army en octobre 2004; le manuel FM 100-27/AFP 3-20, *Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict*; et le MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, publié par l'US Marine Corps en janvier 1980) et tente de voir comment la nouvelle doctrine a transformé, pour autant que cela ait été le cas, la façon dont les militaires américains envisagent la guerre anti-insurrectionnelle et l'abordent du point de vue stratégique.

Résultats: La nouvelle approche stratégique a été conçue et mise en application par le Général Petraeus qui, à l'occasion de son témoignage devant le Congrès en janvier 2007, a soutenu que la protection de la population iraquienne contre les attentats des insurgés devait être la grande priorité de la nouvelle campagne anti-insurrectionnelle. Cette nouvelle stratégie se démarquait passablement de la précédente, selon laquelle la sécurité découlerait de la réconciliation politique et du renforcement des capacités. Disposant d'un nouvel apport de troupes, Petraeus a repensé la campagne et l'a axée d'abord sur la province d'Anbar et Bagdad. Les troupes américaines ont quitté leurs camps fortifiés pour gagner de nouvelles bases d'opérations avancées (BOA), vivre parmi les Iraquiens et mener des patrouilles agressives et des opérations anti-insurrectionnelles conçues pour obliger les insurgés à sortir de leurs repaires, les poursuivre, les capturer ou les tuer avant qu'ils puissent reprendre pied. Mettant à profit un développement de l'automne précédent, Petraeus a aidé des aînés tribaux sunnites à constituer des organisations de « citoyens locaux engagés » (qui allaient devenir plus tard les « Fils de l'Iraq ») en formant et en rémunérant des forces de sécurité tribales irrégulières pour les détourner de l'insurrection et les amener dans le camp du gouvernement. La stratégie a vite donné des résultats appréciables : la violence et les pertes, tant du côté de la coalition que du côté de la population iraquienne, ont fortement diminué tandis que le nombre de citoyens engagés et prêts à donner des renseignements sur les insurgés a augmenté. En novembre 2007, les pertes américaines et iraquiennes avaient chuté de 80 à 90 pour 100, et les premiers éléments des forces « d'intensification » ont commencé à rentrer aux États-Unis le mois suivant.

S'adressant au Congrès américain en avril 2008, Petraeus a imputé l'amélioration de la sécurité à quatre facteurs : la stratégie d'intensification des États-Unis (et une « intensification » parallèle de

l'Iraq, dont l'effectif des forces de police et des forces militaires a augmenté de plus de 100 000 hommes en 2007); le recours à des opérations anti-insurrectionnelles agressives pour protéger la population; l'« éveil sunnite », qui a amené de plus en plus d'Iraquiens à se dissocier des insurgés et à se ranger derrière le gouvernement; et le cessez-le-feu conclu par certaines milices chiites. Même si Petraeus a qualifié les progrès d'appréciables, il a ajouté qu'ils demeuraient inégaux et que la situation était fragile. L'éventualité d'une guerre civile qui semblait imminente un an seulement auparavant semblait cependant écartée.

À quoi peut-on attribuer ces importants résultats? Des quatre principaux facteurs relevés par Petraeus, deux (l'« éveil sunnite » et le cessez-le-feu des chiites) sont essentiellement des phénomènes locaux, tandis que les deux autres (l'accroissement des troupes et l'adoption d'une nouvelle stratégie) dépendaient entièrement des États-Unis. Le document technique est consacré au dernier, et principalement à la stratégie qui a servi de base à l'« intensification » – particulièrement les changements apportés par Petraeus à l'approche stratégique de la lutte anti-insurrectionnelle des États-Unis. L'objectif de l'auteur est d'établir si les progrès accomplis en Iraq de juin à décembre 2007 tiennent, comme on a tendance à l'affirmer, à un virage stratégique quelconque.

Pour examiner la question, l'auteur a évalué l'évolution récente de la stratégie anti-insurrectionnelle des États-Unis. Les innovations de Petraeus correspondaient-elles à une approche stratégique radicalement nouvelle? Étaient-elles une réinterprétation seulement de vieilles pratiques anti-insurrectionnelles? La réponse se situe-t-elle quelque part entre les deux? Le document FM 3-24 n'était pas le premier que l'armée américaine consacrait à la doctrine anti-insurrectionnelle; il remplaçait, comme on l'a vu ci-dessus, des manuels de doctrine antérieurs. Si la réussite de l'« intensification » a effectivement été le résultat d'une nouvelle approche stratégique issue de la nouvelle doctrine, les différences entre les anciens manuels de doctrine et le nouveau devraient se manifester dans certains aspects de ce virage stratégique. À l'inverse, si les différences entre les anciens manuels et le nouveau sont négligeables, il faudrait chercher ailleurs la raison des succès obtenus l'an dernier.

L'auteur arrive à la conclusion que la stratégie d'intensification des opérations anti-insurrectionnelles de Petraeus s'appuyait à la fois sur la doctrine anti-insurrectionnelle classique et sur un petit nombre d'idées relativement nouvelles. La stratégie anti-insurrectionnelle comporterait sept principes clés :

- les considérations politiques doivent primer sur les considérations militaires dans la planification des opérations;
- les différents aspects de l'effort doivent tous être intégrés en une campagne anti-insurrectionnelle cohérente;
- l'usage de la force doit rester mesuré;
- des institutions légitimes et capables (des forces de sécurité, en particulier) doivent être édifiées dans le pays;
- les opérations anti-insurrectionnelles demandent des effectifs plus nombreux et soumis à une instruction plus poussée que les opérations conventionnelles;
- les divisions internes des insurgés doivent être reconnues et exploitées;
- la protection de la population contre les attentats des insurgés doit être l'objectif premier de la mission militaire.

Ces éléments clés correspondent à un mélange de stratégies anti-insurrectionnelles classiques et d'idées plus récentes inspirées des observations et des travaux en matière de doctrine de Petraeus et de spécialistes de la lutte anti-insurrectionnelle aux vues analogues. La plupart ont pour effet d'accroître les risques qui pèsent individuellement sur les militaires et les civils associés à des opérations anti-insurrectionnelles. Cela tend à atténuer les avantages qualitatifs considérables des forces militaires de l'Occident et, en particulier, des États-Unis, la proportion des pertes étant de ce fait généralement plus élevée dans la guerre anti-insurrectionnelle que dans les campagnes conventionnelles (contre le même adversaire).

This page intentionally left blank.

Table of contents

Abstract …….. i
Résumé …..... i
Executive summary iii
Sommaire v
Table of contents ix
Acknowledgements xi
1 .... Introduction 1
1.1 Background 1
1.2 Questions 4
2 .... Conceptualizing Counter-Insurgency, 1980-2006 8
2.1 1980: Echoes of Vietnam 10
2.2 1990: The ‘low-intensity” legacy 14
2.3 2004: Detritus of the “New World Order” 16
2.4 2006: The Iraqi cockpit 22
2.5 The Petraeus observations 28
3 .... The Surge 34
3.1 The Iraqi Study Group 34
3.2 Changing Course 37
3.3 The surge 38
3.4 Early Results 39
3.5 The Petraeus/Crocker reports 40
3.6 Accelerating improvement 43
3.7 What happened? 44
4 .... Key Elements of a COIN Strategy 49
4.1 Political primacy 50
4.2 Integration of effort 51
4.3 Force and restraint 52
4.4 Building legitimacy 54
4.5 Manpower 56
4.6 Identifying and exploting fault lines 57
4.7 Security first 58
5 .... Conclusion 62
5.1 Something old, something new 62
5.1.1 The political is primordial 62
5.1.2 All efforts must be integrated 63
5.1.3 Force must be balanced with restraint 64

5.1.4 Legitimacy is earned, not assumed ... 66
5.1.5 Manpower must be sufficient ... 67
5.1.6 Identify and exploit fault lines ... 68
5.1.7 Security comes first ... 70
5.2 "Re-learn, and adapt" ... 72
Afterword ... 76
Annex A .. Husseyn's Story ... 77
List of symbols/abbreviations/acronyms/initialisms ... 79
Distribution list ... 81

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mr. William (Bill) Tuttle of www.thedonovan.com for granting me permission to publish, in its entirety, the blog post entitled "Hussayn's Story", originally published on 14 May 2008 (see Annex A).

This page intentionally left blank.

1 Introduction

In Iraq, Petraeus changed the nature of the war. [1]

Did he? If so, how?

1.1 Background

The invasion of Iraq in March 2003 was designed to achieve three grand strategic goals: eliminating Iraq's suspected stockpile of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and prohibited weapons programs; ending its support for international terrorism; and replacing the regime of dictator Saddam Hussein with responsible democratic government.[2] A U.S.-led coalition seized Baghdad within three weeks of crossing the line of departure, and by the summer of 2003 had routed the regime's forces and was in control of the country. Washington established a Coalition Provisional Authority to govern the country temporarily; this ceded control to an Iraqi provisional government the following year. 2005 saw Iraqis elect parliamentary representatives, adopt a provisional constitution, and vote in general elections for the first time in history.

By this point, however, a welter of persistent and lethal insurgent groups had emerged, consisting in essence of Sunni groups on one side (former Ba'athists, members of al Qaida and other jihadists, many of them foreign), and Shiites on the other (formed militias like the Sadrist "Mahdi Army," less structured organizations, and Iranian "special groups" and special forces, e.g., the soi-disant "Quds force").[3] Both sides employed an array of paramilitary, terrorist, classical insurgent and suicide tactics, which quickly led to a tangled urban campaign of atrocity and counter-atrocity. U.S. and coalition casualties climbed, and Iraqi civilian deaths skyrocketed. From the outbreak of the insurgency to mid-2005, U.S. forces remained focussed on hunting

[1] George Friedman, "Petraeus, Afghanistan and the Lessons of Iraq" (Canadian Forces Air Warfare Centre Aerogram: Strategic Forecasting, Inc., 4 May 2008), accessed at http://www.airforce.forces.gc.ca/CFAWC/Contemporary_Studies/2008/2008-May/2008-05-04_Petraeus_Afghanistan_and_the_Lessons_of_Iraq_e.asp.

[2] Innumerable versions of the official rationale for war with Iraq have been published, rendering selection of a single *casus belli* all but impossible. The Congressional resolution adopted in October 2002 offers a useful summary: it authorized the use of force against Iraq to "(1) defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq; and (2) enforce all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq." This resolution, taken together with the *Iraq Liberation Act* (1998), covers all of the bases: WMD, terrorism and the elimination of Saddam's Ba'ath Party regime. Public Law 107-243, accessed at http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d107:h.j.res.00114:.

[3] Some have disputed Iran's direct involvement in the insurgency. During May 2008, Iraqi Army and Police Forces personnel, support by U.S. troops, raided numerous Mahdi Army strongholds and seized various arms caches, including dozens of Iranian-made explosive-formed projectile (EFP) weapons, and Iranian-manufactured weapons and ammunition (60mm mortar shells and 107mm recoilless projectiles) with a production date of 2007. They also arrested half a dozen Iranian Special Groups personnel. Bill Roggio, "Iraqi Army dismantles Mahdi Army caches in Sadr City," accessed at http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/05/iraqi_army_dismantle.php.

down insurgents, and training the embryonic Iraqi Security Forces.[4] At the political level, the Bush Administration remained focussed on achieving political progress through the fledgling Iraqi Government.

The situation remained dangerous but more or less stable until February 2006, when Sunni insurgents bombed the Golden Mosque of Samarra, one of Shia Islam's holiest sites. This incident sparked an explosion of sectarian violence that gathered momentum throughout the remainder of the year, claiming thousands of lives, and threatening to destroy the tenuous social order in Iraq. U.S. forces, which remained focussed on their primary mission of training Iraqi security and military forces to assume control, were unable to stem the rising tide of violence. Against this backdrop, U.S. domestic opposition to the war—fuelled in part by impending Congressional elections in November 2006, and efforts by presidential hopefuls to position themselves for the 2008 Primary campaigns—grew rapidly. The spiralling violence put paid to the Bush Administration's "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq," and spawned the creation of the Iraq Study Group (ISG), co-chaired by former Secretary of State James Baker and former Congressman Lee Hamilton, to consider and recommend possible solutions to the worsening situation on the ground. In its report, delivered on 6 December 2006, the ISG pressed the Bush Administration to do more to bring Sunnis into the political process, accelerate the training of Iraqi security forces, and put diplomatic pressure on Iraq's neighbours to help quell the insurgency, if only by restricting their meddling[5]—policies which, one and all, were all ready under way. The ISG Report advocated redoubling efforts on strategic approach that had already clearly failed.

Bush decided to try something else. Thanking the ISG for its recommendations, he ordered a change of command in Iraq, appointing General David Petraeus joint commander, and announcing that up 30,000 additional troops would be dispatched to provide the new commander with the flexibility needed to stem the violence.[6] The most important change, however, was strategic. Since 2003, Washington had focussed on political change and capacity-building first, and security, second—an order of priorities enshrined in the 2005 "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq."[7] Under the administration's new approach, however, security would come first,[8] on the principal that citizens living in daily fear of their lives are unlikely to be interested in striving for long-term, stable political reconciliation, especially with their tormentors. In the words of one analyst, "the goal became to secure Iraq's population from violence in order to allow civic and political progress."[9]

---

[4] Peter D. Feaver (former Special Advisor for Strategic Planning at the National Security Council), "Anatomy of the Surge," *Commentary*, April 2008, p. 25.

[5] James A. Baker III and Lee H. Hamilton, co-chairs, "The Iraq Study Group Report," 6 December 2006; Executive Summary, pp. 6-8, accessed at http://www.usip.org/isg/iraq_study_group_report/report/1206/index.html.

[6] George W. Bush, President of the United States, "President's address to the nation," 10 January 2007, accessed at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html.

[7] National Security Council, "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq," November 2005, p. 8.

[8] National Security Council, "Highlights of the Iraq Strategy Review," January 2009, slide 9, accessed at http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/iraq/2007/iraq-strategy011007.pdf.

[9] Kimberly Kagan, "How They Did It: Executing the winning strategy in Iraq," *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 13, No. 10, 19 November 2007.

Petraeus advised the Senate Armed Services Committee prior to his confirmation hearings in January 2007 that the "top challenge" in Iraq would be "providing the security necessary to reduce the cycle of violence," focusing on "population security, particularly in Baghdad, to give the Iraqi government the breathing space it needs to become more effective."[10] This was a reversal of the "National Strategy for Victory." Petraeus' nomination was confirmed by unanimous vote of the Senate on 26 January 2007, and he took up his new command in the weeks following. The new draft of U.S. forces—which the Bush Administration characterized as "reinforcements," the Democrats dubbed an "escalation," and the media eventually (and lastingly) labelled "the surge"[11]—got underway. The additional troops (five combat infantry brigades, one combat aviation brigade, and a number of supporting units)[12] were complete in theatre by the end of May, and in June, Petraeus launched the first major operations under the new strategy.

The new campaign began in Anbar province, home of the Sunni insurgency, and the epicentre of a growing movement by Sunni tribal chieftains who—due to a combination of war fatigue and the implementation of a variety of novel counter-insurgency (COIN) practices by the U.S. force in and around Ramadi—had begun to reject al Qaida, and respond to U.S. overtures for participating in their own self-defence, and the reconstruction of their city and homes.[13] Under Petraeus' strategy, U.S. troops left their fortified camps and moved into new Forward Operating Bases, building Joint Security Stations and living with and among their Iraqi colleagues. U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces personnel began aggressive patrolling and counter-insurgency operations aimed at driving insurgents out of their strongholds, pursuing them, and capturing or killing them before they could reestablish themselves. Petraeus, Lieutenant General Raymond T. Odierno and their subordinates took the approaches that had worked in Ramadi and employed them more broadly, assisting Sunni tribal elders in establishing "Concerned Local Citizens" (CLC) organizations (later known as the "Sons of Iraq"), providing training and remuneration to irregular tribal security forces. This helped to eliminate the financial hardship and sense of disenfranchisement that had resulted from over-enthusiastic de-Ba'athification policies, which had driven many Sunnis to side with the insurgency.

Results were swift in coming. U.S. casualties climbed briefly (a natural consequence of moving from defensive to offensive operations), but then plummeted, as did Iraqi civilian casualties. Iraqi citizens began helping U.S. forces locate insurgents, weapon caches, bomb factories and buried explosive devices. Petraeus extended the campaign to Baghdad, isolating Sadr City and driving out the Iranian-sponsored Shiite extremists. Significant progress was already noticeable when

---

[10] "Advance Policy Questions for Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus, USA, Nominee to be General and Commander, Multi-National Forces-Iraq;" official documentation submitted by Lieutenant-General David H. Petraeus, U.S. Army, in preparation for testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, 23 January 2007, p. 3, accessed at http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2007/January/Petraeus%2001-23-07.pdf.

[11] Feaver, "Anatomy of the Surge," p. 27.

[12] Bill Ardolino, "Why the violence has declined in Iraq" [http://longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/11/why_the_violence_has.php].

[13] An excellent first-hand account of the rescue of Ramadi—and the prototype for some of the most significantly transformative elements of Petraeus' nationwide COIN strategy—is provided in Major Niel Smith and Colonel Sean MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point", *Military Review*, March-April 2008, pp. 41-52.

Petraeus testified before Congress in September 2007,[14] and by November, the U.S. and Iraqi casualty rate had fallen by 80 to 90 percent.[15] The first of the "surge" forces began rotating home the following month.

1.2 Questions

In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 8 April 2008, Petraeus credited four developments for the improvement in security: the U.S. surge (and a complementary "surge" by Iraq, which had increased its police and military forces by more than 100,000 during 2007); the strategic shift towards aggressive counterinsurgency operations aimed at protecting the population; the "Sunni awakening," that had begun to spread from the Sunnis to all of Iraq's ethnic and sectarian groups, and that was causing Iraqis to turn away from the indiscriminate violence of the insurgency, and join the government and U.S. forces in stabilizing their country; and a ceasefire declared by the Iran-sponsored Shiite cleric, Moqtada al-Sadr.[16] Petraeus was careful to temper his good news with warnings that the progress achieved to date was "significant, but uneven," and remained "fragile and reversible." The Iraqi Security Forces, he cautioned, required more training and greater overall numbers before they would be able to take responsibility for the country as a whole. Provincial elections (scheduled for autumn 2008), returning refugees, detainee releases and a host of social issues would continue to pose security challenges. The transformation of the "Sons of Iraq" into bona fide security personnel would take time and had to be monitored closely. All of these, he argued, required the presence of "sizable conventional forces," along with special operations forces and advisor teams. Accordingly, Petraeus recommended a temporary halt to the drawdown of US forces, arguing that further reductions should be made only on the basis of the security situation, rather than arbitrary timetables.

In the face of qualified success where, only a year earlier, civil war had seemed imminent and unavoidable, it has become increasingly difficult even for the most vehement of critics to argue that the "surge" has failed to achieve important results. But to what should these results be attributed? Petraeus, as noted above, has himself identified four key factors: the availability of more personnel, both American and Iraqi; the shift from defensive counter-terrorist to offensive counter-insurgent operations; the growing rejection of the insurgency; and the Sadrist ceasefire. At time of writing, this last factor seemed to have temporarily broken down, leading to firefights between U.S. and Iran-sponsored Shiite militia forces in the streets of Baghdad—albeit without, it must be noted, resulting in a general collapse of the nationwide stability achieved via the surge (which evidently was not as "fragile and reversible" as Petraeus asserted in his cautious testimony). Clearly, the Sadrist ceasefire, while perhaps an important contributor to the success of the "surge," was not the deciding factor. This leaves the other three factors—which, in reality, are

[14] See General David H. Petraeus, Commander, Multi-national Force—Iraq, "Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq," 10-11 September 2007, accessed at http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2007/September/Petraeus%2009-11-07.pdf.

[15] See the slides accompanying the briefing by Lieutenant-General Raymond Odierno entitled "Multi-national Corps—Iraq—Pentagon Press Conference," 1 November 2007, accessed at http://www.defenselink.mil/news/briefingslide.aspx?briefingslideid=317.

[16] See General David H. Petraeus, Commander, Multi-national Force—Iraq, "Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq," 8-9 April 2008, accessed at http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2008/April/Petraeus%2004-08-08.pdf.

only two: the "Sunni Awakening," and the "surge" itself. This latter may be understood to comprise both the availability of additional personnel, and the implementation of a new strategy for employing them.

The many complex socio-cultural underpinnings of the "Awakening" will thus be touched on only briefly. I will focus on the events and ideas that, taken altogether, constituted the "surge."

It is axiomatic in military strategy that a wise general never reinforces failure—that when something is not working, the last thing you need is more of it. The grim experience of the Western Front between 1915 and 1918 demonstrated that merely throwing more personnel and equipment into a hopelessly stalemated situation, much less a losing one, is unlikely to retrieve it. This suggests that while additional drafts of personnel were almost certainly a *necessary* prerequisite for the "surge," the added forces were not, in and of themselves, *sufficient* to enable Petraeus to change the situation on the ground, and to extract a tenuous victory from the jaws of looming defeat. Accordingly, it is necessary to examine the other aspect of the "surge"—the changes Petraeus effected to America's strategic approach to the insurgency—in order to determine whether, as conventional wisdom asserts, some sort of fundamental strategic shift did indeed underwrite the progress achieved between June and December of 2007.

In order to examine this assertion, we must look back a short distance. In December 2006, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) issued a new field manual: Field Manual (FM) 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5 *Counterinsurgency*. This was billed as a significant departure from the U.S. military's previous approach to COIN warfare, elements of which dated back to the immediate post-Vietnam period, and has since been cited as the foundation upon which General Petraeus—the intellectual force behind the manual—constructed the "surge" strategy that is credited with forestalling civil war and stabilizing the security situation in Iraq. As one analyst put it, "our soldiers under the Petraeus strategy got off their big bases and out of their tanks and deeper into the neighbourhoods."[17] This indeed appears to be at least one of the many important things that happened as the result of the "surge."

But *why* did it happen? Was it a fundamentally new strategy, some "new, ground-breaking changes," as some observers have claimed?[18] Or was it merely a novel application of ages-old counter-insurgency practice? Was there some sudden, transformative understanding of the nature of COIN warfare contained in the new manual? FM 3-24 was not, after all, the Army's first COIN doctrine; it superseded a number of earlier documents, including Field Manual-Interim (FMI) 3-07.22, the U.S. Army's interim guide to COIN operations, published in October 2004; FM 100-20, the U.S. Army and Air Force doctrine for "Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict," published in 1994 (and superseding a 1981 version of the same manual); and MCWP 3-33.5, the U.S. Marine Corps' guide to COIN operations, issued in January 1980. American soldiers were not new to dealing with insurgents and insurgencies; the U.S. military has been fighting COIN campaigns at least since the Philippine Insurrection, more than a century ago.[19] If the success of

[17] Michael Yon, "Let's 'Surge' Some More," *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 April 2008, p. A17.
[18] Dr. Conrad Crane, U.S. Army War College. Cited in Michelle Gordon, "Army, Marine Corps unveil counterinsurgency field manual," Army.mil/news, 15 December 2006, accessed at http://www.army.mil/-news/2006/12/15/1005-army-marine-corps-unveil-counterinsurgency-field-manual/.
[19] From an historical perspective, U.S. forces in their earliest incarnation earned extensive experience in insurgency during the Revolutionary War.

the "surge" was indeed the result of a transformed strategic approach derived from newly-published doctrine, then the most important elements of that strategic shift would logically be reflected in the differences between the current document and those it replaced. If, on the other hand, the differences between the new manual and its antecedents were found to be minimal, it would be necessary to seek elsewhere for the key causal element in the successes of the past year.

Strategic doctrine, of course, is not everything, and military history is replete with victories achieved by commanders who departed from established doctrine (whether because it was flawed, or because circumstances presented an opportunity for the achievement of gains through original thinking). Accordingly, while I examine whether the "surge" may have been enabled by significant changes in doctrine between 1980 and 2006, it is also necessary to ask whether Petraeus, in designing and executing the strategy, conformed to or departed from existing doctrine. This is of course something of a loaded question, as Petraeus is credited with co-authoring the present COIN doctrine manual, but it must be asked nonetheless. It is, after all, important to know whether victory resulted from following the concepts presented in FM 3-24, or flouting them.

I therefore compare FM 3-24 with its immediate predecessors, with a view to identifying how the U.S. military's understanding of, and strategic approach to, COIN warfare has been transformed by the new manual; and from this, to compare the strategic elements of the "surge" to current and past doctrine in order to determine the extent to which the transformation of the U.S. military's approach to COIN warfare contributed to the recent improvements in the security situation in Iraq. I will not discuss tactical or operational doctrine; the focus here is on examining the key elements of counterinsurgency strategy (which may be defined as the organization and application of all necessary resources in order to conduct a successful COIN campaign) as they appear in past and present doctrine, and as they emerge from the U.S. experience in Iraq. I examine the design and execution of the operations at the strategic level that took place between June and December of 2007, in order to determine whether they conformed to or departed from the principles and strategy for COIN operations outlined in FM 3-24. I look at three key areas of interest: defining and understanding insurgencies; devising strategic approaches to COIN situations; and developing and executing COIN campaigns at the strategic level of war. My aim is to determine which aspects of the surge strategy (if any) constitute key strategic elements for a successful COIN campaign.

I hope that this Memorandum will offer some clues to assist researchers in identifying topics for further research with respect to the key decision points and rate-limiting steps likely to be encountered when developing COIN responses to insurgent threats. Finally, nothing in this Memorandum should be taken as an assertion that General Petraeus was either the sole originator of the concepts set forth in FM 3-24, or the sole author of the document. Due to his appointment and frequent Congressional testimony, he remains the public face of the ongoing COIN campaign in Iraq; but many experts in, and practitioners of, COIN contributed both to the strategy, and to its practical implementation in the field.[20]

---

[20] Success, as they say, has a thousand fathers, but some names, among many that deserve mention, surfaced repeatedly in the course of this study. Lieutenant-Colonel David Kilcullen, Australian Army, served as a consultant on COIN operations for the U.S. DOD, and reportedly played a significant role in developing the new strategy. Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, U.S. Army, author of *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), extracted important lessons from historical

Finally, we must remember that the surge is not over, and that Iraq remains in a state of flux. Most trends at time of writing were positive; but, as Petraeus himself has noted, reversals are always possible because "the enemy gets a vote."[21] Any analysis undertaken *in medias res* therefore comes heavily laden with caveats. This challenge notwithstanding, students of COIN strategy will doubtless continue to observe ongoing conflicts closely, resulting in data and conclusions that may tend to either support or refute the arguments I have made herein. Continuous review and analysis of what appears to be working is crucial to ensuring that the correct lessons are drawn from the ongoing counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

COIN campaigns and ongoing operations in Iraq, and incorporated them into FM 3-24. Colonel Sean MacFarland, Commander of the Ready First Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armoured Division, U.S. Army, was at the center of the "Sunni Awakening" in Anbar province in the summer of 2006, and pioneered many of the strategic transformations that shepherded it into a full-blown rejection of al Qaeda, and that were adopted and adapted by Petraeus the following spring and summer during the surge. Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, Commander Multinational Corps Iraq, put the new strategy into practice while the surge unfolded. Finally, Captain Travis Patriquin, U.S. Army, deserves enormous credit for developing and disseminating, in readily-understood form, crucial ideas on how to leverage Iraq's complex social and sectarian dynamics, and co-opt the Sunni sheiks in Anbar province.

[21] General David Petraeus, in testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 8 April 2008, accessed at http:// www.washingtonpost.com/wp-rv/politics/documents/senate_foreign_relations_Iraq_04082008.html.

2 Conceptualizing Counter-Insurgency, 1980-2006

Counterinsurgency is not just thinking man's warfare – it is the graduate level of war.[22]

In this first chapter I examine the U.S. military's evolving understanding of the nature of COIN warfare. I look at the characteristics of insurgencies and counter-insurgencies as these were understood in the 1980, 2004 and 2006 doctrine manuals, and discuss some of the many conditions and caveats that apply when translating strategic principles into a COIN campaign. As always in any comparative analysis, what is of interest is not merely where perspectives on insurgency and counter-insurgency stand today, but also how—and why—they changed over the course of more than a quarter-century of doctrinal evolution. It is an axiom of historical analysis that it is easier to understand where we are in the context of where we have been.

As a starting point for the following analysis, it is first necessary to examine what the terms "insurgency" and "counter-insurgency" have, over the past twenty-five years, been understood to mean (see Table 1).

Table 1: Evolving definitions of insurgency and counter-insurgency

Definition	Source
"Any attempt by a dissident element to organise and incite the population of a country into forcibly overthrowing its existing government is called subversive insurgency." (p. 9) "Counterinsurgency situations may occur during any stage of national development and will normally involve concurrent and coordinated military and diplomatic actions." (p. 39)	MCWP 3-33.5 (formerly FMFM 8-2), *Counterinsurgency Operations* (Quantico, Virginia: Marine Corps Development and Education Command, 29 January 1980).
"An insurgency is an organized, armed political struggle whose goal may be the seizure of power through revolutionary takeover and replacement of the existing government." "…counterinsurgency [is] all military and other actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency."	FM 100-20 / AFP 3-20 *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters of the Army, 1990)
"**insurgency** – An organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict." (p. 267) "**counterinsurgency —** Those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency." (p. 128)	JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 12 April 2001, updated 4 March 2008)

[22] Quotation attributed to a U.S. Special Forces officer serving in Iraq in 2005. Cited in FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army and Headquarters Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Department of the Navy, 15 December 2006), p. 1-1.

The three documents contain only two sets of definitions because joint force terminology was standardized in the interval between the publication of MCWP 3-33.5 in 1980 and FM 3-07.22 in 2004. In 2001, the Department of Defense published JP 1-02 *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, which collated and de-conflicted the tens of thousands of specialized terms associated with military operations and administration. Authors of subsequent publications made an effort to avoid creating new terms not already defined in the Dictionary (the authors of FM 3-07.22 note in the preface to the manual that their document "is not the proponent manual for any terms,"[23] while the preface to the successor document, FM 3-24, notes that "FM 3-24 is not the proponent field manual (the authority) for any term").[24] The *Dictionary* was updated early in 2008 and thus is current.

Despite the different publications in which they appear, there is so little substantive variance between the definitions of insurgency and counter-insurgency in use in 1980 and those derived from the modern reference that there is little to be gained by deconstructing the differences. With respect to the former, the 1980 definition explicitly includes reference to organization and incitement of "the population," a feature common to the communist insurgencies of the Cold War period, but less prevalent in the modern context, where insurgents are more likely to attempt to dominate an indifferent or hostile population through terror than through persuasion (communist revolutionary doctrine advocated a mixture of both).[25] The 2004 definition, by contrast, makes explicit reference to insurgencies targeting "constituted" government, which may amount to acknowledgement of the contemporary importance to the supporting state of ensuring that the supported government is democratically legitimate—something that was arguably less of a concern a generation ago, when a supported government's anti-communist stance often seemed to count for more than its democratic bona fides.

By contrast, the 1980 definition of counter-insurgency is rather more nebulous than the definition of insurgency; the assertion that a counter-insurgency situation can occur at "any stage of national development" is an explicit reference to political evolution in developing countries, which was a principal focus of U.S. foreign policy at the time (e.g., under Carter). By 2004, the definition had become much more precise, and encompassed the incorporation and coordination of all of the assets and capabilities available to a state, and any state assisting it, to defeat an attempt to overthrow its constituted government. Clearly, the progressive delegitimization of Marxist ideology and Washington's experience with post-Soviet ethnic and religious conflict in the Balkans, Asia, Africa and the Middle East, had established that vastly different types of insurgencies might be encountered, and that definitions must therefore be flexible. The reader is invited to remember these definitions, and to keep an open mind about how the sources of motivation in insurgencies are understood while proceeding through the remainder of this Memorandum.

[23] FM 3-07.22 Counterinsurgency Operations (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2004), p. iv.
[24] FM 3-24, p. vii.
[25] For an overview of the communist approach to revolutionary warfare, see the classical text by Mao Tse-Tung, *Yu Chi Chan* [Guerilla Warfare], trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1961).

2.1 1980: Echoes of Vietnam

The most marked shift in COIN doctrine between the 1980 and the 2004 manuals is the transformed understanding of the nature of the political impetus underlying the bulk of insurgencies since the end of the Second World War—an understanding naturally rooted in the American experience of COIN warfare. In general, the post-Second World War period saw three principal types of insurgencies: popular movements aimed at achieving or accelerating independence from a colonial power (e.g., in India and Israel); popular revolts aimed at creating a communist "people's state;" and palace coups d'état by elites, aimed at seizing power, either with or without an accompanying alteration in the form of government. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, America's most prevalent experience was in opposing communist insurgencies—the Maoist capture of China, the protracted victory of North Vietnamese communism over South Vietnam, the invasion to liberate Grenada in 1983—and supporting anti-communist insurgencies, especially in Latin America (e.g., the Contras against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua). Accordingly, it is not surprising that while the 1980 COIN doctrine manual acknowledges that not "all rebellions or attempts to overthrow established governments are inspired by communism,"[26] it focuses heavily on communist insurgencies (usually dubbed "wars of national liberation" by their perpetrators).

The 1980 manual thus reflects the thinking of the post-Second World War era regarding the nature of insurgencies, which, again not surprisingly, focuses heavily on insurgencies inspired by Marxism, either independently derived, or Soviet-sponsored. It posits three types of insurgent strategies: "left" (those predicated on the assumption that the conditions necessary for revolution can be achieved spontaneously with a minimum of organization); "right" (those which work through legal means, perhaps aiming at cooperation with established government, but not shy about using violence); and "mass" (those which leverage a large, discontented populace to foment a general uprising). "Mass" insurgent strategies are the focus of the 1980 doctrine,[27] and Mao's theories of popular uprisings provide much of the explanatory matter in the text.

Washington's goals, according to the manual, were to safeguard the interests of the United States, which is best achieved through promotion and maintenance of "a stable international environment"[28]—a clear indication that when considering involvement any regional dispute, the primary aim was not to place unendurable strain on the all-important bilateral relationship between Moscow and Washington (which, at the time the manual was being written, was still characterized by post-Nixonian détente). U.S. aid to counterinsurgents, the doctrine argues, should focus on assistance and development, but could also extend to military assistance ranging in scope "from protection or evacuation of American citizens to supporting the host country government in defeating the insurgency." The doctrine envisioned a graduated scale of commitments, that might include: advisory efforts "intended to strengthen the military of the host country to combat insurgency;" a "show of force to deter insurgency;" the insertion of American forces to protect or evacuate U.S. personnel and property; "the destruction of property and installations owned by the United States in order to prevent their use by insurgents;" and "the conduct of combat operations."[29] Some of the rationales for the insertion of U.S. forces still echo

[26] MCWP 3-33.5 (formerly FMFM 8-2), *Counterinsurgency Operations* (Quantico, Virginia: Marine Corps Development and Education Command, 29 January 1980), p. 10.
[27] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 10.
[28] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 31.
[29] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 35.

in today's environment; according to the manual, the political interests of the United States included not only preserving U.S. security and creating a stable international security environment, but also preserving "the right of an independent country to determine its own future"[30]—perhaps an indication that the military understood the need to be able to support the Truman, Eisenhower and Johnson Doctrines.[31]

Substantiating claims of legitimacy for U.S. support was a key strategic concern. Under the 1980 doctrine, support could be provided to a Host Nation (HN) under one or more of the following rubrics: to satisfy a political interest of the United States; to fulfil a treaty agreement; or at the invitation of a host government.[32] Regardless of the justification for the mission, U.S. Marine Corps forces—the principal focus of the 1980 manual—had to be prepared to meet a wide variety of potential tasks. Their primary function in the HN would be "to restore law and order and re-establish security in coordination with the host country;" their secondary role would be to contribute to its "political, social and economic welfare."[33]

Any force inserted on COIN operations would face four principal tasks: "ensur[ing] the security of the population and resources;" "defeat[ing] the guerrilla forces and destroy[ing] the insurgent infrastructure;" "defeat[ing] the organized military forces of the enemy;" and "conduct[ing] civil affairs operations which include civic action and psychological operations."[34] In planning a campaign to meet all of these tasks, commanders were enjoined to observe an array of operational, political and economic considerations (see Table 2).

In addition to these, the 1980 manual outlined a number of considerations governing the design and conduct of tactical operations in a COIN campaign. Two different types of operations are described: "strike operations," the goal of which is to "inflict damage on, seize or destroy an objective," which may be "either terrain or hostile forces,"[35] and "consolidation operations," also known as "clear and hold operations," a term that covers "the application of all aspects of national internal defense and development programs…in order to maintain or restore internal security" of the region in question.[36] Regardless of the type of operation envisaged, however, planners are enjoined to observe an array of key principles in designing the intervention force. Some of these —for example, an emphasis on "firepower and mobility," tactical self-sufficiency, intelligence, communications and transportation—are standard hallmarks of U.S. force employment. Others, however, are peculiar to a COIN-focused deployment—for example, the need to incorporate civil affairs and psychological operations (PSYOPS) personnel into the force to a far greater degree than in conventional operations, due to the importance of creating and maintaining close contact with civilian populations in a COIN scenario.

---

[30] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 36.
[31] The Truman, Eisenhower, Johnson and Reagan Doctrines promised U.S. aid to oppose Soviet/communist influence in, respectively, Greece and Turkey; countries that oppose communism in general; in the Western hemisphere; and Africa, Asia and Latin America, with a view to "rolling back" communist governments. Taken altogether, these eponymous doctrines formed the policy backbone of America's post-Second World War strategy of "containment."
[32] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 37.
[33] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 39.
[34] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 41.
[35] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 47.
[36] MCWP 3-33.5 (formerly FMFM 8-2), *Counterinsurgency Operations* (Quantico, Virginia: Marine Corps Development and Education Command, 29 January 1980), p. 49.

Certain of the operational considerations for a COIN campaign highlighted in the 1980 manual stand out. The size of the initial force commitment, for example, must be "large enough to defeat the insurgents speedily," because "insufficient force at the start can result in lengthy, inconclusive, and costly operations."[37] Once deployed the force must engage in "saturation patrolling to locate and fix insurgent forces," after which "offensive operations to destroy them" are to be undertaken. Commanders are enjoined to maintain "continuous pressure" on the enemy, and must not assume that he has been destroyed when resistance ceases. Once located, enemy forces are to be attacked as soon as possible; "Friendly forces should be larger, and encirclement is the preferred tactic." When attack with overwhelming force is not immediately possible, the pressure should be maintained through harassment to prevent the enemy from resting, reorganizing or massing personnel and equipment for a major attack (harassment, the manual notes, may also be used as an economy-of-force measure in low-priority areas). "Long periods of inactivity" in a COIN situation, the manual asserts, "favour the enemy."[38]

Table 2: Considerations for a COIN campaign (1980) [39]

Operational	***Economic***
Maintain constant pressure on the insurgents	Avoid too pronounced an impact on the local economy
Maintain secrecy and ensuring surprise	Avoid creating local industries to support only U.S. forces
Make maximum use of superior mobility available to U.S. forces	Control materials to avoid flow to insurgents/black markets
Collect and rapidly disseminate intelligence	Rationing may be necessary
Maintain popular support	Indigenous labour should be employed, but security of workers must be assured
Political	Protect low-income groups from exploitation
What U.S. forces do is more important than what they say	Provide technical assistance where possible to assist economic recovery
Promote respect for, confidence in and loyalty to the HN government	Deny the enemy access to key resources and skills
Assist in the restoration of the machinery of government where it has been destroyed	Undertake public works only on request, on a short-term basis
Political considerations may be more important than military concerns	Coordinate U.S. guidance and assistance

The doctrine also addresses the question of "combat bases," which are defined as "secure locations from which operations are projected and supported." Such bases are to be located "within or immediately adjacent to their area of responsibility," and are to be moved as often as necessary to keep US forces within striking range of their opponents (admittedly a more important consideration in jungle scenarios, and before the widespread availability of medium and heavy transport helicopters). What is interesting in the 1980 description of combat bases for

[37] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 44.
[38] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 45.
[39] MCWP 3-33.5, pp. 41-43.

COIN campaigns, however, is the principle that the minimum size contemplated is the Company-level base,[40] and that intimate contact with the populace being protected does not appear to be one of the planning considerations.

Written immediately following the U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam and that country's subsequent subjugation by the communist north, the 1980 manual naturally reflects a counterinsurgency situation featuring massed enemy forces operating in regimental and division strength, often conducting large-scale conventional military operations (e.g., the 1968 Tet Offensive, which, according to some estimates, involved as many as half a million People's Army of Vietnam personnel and Viet Cong guerrillas, striking dozens of targets throughout South Vietnam virtually simultaneously). The current situations in Iraq and Afghanistan are more representative of what the manual refers to as "consolidation operations." The offensive phase of consolidation may still require "strike operations" to clear large bodies of insurgents, but consolidation was expected to require primarily protective measures, including extensive patrolling, and area defence missions. Reflecting the heightened political sensitivities, it was expected that the consolidation phase would see "regular armed forces, paramilitary, economic, social, psychological and civic elements…integrated under the direction of government officials," and that combat and other activities would be "designed to prevent the resurgence of the insurgent movement."[41] In these circumstances, the operations expected of U.S. forces would be likely to "parallel rear-area security activities in conventional warfare," featuring "combined, joint and interdepartmental civil and military operations at the lowest levels;" "subordination of military to civilian activities;" "dispersion of small units over extremely wide areas;" and "mission diversity between the military and civilian operations." The bulk of defensive forces would be assigned to security tasks, including "extensive" patrolling, while the defence of individual civilian communities, once they are cleared of insurgents, would become "the responsibility of the paramilitary, police, or irregular forces."[42] US forces would continue, however, to emphasize control of movement; surveillance and security measures; intensive intelligence-gathering endeavours "inside and around communities;" "extensive" patrolling; the maintenance of mobile reaction forces to counter insurgent attacks; and a variety of other key military functions, until HN forces are able to take over these functions on their own.

Some strategic considerations are fundamental in the consolidation phase. The nature of insurgent tactics—which, once their ability to conduct large-scale military operations has been degraded, consists primarily of raids and ambushes—means that U.S. forces must understand that it is the guerrilla force itself which is the target, rather than (as in traditional conventional operations) any particular piece of ground or infrastructure that the enemy may occupy. The smaller the guerrilla force, the more difficult a target it is, especially as guerrillas are moving in their native environment, and therefore benefit from linguistic and cultural camouflage. The "vital ground" for any COIN force, therefore, is not ground at all, but rather destroying the ability of insurgent groups to organize and operate, and to sustain or increase their numbers.

Such an approach imposes two strategic goals on the COIN commander. First, the COIN force must identify and eliminate the "hard core leadership faction [that] exists at the heart of every insurgent movement" (the destruction of which, according to the 1980 manual, "will cause the

---

[40] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 47.
[41] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 49.
[42] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 51.

disintegration of the entire insurgent organization"); and second, the COIN campaign must be taken to the civilian population, both to "separate the population from the insurgents and deprive them [the insurgents] of support," and to "protect the population from insurgent exploitation and domination."[43] In this endeavour, the psychological and actual support of the population can be gained through "exposing, discrediting and destroying" the objectives, methods, infrastructure and subversive propaganda employed by the insurgents. The aim of all this, the document argues, is to achieve the key goal of any COIN campaign: to regain the support and allegiance of the people for the HN government.[44] Once the public supports the HN government and the government's security forces are capable of dealing with the residuum of the insurgency, the COIN mission, from the perspective of the US intervention forces, was understood to be largely complete.

2.2 1990: The 'low-intensity" legacy

In 1990, the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force jointly published FM 100-20/AFP (Air Force Publication) 3-20 Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict, to fill "a void which has existed in the Army and the Air Force for some time."[45] For the Army, the new manual superseded its previous field manual for low-intensity conflict (FM 100-20, published on 16 January 1981), which had appeared shortly after publication of the 1980 Marine Corps counterinsurgency doctrine.

The 1990 manual was a product of the U.S. military's experiences in the 1980s—dealing with insurgencies and counterinsurgencies in Asia, Africa and Latin America, many of which were inspired by Marxism, but also looking at the Soviet Union's gruelling eight-year experience in Afghanistan. Not surprisingly, the doctrine considered insurgency and counterinsurgency as only one subset of a broader category known as "low-intensity conflict," (LIC) to differentiate it from the main thrust of US strategic, operational and tactical doctrine, which throughout the Reagan era (the period that informed this latest doctrinal revision) was primarily concerned with defending Western Europe against a numerically overwhelming Soviet onslaught across the Inner-German Border. Low-intensity conflict and its various sub-components (and insurgency, counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, peacekeeping, and "peacetime contingency operations") were seen as a secondary task that would be likely to consume military time and resources while the armed forces trained and prepared for its principal focus in central Europe.

Another noteworthy aspect of the 1990 doctrine is that it considered insurgency and counter-insurgency to be two sides of the same coin, and foresaw U.S. involvement as equally possible on one side or the other, depending upon which U.S. interests were at stake in any given conflict. While America had played the role of the counter-insurgent in Vietnam, for example, in Nicaragua Washington found itself on the side of the insurgents, supporting the Contras against the Sandinistas; while in Afghanistan, America provided arms and financial support to the mujaheddin struggling to expel the Soviet occupation force. The difference between these sorts of operations and the principal focus of conventional, central front warfare lay in importance of "other imperatives." Where capstone doctrine was designed to ensure the "direct engagement and

[43] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 53.
[44] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 54.
[45] FM 100-20/AFP 3-20 *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: US Army Headquarters, 1990), Introduction, p. 2.

defeat of an enemy in war," doctrine for low-intensity conflict—which was defined as "a political military confrontation between contending states or groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states"—was driven by different imperatives: "political dominance, legitimacy, unity of effort, adaptability, and perseverance."[46]

As the 1990 doctrine represents a chronological stepping-stone between its 1980 predecessor and its 2004 (and 2006) successors, it is not surprising that it displays many similarities with both. From the point of view of contemporary understandings of insurgency and counter-insurgency, there is much that is similar, and much that is starkly different. The dynamics of a LIC, for example, are understood to be influenced principally by "change, discontent, poverty, violence and instability."[47] The driving influence of ideology, especially communist or Marxist ideology, that was a feature of the 1980 doctrine has more or less disappeared, while the role of religious ideology as a motivator (which, as will be seen, is a key feature of modern doctrine) has not yet reared its head.[48] To the extent that an insurgent postulates an ideology, the doctrine argues that his primary goal is to explain "what is wrong with society", to justify his actions, and to "promise great improvement after the government is overthrown;"[49] this understanding suggests that despite years of providing support to the Afghan insurgency against the Soviets, U.S. observers did not yet fully comprehend the nature of the ideology motivating their clients. Also, the main U.S. role in LIC is understood to be as a provider of "training, equipment, services and combat support" rather than as a primary combatant.[50] This is not surprising, as it reflects the bulk of U.S. experience in the 1980s. The authors of the doctrine were understandably unable to foresee the forthcoming watershed moments that would see enormous U.S. deployments to places like Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The 1990 doctrine nevertheless begins to display a number of features that would survive into subsequent expressions of how insurgencies and counter-insurgencies are understood. As noted above, five "imperatives" for the planning and conduct of LIC operations are posited. First, as argued in the 1980 Marine Corps manual, political considerations are deemed "dominant;" they "drive military decisions at every level from the strategic to the tactical." Military leaders are enjoined to "understand [America's] political objectives and the impact of military operations on them." The second imperative, "unity of effort," demands "interagency integration and coordination" all U.S. government action. Third, an LIC context demands "adaptability" on the part of the armed forces. Fourth, the success of a campaign in a LIC situation devolves upon questions of legitimacy, which is "the central concern of all parties directly involved in a conflict." Legitimacy is described as "the willing acceptance of the right of a government to govern or of a group or agency to make and enforce decisions." "No group or force," the doctrine warns, "can create legitimacy for itself, but it can encourage and sustain legitimacy by its actions." Finally, because LICs are, by their very nature, "protracted struggles," nations involved in them must demonstrate perseverance—"the pursuit of national goals and objectives for as long as necessary to achieve them."[51]

---

[46] Ibid, p. 2.
[47] FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, Chapter 1, p. 2.
[48] Similarly, the perpetrators of LIC are understood to be "urban guerillas", "anti-Marxist insurgents", "vigilante groups", and purveyors of "illicit narcotics" – all features of the 1980s that (with the possible exception of the guerillas) did not, in any significant numbers, survive into the 1990s. Ibid., p. 4.
[49] FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, Chapter 2, p. 3.
[50] Ibid, p. 2.
[51] FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, Chapter 1, pp. 5-6.

Some glimmerings of the importance of development appear in the 1990 doctrine, which establishes the "internal defense and development (IDAD) strategy" as one of the key lines of emphasis for U.S. forces engaged in LIC. The IDAD strategy is defined as "the full range of measures taken by a nation to promote its growth and to protect itself from subversion, lawlessness and insurgency," and focuses on "building viable political, economic, military and social institutions that respond to the needs of society."[52] The IDAD is based on four factors: "balanced development [that] satisfies grievances that the insurgents attempt to exploit;" "neutralization," which is the "physical and psychological separation of the insurgents from the population;" "security," or the protection of the people from the insurgents, and the provision of "a safe environment for national development;" and "mobilization" of the human and materiel resources of the population to the side of the government.[53] In planning and implementing this strategy, U.S. military commanders are required to observe four principles particular to defeating an insurgency: unity of effort; minimum use of violence; maximum use of intelligence; and responsive government.[54] All of these "principles" feature in both previous and subsequent editions of COIN doctrine.

In many ways, the 1990 doctrine manual is a conceptual stepping-stone, located halfway between the Vietnam-informed doctrine of the late 1970s, and the Iraq-informed doctrine published in 2006. The decline of Marxist-motivated insurgencies in Latin America, and the rise of something vastly different (e.g., in places like Afghanistan from 1980-88), led to new understandings of COIN warfare, with the result that the 1990 manual shows the first glimmerings of many aspects of COIN theory that would burst into full flower in the years following 9/11. While the 1990 doctrine retains many of the vestiges of older ideas, it also helped to transmit a number of long-standing "truths" about the nature of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies to later generations of theory. As such, it is an important signpost on the evolutionary pathway from the post-Vietnam to the post-Cold War years.

2.3 2004: Detritus of the "New World Order"

> Out of these troubled times…a new world order can emerge: a new era -- freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace.[55]

The preface to FM 3-07.22 *Counterinsurgency Operations*, the interim manual published in 2004, notes that the material contained therein "is based on existing doctrine and lessons learned from recent combat operations," and adds that "additional counterinsurgency doctrine is being developed," and is (was) intended for publication prior to October 2006―a clear reference to FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency*, which appeared in December 2006, and which will be the subject of the next section of this chapter.[56] The manner in which the 2004 document viewed the problem of insurgency and its solution suggests that doctrinal development was still in flux when the manual was written, and remained suspended somewhere between the communist-driven insurgent concepts of the Cold War, and the new, religiously-motivated insurgencies that America was

[52] FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, Chapter 2, p. 8.
[53] Ibid., Chapter 2, pp. 8-9.
[54] FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, Chapter 2, p. 9-10.
[55] President George H.W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress," 11 September 1990.
[56] FM 3-07.22, p. iv.

beginning to face in Afghanistan and Iraq. Like most attempts to straddle two different worlds, FM 3-07.22 approached neither remarkably well, and risked falling between them.

Three support concepts for U.S. assistance to a HN are envisioned: "Indirect support," in which the guiding principle is self-sufficiency on the part of the HN and U.S. economic and military assistance is designed to build "strong national infrastructures;" "Direct support (not involving combat operations)," involves military assistance in the fields of intelligence, communications and civil-military relations, but not normally training assistance or the transfer of arms and equipment; and "Direct support (involving combat operations)," which is the employment of U.S. combat forces on COIN operations. This last level of support requires Presidential authorization and is intended to serve "only as a temporary or provisional solution until HN forces are able to stabilize the situation and *provide security for the populace* (emphasis added)."[57] The last part of this phrase will be referred to again.

The 2004 doctrine manual highlights the importance of identifying the desired end state in any COIN situation, and establishing criteria for success. COIN missions "must achieve the end state established by the President," and in order to do so, must achieve five critical tasks:

- Protect the population;
- Establish local political institutions;
- Reinforce local governments;
- Eliminate insurgent capabilities; and
- Exploit information from local sources.[58]

These criteria for success will reappear later in the discussion.

The 2004 manual expands on the JP 1-02 definitions, arguing that an insurgency is a "protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control." Achieving a transfer of political legitimacy and authority is the principal goal of the insurgents, who are aiming to "mobilize human and material resources in order to form an alternative to the state." The "mobilization" sought includes both active and passive support for the "insurgency's programs, operations and goals."[59] These definitions reflect continuity with the 1980 manual as to how insurgencies are understood; the political component is primordial and fundamental, and there does not seem to be much allowance made for "insurgents" whose goals, while ideologically motivated, are not entirely governed by reason or the quest for permanent political power.

The 2004 doctrine categorizes uprisings against authority as either "rebellions" (which are defined as "uprisings against indigenous regimes") or "resistance movements" ("uprisings against an external occupying power"). Either may become an insurgency by virtue of their incorporation into a armed political campaign that employs armed forces, thereby creating "a political challenge to the state through the formation of, or desire to, create a counterstate." The doctrine acknowledges that religious ideology is playing an increasing role in generating insurgent movements, and argues that obtaining and retaining the support of the population is "the center of

---

[57] FM 3-07.22, vii.
[58] FM 3-07.22, viii.
[59] FM 3-07.22, 1-1.

gravity" of any insurgency. Popular support "must be gained in whatever proportion is necessary to sustain the insurgency movement (or, contrariwise, to defeat it)."[60]

Violence, according to the 2004 manual, is the single most important weapon available to any insurgency. The targets of violence, according to the doctrine, can be anything that the insurgents may deem an "obstruction" to their cause: "HN forces, foreign forces, aid workers, civilians who do not accept the insurgents' claims, and infrastructure." That said, violence can also be counterproductive, and excessive brutality may cause a population to reject an insurgency's actions (if not necessarily its philosophy or its aims) unless the insurgents are also able to demonstrate a causal, near-term link between their violence and "a better life" for the people.[61] Creating a mass perception of this linkage thus becomes a mission-critical goal for insurgent leaders, who both create and feed off of popular demands for change for the better. The doctrine suggests that popular causes can be translated into insurgent causes if the leaders of the insurgency are able to adopt them and shape them to their own ends (one means of doing so is by playing upon popular distaste for an occupying force, which is accomplished most effectively by provoking HN or supporting forces into over-reactions and the use of excessive force). This is not, however, a necessary condition; "Self-serving insurgent leaders with no regard for local conditions may launch an insurgency, even if the population supports the HN and has few grievances."[62]

The 2004 manual divides insurgent "doctrine" into two approaches: "mass mobilization," in which a hard core of insurgents provides the nucleus of revolt while a widespread uprising by the populace provides the manpower; and "armed action," wherein the insurgency is more compact, and the insurgents themselves provide the bulk of their own forces. Examples of the former include the popular approach employed by the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong forces during the Vietnam War, while the latter is exemplified by the activities of the Irish Republican Army during "The Troubles," the Taliban and pro-Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan after 2001, and the ongoing insurgency in Iraq.[63] While the manual does not go into the ideological motivations driving insurgents in any significant depth, the choice of examples would appear to support at least a prima facie correlation between "mass mobilization" insurgencies and communist ideology, whereas "armed action" insurgencies appear to be more likely to feature a hard ethnic or religious motivation (this apparent correlation would be worthy of deeper investigation).

Victory can be defined as denial of the insurgent's war aims, and thus the 2004 doctrine argues that "a successful counterinsurgency results in the neutralization by the state of the insurgency and its effort to form a counterstate." This definition presumes, of course, that the insurgents' overriding political goal has been to form a counterstate; this may not always be the case. "Defeating" an insurgency without redressing underlying conditions that may have motivated the populace to support or sympathize with the insurgents, however, may be a Pyrrhic proposition―but, the doctrine notes, addressing social or other conditions is not the province of military forces. "Counterinsurgency operations must balance elimination of grievances…and security force action that eliminates the insurgents." However, while a government may charge its

[60] FM 3-07.22, p. 1-3.
[61] FM 3-07.22, p. 1-3.
[62] FM 3-07.22, p. 1-4.
[63] FM 3-07.22, pp. 1-5 to 1-6.

military forces with defeating an insurgency, military forces are not, as a rule, in a position to deal with all of the causes thereof.[64]

This inherent incapacity notwithstanding, HN and supporting forces involved in COIN operations are the most visible manifestation of a government's COIN campaign, and often the first on the scene after an insurgent attack. They serve three crucial functions: as a "shield for carrying out reform;" as the means of restoring government control; and, tactically, as the mechanism for eliminating "insurgent leadership, cadre, and combatants, through death and capture, by co-opting individual members, or by forcing insurgents to leave the area," thus (pace Mao) "separating the fish from the sea" of the sympathetic populace within which the insurgent "swims." Of these functions, priority of place is given to the protective function of COIN forces; the doctrine deems it "imperative that HN military and police forces protect the populace and defend their own bases while simultaneously fighting an insurgency."[65]

This latter admonition illustrates one of the most complex internal contradictions of COIN operations (perhaps one of the reasons that it is referred to, as in the citation featured in the title of this paper, as "the graduate level of war"). They are often executed by military forces operating under constraints that form no part of their normal training and operational practices. In more conventional forms of warfare, an army is expected simultaneously to defend its own bases, and carry the fight to the enemy. By contrast, in an insurgency, the enemy is commingled with one's own people (or the people of the HN that one is attempting to support), and the COIN concept must aim to protect them not only from the ancillary effects of one's own weapons, but also from the deliberate attacks of an insurgency bent on provoking excessively forceful responses. This necessitates cautious precision when tailoring the use of force, and constant monitoring of both the military and the political results and repercussions thereof. When a conflict between goals and means arises, the 2004 doctrine advises COIN planners to err on the side of avoiding accidental harm to the population.

COIN operations differ in many ways from conventional military operations. The fact that security forces are required to err on the side of defence rather than offence is one; the generally protracted nature of COIN campaigns is another (an especial concern for representative governments which must maintain long-term public support for the endeavour). The burden on supporting (i.e., U.S.) forces is inversely proportional to the capacity of the HN, its security architecture, and its supporting infrastructure—and the fact that many, if not most, COIN campaigns are undertaken on behalf of the governments of less-developed nations, means that the majority of such efforts will be in places lacking vital infrastructure. The end result is that, in addition to self-defence, defence of the HN population, and attacking insurgents, committed military forces now face a fourth imperative: becoming "involved in nation building while simultaneously attempting to defeat an insurgency."[66] Finally, COIN campaigns face a variety of constraints, ranging from time (which may be affected by domestic and/or international political concerns); the means available to the HN; the legal implications of lending support to a government conducting a COIN campaign; geographic, cultural, religious, political or environmental "sensitivities;" the availability of potential partners; and the culture, politics,

[64] FM 3-07.22, pp. 1-9 and 1-10.
[65] FM 3-07.22, p. 1-10.
[66] FM 3-07.22, p. 1-10.

political character and long-term aspirations and intentions of the HN government.[67] Any or all of these can complicate the planning and execution of even the most modest-seeming COIN operation.

The "fundamental conditions" for victory in a COIN campaign are defined as a "secure populace;" "established local political institutions;" "contributing [i.e., effective] local government;" neutralization of the residual capacity of the insurgents; and making use of information from local sources to better understand and overcome the insurgency.[68] The single most important fact is providing "security from the influence of the insurgents initially" after which the population is "mobilized, armed and trained to protect itself." In a phrase worthy of being engraved on the heart of every COIN commander, the 2004 manual notes that "effective security allows local political and administrative institutions to operate freely and commerce to flourish."

With respect to the use of formed military forces, the 2004 manual states that the role of the U.S. Army in COIN operations "is to administer, train for, and successfully conduct full spectrum operations, with great emphasis on stability operations," of which COIN is merely one example. Army forces placed in a supporting role are to assist HN forces in conducting COIN, local and area security operations, and to "advise and assist in finding, dispersing, capturing, and destroying the insurgent force." At the same time, however, the Army is also charged with providing training to HN forces at all levels to enable them to perform, and eventually assume responsibility for, all defence tasks. In doing so, the aim is "to provide a secure environment in which developmental programs can take effect while respecting the rights and dignity" of the supported population.[69] The aim of the U.S. force commitment is to provide stability while a new government establishes itself; help that government gain control and acquire the skills and expertise necessary to carry out the full range of functions expected of it; assist HN forces to assume, as soon as possible, responsibility for "the primary combat role;" and in doing so, set the conditions for the wind-down and eventual withdrawal of the U.S. commitment.

This aim plays in the planning process for COIN operations. The primary consideration is one of timeliness. Once it becomes apparent that COIN support may be necessary, it should be initiated as soon as practicable in order to prevent the enemy from gaining momentum; "an escalating insurgency becomes increasingly difficult to defeat,"[70] a maxim demonstrated by the slow response by Washington to the escalating crisis in Iraq following the Golden Mosque bombing in 2006. Because the insurgent's center of gravity is popular support (denying it to the government, and attracting it to the insurgency are equally important), the insurgent's primary target is likely to be the people. The goal of a COIN campaign, therefore, should be to "separate the insurgent from the people and their resources."[71]

Security of population and city centres, therefore, becomes a key prerequisite to other operations; individual communities, the people they contain, and the civil and economic machinery they support, must be cleared of insurgents and insurgent infrastructure, and made safe before the

---

[67] FM 3-07.22, pp. 1-10 to 1-11.
[68] FM 3-07.22, pp. 2-2 and 2-3.
[69] FM 3-07.22, p. 2-3.
[70] FM 3-07.22, p. 3-1.
[71] FM 3-07.22, p. 3-2.

enemy may be pursued elsewhere. The manual even notes that "in areas under insurgent influence, it will be necessary to construct defenses around existing villages and concentrate rural populations into defendable population units."[72] "The entire political administrative unit…as well as each individual community, must be secured all the time" in order to prevent the insurgents from harming or manipulating the population. "The primary objective of counterinsurgency operations," simply put, "is to neutralize the insurgents and…establish a secure environment within which political, social, and economic progress is possible."[73] This may be the single most important principle expressed in the whole of the 2004 doctrine manual.

One of the more interesting features of the 2004 manual is figure 3-1, the "Leader's Checklist for Counterinsurgency Operations." Most of the 12 main points listed are established principles of military strategy―e.g., "emphasize secrecy and surprise," "plan for and use all resources"―but some are particularly relevant to COIN situations. Four of these are worthy of special mention:

- "Concentrate on elimination of the insurgents, not on terrain objectives;"
- "Maintain the offensive in all kinds of weather (for example, do not bog down during the rainy season – limited offensive operations are preferable to passive measures;"
- "Get counterinsurgency forces out of garrisons, cities and towns; off the roads and trails into the environment of the insurgents;" and
- "Avoid establishment of semipermanent patrol bases laden with artillery and supplies that tend to tie down the force. (Pay special attention to prevent mobile units from becoming fixed.)"[74]

While at first glance these principles appear to be little more than COIN-specific rebranding of classical military adages, their internal logic is important. If, as noted above, the "primary objective of counterinsurgency operations is…to establish a secure environment" for political, social and economic progress, then there is a natural tendency to do so by occupying "key terrain" ―which usually includes urban and population centres. The checklist, however, reminds the COIN planner that the ultimate purpose, and the means, of providing security for the population is to prevent insurgent attacks―and while "presence" is a necessary factor in this equation, it is not sufficient. As is the case with domestic terrorism (which is what, in a nutshell, contemporary insurgencies most resemble), one successful insurgent attack does more damage to public perceptions of safety than can be assuaged by nine interrupted or failed attacks. The only means of preventing that one attack is through complete elimination of the insurgents―something that can only be accomplished by targeting enemy personnel and infrastructure. A defensive posture can raise the operational cost for the insurgents, but it cannot prevent attacks. Offensive action is necessary to eliminate the ability of the insurgents to cause harm.

If the primacy of the offensive over the defensive is the first general principle illustrated by the above-cited checklist, the second might best be described as "mingling." Military forces on long-duration operations have a natural tendency to "dig in"―to establish, occupy and continually improve a position chosen for defensive, geographic or other relevant purposes. Improvements constitute an investment of time and resources that is not to be lightly thrown away, especially

[72] FM 3-07.22, p. 3-3.
[73] FM 3-07.22, p. 3-8.
[74] FM 3-07.22, p. 3-9.

when a large unit's area of operations is unlikely to change.[75] Nonetheless, if the history of COIN operations over the past century teaches any lessons, one of the most important is that COIN warfare is all but impossible without extensive and intimate contact with the population that COIN forces are meant to be protecting. This is more than simply a question of presence and being on hand to respond to an incident; it is a matter of gathering invaluable operational intelligence on the identities, whereabouts and activities of insurgents from the other denizens of the "sea" in which the insurgents "swim".

The 2004 doctrine manual offers a succinct summary of the challenge facing U.S. forces engaged in a COIN campaign:

> The American way of war has been to substitute firepower for manpower. As a result, US forces have frequently resorted to firepower in the form of artillery or air any time they make contact. This creates two negatives in a counterinsurgency. First, massive firepower causes collateral damage, thereby frequently driving the locals into the arms of the insurgents. Second, it allows insurgents to break contact after having inflicted casualties on friendly forces. A more effective method is to attack with ground forces to gain and maintain contact, with the goal of completely destroying the insurgent force.[76]

The challenge faced by U.S. forces in reorienting towards COIN warfare has been to eschew the hard-won, and hitherto invaluable, ability to concentrate massive amounts of firepower, in favour of traditional, manpower-intensive ground operations involving—indeed, demanding—large numbers of highly-skilled and well-equipped infantrymen.

The challenge of effecting this strategic shift may well have been exacerbated by the efforts undertaken by DOD, under former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, to transform the U.S. armed forces into a smaller, more lethal organization. This endeavour was making progress when the war on terror intervened, and DOD (re-)discovered that, in certain types of military operations, advanced technology, especially firepower, cannot easily be substituted for manpower. If high-speed, high-lethality mechanized warfare and counter-insurgency are two fundamentally different forms of war—and they are—then it should have come as no surprise that the force that defeated Iraq and ousted Saddam in a matter of weeks in 2003 was not optimized to conduct an intense, nation-wide, door-to-door COIN campaign only a few months thereafter.

2.4 2006: The Iraqi cockpit

FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* was published on 15 December 2006, and remains the current doctrine manual for COIN operations for the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps (where it is

[75] The tendency of advanced mechanized forces to "laager up" for long periods is to a certain extent reminiscent of past wars, where the need to forage for supplies or to "go into winter quarters" outside of the campaigning season tended to tie down otherwise mobile armies. It is especially prevalent today due to the reliance of heavy forces on logistical support (especially for fuel and ammunition), which makes it risky to move too quickly or too far from pipelines, stockpiles or other sources of essential war materiel. There are doubtless many other factors tending to encourage immobility among long-service troops; further research on this topic might yield useful insights.
[76] FM 3-07.22, p. 3-10.

designated MCWP 3-33.5, and is distributed by the Marine Corps Combat Development Command).[77] The first thing one notices when comparing it to the 2004 manual is that, contrary to the notice in the latter publication (that "additional counterinsurgency doctrine is being developed", which was to be combined with the 2004 manual and published prior to October 2006),[78] much of the 2006 manual appears to have been comprehensively rewritten.

From the perspective of the present Memorandum, the two most interesting aspects of FM 3-24 are, first, that U.S. COIN doctrine appears to have been substantively updated and revised to better reflect the unique characteristics of today's COIN environment (in which the enemy that U.S. forces are most likely to encounter are either jihadists or some other species of insurgent motivated, in one way or another, by Islamic ideology). This point is brought home to the reader in the preface to the manual, which, while attempting to retain a patina of non-judgmental generality, acknowledges that one of the goals of the new manual is to "merge traditional approaches to COIN with the realities of a new international arena shaped," *inter alia*, by "the spread of extremist ideologies—some of them claiming the authority of a religious faith."[79] The document also acknowledges that insurgents employ asymmetric attacks in order to avoid the crushing weight of U.S. technological superiority; and that their strategy is aimed not only at U.S. forces, but also against the U.S. public, as part of a concerted effort "to exhaust U.S. national will…by undermining and outlasting public support."[80]

A second striking aspect of the manual is that the strategic principles of COIN campaign and operational design and execution do not appear to have changed much. The document opens by acknowledging that the U.S. military has "throughout its history" been forced to "relearn the principles" of COIN operations. While all insurgencies have different characteristics, "broad historical trends" are evident in the development and emergence of insurgencies, and, as a result, "the tactics used to successfully defeat them are likewise similar in most cases." There is some evidence of humility in the face of the reverses suffered in the year leading up to the publication of the manual, and its authors appeal to history, noting that

> …forces conducting COIN operations usually begin poorly. Western militaries too often neglect the study of insurgency. They falsely believe that armies trained to win large conventional wars are automatically prepared to win small, unconventional ones. In fact, some capabilities required for conventional success—for example, the ability to execute operational manoeuvre and employ massive firepower—may be of limited utility or even counterproductive in COIN operations. Nonetheless, conventional forces beginning COIN operations often try to use these capabilities to defeat insurgents; they almost always fail.[81]

[77] Throughout this Technical Memorandum the Army designator "FM 3-24" is used when referring to the 2006 document. This is to avoid confusion with the 1980 US Marine Corps document, which bears the same MCWP designator as the 2006 edition.
[78] FM 3-07.22, p. iv.
[79] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. vii.
[80] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. ix. It is hardly surprising to see this point glossed over in the 2004 manual, when public support for the war in Iraq was still high, and raised so prominently in a document completed in 2006, when public support for the war had declined precipitously.
[81] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. ix.

As noted in the previous section, adopting a different strategic approach to deal with a developing insurgency may be less a question of doing everything differently than one of shifting emphasis from one area of capability to another. When and how to execute such a shift, however, depends on how the insurgency evolves, and—as noted—all insurgencies are different. Each COIN campaign is therefore by definition a learning situation—and the 2006 doctrine acknowledges from the outset that "learning" in an insurgency/counter-insurgency battle is interactive; the enemy's expertise and operational methodology are not static. Counter-insurgencies are "learning competitions" in which "the side that learns faster and adapts more rapidly…usually wins." FM 3-24 suggests, therefore, that "Learn and Adapt" should be the watchword for U.S. forces engaged in COIN operations.[82] The goal of this methodology is to develop a continuous learning cycle through which U.S. forces are able to identify, recognize, analyze and develop countermeasures for evolving insurgent tactics, techniques and procedures; and to tighten this sequence so that it operates more rapidly than the insurgents' own learning and adaptive processes. Cyclic adaptation, the manual notes, is characteristic of a learning organization. And whereas "learning organizations defeat insurgencies," the authors argue, "bureaucracies do not."[83]

In providing an overview of the origins of insurgencies and the multifarious factors that motive those who participate in and support them, the 2006 doctrine manual completes the transition that was already under way in the 2004 manual—that of writing into doctrine the psychological transition from the bipolar, East-West world to the post-Soviet, unipolar world. While some things have changed, though, others remain familiar. Political power, for example, remains, according to the doctrine, the central issue motivating insurgents; and the goal of an insurgency is still understood to be the overthrow of an existing political order. The discussion of "counterstates," though, has been expunged.[84] By contrast, the role of "transnational organizations motivated by ideologies based on extremist religious or ethnic beliefs" takes on a much more visible profile.[85] Islamism has replaced international communism as the key transnational motivating factor in modern insurgencies, in essence if not in name.

What is of greater interest, however, is the discussion of the extent to which the "rules" governing civilized behaviour in general, and armed conflict in particular, tend to favour insurgents. The manual argues that the odds are stacked heavily against any government engaging in COIN warfare, and any government providing COIN support. Insurgents deliberately leverage the differing standards and norms of conduct applicable to states, as one of their principle means of asymmetric attack. Political hesitancy, and the development of measured, proportional responses to insurgent provocations (the severity and proportionality of which are always judged, and often condemned, by the "international community") allow insurgents time to further their project, and expand their operational and support networks. Moreover, as identified in the previous section, insurgents benefit from the same strategic advantage as terrorists: they "succeed by sowing chaos

---

[82] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. ix.
[83] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. x.
[84] Many Iraqi insurgent groups (on both sides of the sectarian divide) seem to be fighting over perceptions that their sect will be disadvantaged due to power-sharing arrangements in the Iraqi Government. Only the avowed Islamists seek a "counterstate" in any sense. To the extent that the more extreme Islamist jihadists seek a "counterstate", however, it is not a "state" in the modern sense that they seek, but rather a sharia-derived, supra-national Islamic "caliphate" based on a model that has not existed since the Seventh Century (if ever). This is not a definition of "state" that allows useful dialogue between insurgents and counterinsurgents.
[85] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. 1-2.

and disorder anywhere," whereas the government attempting to subdue them "fails unless it maintains a degree of order everywhere." Insurgents operate in small numbers, in dispersed and often secretive organizations, meaning that "successful COIN operations often require a high ratio of security forces to the protected population"—which is one of the reasons why protracted COIN operations can be difficult to sustain over the long term. COIN campaigns, by their very nature, demand "a firm political will and substantial patience by the government, its people, and the countries providing support."[86]

The 2006 manual rebalances the strategic emphasis vis-à-vis targeting insurgents and redressing the political issues that engendered, and that sustain, the insurgency. Where the 2004 doctrine admonished leaders to "concentrate on the elimination of the insurgents," the 2006 doctrine accentuates the desirability (indeed, the inseparability) of simultaneously addressing both the insurgents activities, and their "causes":

> …killing insurgents – while necessary, especially with respect to extremists—by itself cannot defeat an insurgency. Gaining and retaining the initiative requires counterinsurgents to address the insurgency's causes through stability operations as well. This initially involves securing and controlling the local populace and providing for essential services. As security improves, military resources contribute to supporting government reforms and reconstruction projects. As counterinsurgents gain the initiative, offensive operations focus on eliminating the insurgent cadre, while defensive operations focus on protecting the populace and infrastructure from direct attacks. As counterinsurgents establish military ascendancy, stability operations expand across the area of operations (AO) and eventually predominate.[87]

"Victory," the doctrine argues, "is achieved when the populace consents to the government's legitimacy and stops actively and passively supporting the insurgency" (an uncomfortably-worded objective, but one which illustrates the desired end-state of any COIN campaign—a government "deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed").

The fact that the doctrine explicitly differentiates between two different types of insurgents—normal (or perhaps "moderate") insurgents who turn to violence as the result of some transitory motive, who may some day be reconciled with the HN government if the issues that impelled them to violence are addressed; and "extremists," whose demands are so *outré* that they cannot be reconciled, and who must therefore be eliminated—is a significant conceptual step forward. Nor is it a foregone conclusion that the insurgency is monolithic; commanders engaged in a COIN campaign "may face a confusing and shifting coalition of many kinds of opponents, some of whom may be at odds with one another." The manual highlights the situation in Iraq at present, where insurgent groups with different political goals "form loose coalitions when it serves their interests," while fighting among themselves at other times—even, from time to time, while engaged in combat with COIN forces.[88] The recognition that the enemy is not necessarily monolithic, and that even apparently cohesive factions may exhibit fault lines susceptible to exploitation, represents a clean break from past understandings of insurgencies (especially with

---

[86] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. 1-2.
[87] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. 1-3.
[88] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, pp. 1-4 to 1-8.

respect to the view—perhaps mistaken—that the communist-inspired guerrilla movements of the past were necessarily ideologically cohesive), and thus constitutes another important evolutionary step forward.

This problem of extremists in modern COIN situations is exemplified by al Qaeda, the only group meriting special mention in the discussion of the nature of contemporary insurgency and counter-insurgency. According to FM 3-24, al Qaeda "seeks to transform the Islamic world and reorder its relationships with other regions and cultures," and is notable for the willingness of its members "to execute suicide attacks to achieve their ends." While true, this assessment stops short of the key point about the nature of al Qaeda's motivation (which is rooted in a religiously-inspired mythological historical construct and emphasizes the glory of martyrdom, thus all but precluding dissuasion or deterrence); and its goals, which extend far beyond the Islamic world (as evidenced, for example, by the attacks of 9/11), and which are essentially eschatological, thereby precluding negotiation in hopes of achieving reconciliation through addressing "causes."

The 2006 manual provides an in-depth discussion of the dynamics, ideology, organization and operational methodologies of insurgents and insurgencies, information which is relevant and valuable, and far more extensive than in either the 1980 or 2004 publications. It also enumerates some of the strategic vulnerabilities of insurgent organizations, an important consideration as these provide COIN campaign planners with an array of points at which pressure may be applied to fracture an insurgency. Some of the vulnerabilities are operational (the need for a base of operations, operational security and secrecy, financial resources and external support), while others are ideological (the importance of maintaining a consistent mobilization message, the need to maintain momentum lest the endeavour stagnate, the problem of reconciling internal divisions, and the ever-present threat of betrayers and informants).[89] Of these, perhaps the most threatening (and therefore, from the perspective of COIN forces, the most valuable) problems are those of internal divisions and informants. Even in insurgencies motivated by shared ideology, power struggles are common; in more fragmented insurgencies, ideological differences may be extreme, and can only be papered over for so long. "Rifts between insurgent leaders, if identified, can be exploited," and, where non-extremist insurgents are concerned, offers of amnesty "or a seemingly generous compromise" can "cause divisions within an insurgency and present opportunities to split or weaken it."[90]

Another welcome innovation in the 2006 manual is a discussion of historical principles for the design and execution of COIN campaigns, and a comparison of these to principles derived from recent COIN experience. Of equal (perhaps even greater) interest is the enumeration of what the manual refers to as the "paradoxes" of counter-insurgency operations (see Table 3).

Some of these reflect long-standing military conventional wisdom. Others are less obvious, and indeed would seem counterintuitive were it not for the salutary example of Iraq. FM 3-24 provides nine pages of discussion of these principles and paradoxes—a vast quantity of material that it would not be helpful to reproduce. However, the list itself will serve as a reference point for comparison with other publications—notably the key article on COIN operations published by General Petraeus in the January-February 2006 edition of *Military Review*—a think-piece derived from the general's experiences in Iraq, which contains the kernels outlined above, and which goes

[89] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. 1-17.
[90] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. 1-19.

a long way towards explaining why the 2006 COIN doctrine manual differs so markedly from the edition published only two years earlier (and which is the subject of the next section of this chapter).

Table 3: FM 3-24: Principles and paradoxes of COIN operations[91]

<table>
<tr><th>Historical Principles</th><th>Paradoxes</th></tr>
<tr><td>• 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
• Counterinsurgents should prepare for a long-term commitment</td><td rowspan="3">• Sometimes, the more you protect your force, the less secure you may be
• Sometimes, the more force is used, the less effective it is
• The more successful the counter-insurgency is, the less force can be used and the more risk must be accepted
• Sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction
• Some of the best weapons for counterinsurgents do not shoot
• The host nation doing something tolerably is better than [the supporting nation] doing it well
• If a tactic works this week, it might not work next wee; if it works well in this province, it might not work in the next
• Tactical success guarantees nothing
• Many important decisions are not made by generals</td></tr>
<tr><th>Contemporary Principles</th></tr>
<tr><td>• Information and expectations must be managed
• Use the appropriate level of force
• Learn and adapt
• Empower the lowest levels
• Support the Host Nation</td></tr>
</table>

The discussion of the nature of insurgencies and counter-insurgencies concludes with a table listing and comparing practices in COIN operations that have proven successful or unsuccessful. Again, some of these are obvious, while others are less so. In view of how the "surge" was designed and executed, several should be highlighted. Among the "successful practices" identified are "Focus on the population, its needs, and its security;" "Isolate insurgents from the populace;" "Provide amnesty and rehabilitation for those willing to support the new government;" "Place host nation in the lead…as soon as the security situation permits;" and "Deny sanctuary to insurgents." Among the "unsuccessful practices" worthy of special emphasis are, "Overemphasize killing and capturing the enemy rather than securing and engaging the populace;" "Concentrate military forces in large bases for protection;" and "Ignore peacetime government processes, including legal procedures."[92]

These and other principles and practices highlighted in FM 3-24 will be revisited in the context of Petraeus' campaign to retrieve what, at the time the document was published, was a deteriorating and, according to many observers, all-but-irretrievable situation in Iraq.

---

[91] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, pp. 1-20 to 1-28.
[92] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. 1-29.

2.5 The Petraeus observations

The January-February 2006 edition of *Military Review* featured an article entitled “Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq.” Penned by then-Lieutenant General Petraeus, the essay was presented as an example of the “time-honored tradition” of soldiers sharing with their comrades the observations and conclusions of their wartime service in the interests of improving the overall operational effectiveness of the force, and of husbanding scarce resources—especially lives—in time of conflict.[93] Drafted in the form of a military staff paper, Petraeus provided a list of fourteen “observations,” expanding upon each in detail, and incorporating examples gleaned from his own experience and that of others.

Petraeus’ observations were wide-ranging and touch on a broad array of subjects, many of them not traditional fare for discussion under the aegis of military strategy. Some of his observations incorporating historical examples not likely to be familiar to the average military reader more accustomed to accounts of major infantry and tank battles, naval engagements, or air campaigns.

> ***Ambassador Bremer and his CPA [Coalition Provisional Authority] team did much good work under difficult and dangerous circumstances. But the value of that work was outweighed by the harm caused by the fact of occupation. The United States would have been in a far better position to help Iraqis fulfil President Bush’s vision of a new, free, and benign Iraq if we had been able to work with them as partners rather than as overlords.***
>
> \- Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, 502

Petraeus began with an admonition derived from an article published by T.E. Lawrence (the British soldier-scholar better known as “Lawrence of Arabia”) in August of 1917. Lawrence, whose experience was as an insurgent rather than a counter-insurgent, was a keen observer of Arab tradition, and his advice is often culturally dependent rather than grounded in time-tested military wisdom. Foreign forces supporting Arab armies, Lawrence cautioned, should not “try to do too much with [their] own hands,” arguing that, for reasons of national pride as much the need to build HN capacity, more progress is achieved by teaching a man to fish (even if he does it poorly at first), than by giving him a fish. Petraeus repeated this advice, noting that doing, instead of helping, tends to prolong the need for support and assistance by delaying the emergence of the indigenous capacity which is the *sine qua non* of success in any COIN campaign. “Assist, rather than do” should be the watchword of foreign forces assisting in a COIN context.[94]

Petraeus counselled rapid activity by foreign forces, using the argument that “every army of liberation has a half-life beyond which it turns into an army of occupation.” While the analogy is suspect, the principle is not. The invasion of Iraq was predicated upon a number of casus belli, the most important of which, from the perspective of the average Iraqi citizen, was almost certainly the ouster of Saddam and the replacement of his regime by a representative democracy. Many Iraqis doubtless expected a rapid transition to self-government—which, for various reasons, did

[93] Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus, “Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq”, *Military Review*, January-February 2006, p. 2.
[94] Petraeus, “Observations”, pp. 3-4.

not occur for more than a year after the fall of Baghdad. Some have argued that this may have led to disillusionment and increased popular support for the insurgency.[95]

The third observation—that "money is ammunition" and that, "depending on the situation, money can be more important than real ammunition"—is both true, and of long pedigree in the annals of military history. One of the axioms of modern military planning (especially in armies that make maximum use of firepower) is that one should never send a man where one can send a shell. COIN operations, however, as noted above, often preclude the use of shells due to the potential political impact of collateral damage—but in such situations, sending a dollar may prove even more advantageous. This has been a feature of operations by organized military forces against tribal opponents for centuries; Rome frequently used gifts and bribes to turn foes into allies, rather than having to fight and defeat them. Caesar did this on numerous occasions during his eight-year campaign to subdue Gaul.

Table 5:Observations from Soldiering in Iraq

(Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus)

♦

"Do not try to do too much
with your own hands"

♦

Act quickly, because every Army of liberation
has a half-life

♦

Money is ammunition

♦

Increasing the number of stakeholders
is critical to success

♦

Analyze "costs and benefits"
before each operation

♦

Intelligence is the key to success

♦

Everyone must do nation-building

♦

Help build institutions, not just units

♦

Cultural awareness is a force multiplier

♦

Success in a counterinsurgency requires
more than just military operations

♦

Ultimate success depends on local leaders

♦

Remember the strategic corporals and
strategic lieutenants

♦

There is no substitute for flexible,
adaptable leaders

♦

A leader's most important task
is to set the right tone

♦

While Caesar's campaign was one of conquest rather than liberation, there are similarities between some of the incidents recounted in *De Bello Gallico*, and Petraeus' practice of providing remuneration to Iraqi tribal leaders in exchange for military service by their armed tribesmen. Although this practice has been derided by critics of the war as "bribery,"[96] it constituted recognition and redress of a relatively straightforward dynamic: that many Iraqis turned to the insurgents not out of ideological conviction, but rather as the only available source of income. Providing alternate employment reduced the operational impact of the insurgency at remarkably little expense compared to the potential cost,

[95] The reasons underlying this failure are addressed in detail by Douglas J. Feith in chapters 14 and 15 of *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), pp. 425-502.

[96] E.g., Pepe Escobar, "Behind the Anbar Myth", *Asia Times Online*, 14 September 2007, accessed at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/II14Ak04.html.

in lives and equipment, of using force to achieve the same outcome. As Petraeus put it in his April 2008 testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, "the salaries paid to the Sons of Iraq alone cost far less than the cost savings in vehicles not lost due to the enhanced security in local communities."[97]

This latter calculus informs the fifth of Petraeus' observations—that military actions in any COIN campaign must be subjected to a cost-benefit analysis in terms of their potential political impact before they are executed. Citing former SACEUR General John Galvin, Petraeus noted that the aim of COIN operations should be "to end each day with fewer enemies than we had when it started."[98] By this calculus, the manner in which an operation is conducted can be more important than the outcome it is expected to achieve—and, if the potential outcome of the operation could lead to the creation of more insurgents than are likely to be neutralized, it might be preferable to do nothing.

Some of the other observations contained in the article (like many aspects of COIN doctrine over the years), while appearing to be nothing more than common military sense, are in fact potentially more significant in a COIN context than in conventional military operations. Intelligence, for example, is dubbed the "key to success," a moniker that always holds true, but that is especially relevant for COIN forces seeking to surgically target and eliminate insurgents without disturbing, let alone harming, their neighbours. Such precision is virtually impossible without detailed human intelligence (HUMINT). The corollary to this, of course, is that detailed HUMINT cannot be obtained without regular, intimate and friendly contact between COIN forces and the population they are tasked to protect.

Annex A to this Technical Memorandum—"Hussayn's Story"—contains an anecdote drawn from the U.S. counter-insurgency experience in Iraq that illustrates this principle. After the fall of Baghdad, "Hussayn" (a former member of the Iraqi Air Force) and his family became accustomed to regular visits by U.S. foot patrols. When insurgent activities in Hussayn's neighbourhood suddenly intensified, however, U.S. personnel reverted to mounted patrolling. Hussayn, a resident of a neighbourhood where the insurgents were based and from which they were operating,[99] possessed a good deal of information that might have been valuable to the US COIN forces—but he could not impart it to them, because "the Humvees travel fast and no one [came] to [his] house any more."[100] During the surge, the foot patrols of "courteous" and "watchful" U.S. soldiers began again—whereupon Hussayn invited them into his house for tea, and provided them with a map of where the 'Wahabis' were. The lesson of "Hussayn's Story" is clear—there is simply no substitute for intimate, regular, face-to-face contact between COIN forces and the local population.

This is not a new lesson; very few of the "lessons learned" from recent COIN experiences are new. Military history is replete with examples of successful and unsuccessful COIN campaigns, from Caesar's pursuit of Pompeian forces in Spain during the Civil War (culminating in the Battle

---

[97] Petraeus, "Report to Congress", 8 April 2008, p. 6.
[98] Petraeus, "Observations", p. 6.
[99] "Hussayn" calls the insurgents "Wahabis"—a revealing and very interesting nomenclature that says a great both about the nature of the insurgency, and about the average Iraqi's perception of the origins and motivations of the insurgents.
[100] See Annex A, "Hussayn's Story."

of Munda in 45 BC), to Napoleon's unsuccessful attempts to subdue the Spanish *guerrilleros* during the Peninsular War from 1808 to 1814. Charges that the U.S. military is in the process of "relearning counterinsurgency," however, overstate the case. Shifting from mechanized manoeuvre warfare to COIN operations is less a matter of changing completely one's military modus operandi, than it is of shifting emphasis from one set of strategic objectives to another. This is the challenge that the U.S., and its allies, have faced in Iraq (and Afghanistan) since the onset of the war on terror.

Some of Petraeus' observations, while perhaps less obvious, are equally important. For example, he argues that the population must be given a stake in their own protection, and stresses the importance of creating, if they do not already exist, the political, social and economic institutions needed to support their society (with a focus on building "institutions, not just units"). Because the demands of reconstruction are likely overwhelm even the most generously-staffed civil-military affairs organization, manpower will be at a premium, and thus "everyone must do nation-building." "People are the vital terrain," and therefore "cultural awareness is a force multiplier"—maxims no less true today than when Rome encountered the Germans, the Franks repulsed the Moors, or the Russians met the Mongols, the Spaniards the Aztecs, or the Turks the Magyars. In any encounter between different human cultures, cultural awareness has always been, and will always be, a "force multiplier;" strategists have always admonished generals to "know the enemy."[101] Finally, readers are reminded that leaders must be flexible, must set the right tone for operations, must trust their subordinates, and must encourage and mentor local HN leaders. All of this adds up to the 10th observation—that success in a COIN campaign "requires more than just military operations."[102]

These observations represent an embryo—the first stage of development of a new concept of COIN strategy that served as the foundation for the development of the latest iteration of doctrine. Petraeus' article antedated publication of the 2006 edition of FM 3-24 by nearly a year, and the manual demonstrates how these ideas were adopted, expanded, fleshed out and underwritten with historical examples—and how their implications for U.S. COIN strategy were derived and explained.[103] While analogies, as noted above, are always suspect, it would not be inaccurate to describe the Petraeus article as a kernel of yeast that, when injected into the vast body of COIN experience gleaned by the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2001 and 2006, sparked a rapid and highly productive fermentation. FM 3-24 is the filtered and finished result.

To take this analogy one step further, we must turn to the "Counterinsurgency Guidance" that was issued to U.S. forces by Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, Commander of the Multinational Corps—Iraq, as the surge got under way in June 2007. This document, a mere two and a half pages long, is perhaps best described as the distilled essence of the strategic principles that were outlined in the abstract by Petraeus in his "Observations" piece, and that were eventually refined into doctrine in FM 3-24. The Guidance document is clear, concise, pointed and penetrating, and

[101] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Trans. and ed. by James Clavell (New York: Delta Publishing, 1983), p. 18. Sun Tzu's written work is estimated to have first appeared somewhere between 500 and 300 B.C.
[102] Petraeus, "Observations," pp. 7-9.
[103] When, prior to his confirmation hearings in 2007, he was asked to provide the Senate Armed Services Committee with a written description of the major lessons he had learned during his previous tours in Iraq, Petraeus cited his 14 observations and attached a copy of the *Military Review* article.

consists of a series of ten "mutually supporting principles" designed to assist subordinate commanders in planning and executing COIN operations. These points are excerpted in table 6.

These ten points are a concise and comprehensive summary of the "commander's intent"—the strategic thrust behind the transformed COIN campaign designed and executed by Petraeus and Odierno between June and December of 2007. Along with the Petraeus' observations and the past quarter-century of US COIN doctrine, they form part of the objective standard against which the design and execution of the surge strategy must be measured.

Table 6: Counter-insurgency guidance, HQ Multi-national Corps—Iraq (June 2007)

1. Secure the people where they sleep. Population security is our primary mission…
2. Give the people justice and honor…never walk away from a local citizen who believes he or she has been treated unjustly…
3. Integrate civilian and military efforts…synchronize efforts to improve local security with initiatives aimed at making progress in governance and economic development.
4. Get out and walk…work dismounted. Vehicles…limit out situational awareness and insulate us from the Iraqi people we intend to secure….Stop by, don't drive by. Patrol on foot to gain and maintain contact with the population and the enemy. That's the only way to dominate urban terrain.
5. We are in a fight for intelligence….Intelligence is not a "product" provided by higher headquarters, but something we gather ourselves through our own operations….Our presence in communities could lead to a flood of unsolicited tips about the enemy…units must create opportunities for the local population to provide intelligence...
6. Every unit must advise their ISF [Iraqi Security Forces] partners….Coalition and Iraqi units live, work, and fight together in a combined effort to protect the population…
7. Include the ISF in your operations at the lowest possible level. When it comes to language capacity, cultural awareness, and having a "feel" for what is normal in the local environment, Coalition forces are at a natural disadvantage. In contrast, ISF units possess all these abilities…
8. Look beyond the IED [Improvised Explosive Device] – get the network that placed it….damage and "roll up" that network, ultimately defeating the threat.
9. Be first with the truth….Tell the truth, stay in your lane, and get the message out fast. Be forthright and never allow enemy lies to stand unchallenged. Demand accuracy, adequate context and proper characterization from the media.
10. Make the people choose….We must get the Iraqi populace off the fence – and on the side of the GOI [Government of Iraq]….Concentrate on getting Iraqis to choose to be part of the solution at the local level….Above all, protect the people who – for whatever reason – have made the irrevocable choice….win over local leaders to encourage the community to shift to the side of the new Iraq.

The next chapter will examine how the surge evolved, from the situation assessment in mid-2006 that forced the Bush Administration to acknowledge that disaster was looming in Iraq, through to the widespread realization, by late autumn of 2007, that disaster was no longer imminent, and that real progress was being achieved.

The final chapter will examine the causal linkages (if any) between the design, implementation and outcome of the surge, these strategic principles, and the doctrinal concepts from which they were derived.

3 The Surge

This chapter examines how, from a strategic perspective, the "surge" unfolded over the period from its inception in late 2006, to the acknowledgement, by late 2007 and early 2008, that significant results had been achieved and that the security situation in Iraq had, for the time being at least, been retrieved. This is followed by the final chapter, which derives the key elements of a contemporary COIN strategy; establishes their doctrinal genealogy; evaluates how closely the strategy designed and executed by Generals Petraeus and Odierno correlates with the design principles for COIN operations described in FM 3-24 and its predecessors; and offers an assessment of the extent to which the success of the surge was due to "new and groundbreaking" strategic concepts.

3.1 The Iraqi Study Group

By the end of 2006, Washington's strategy for victory in Iraq had collapsed, and the operational balance—between the U.S., Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces on one side, and the welter of jihadists and insurgents on the other—was decaying rapidly in favour of the latter.[104] The situation, however, was deeply unfavourable to the Iraqi population, with violence at extremely high levels. U.S. troops, in cooperation with the Iraqi Army and national police forces (both of which, although growing in numbers, remained deficient in experience, equipment and reliability), continued to whittle away at the insurgents; but at the same time, there seemed to be no lack of gunmen or willing martyrs to undertake regular and often highly lethal suicide attacks. Increasing Coalition efficiency at detecting, defusing and avoiding improvised explosive devices (IEDs) was offset by the influx from Iran both of more effective and lethal weapon systems, and of specialized military personnel, both to train and assist the insurgents in employing the advanced munitions, and to conduct special operations of their own against Coalition and Iraqi forces. Progress, at least in terms of the achievement of purely military objectives, was limited, and political attempts at reconciliation were stagnant. The enemy, to use one of General Franks' preferred phrases, continued to "get a vote," and were casting it regularly and effectively.

All was not bleak; even in the most hostile parts of the country, there were brief glimpses of hope that the situation could be turned around. In Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province and the heart of the Sunni insurgency, the 1st Armoured Division was doing something unusual. In 2005, local sheiks had attempted to rebel against al Qaeda's brutal domination of the region, and had been soundly defeated. Popular sentiment turned against the insurgents, and Colonel Sean MacFarland (commander of one of the division's brigade combat teams) tried to drive a wedge into the gap. His troops pushed into the city, established combat outposts, liaised with the local sheiks, and began to incorporate their tribal fighters into the Iraqi Police, training them as they went. This gave the US forces the additional manpower they needed to both protect cleared neighbourhoods, and take the fight to the insurgents. Continuous close cooperation built trust, and U.S. support in time of crisis (as when al Qaeda attacks accelerated once the strategy began to take hold) convinced local leaders that they were not about to be suddenly abandoned. Local sheiks met in September 2006 and reached agreement on a way forward, and the "Anbar Awakening" was launched. By December 2006, Ramadi had been largely secured, the insurgents had taken heavy

[104] Feaver, "Anatomy of the Surge," p. 26.

casualties, and attacks were down 70%.[105] Ramadi—and, more broadly, Anbar—was a success story, but it was an isolated one. Across the county, the situation remained precariously balanced between insurgents and counterinsurgents.

From Washington's perspective, a balanced (which is to say, stalemated) counter-insurgency campaign that threatened unending U.S. involvement in an interminable and unavoidable blood-letting was the worst conceivable outcome short of outright military defeat—worse even than an orderly withdrawal leaving chaos in its wake. The situation was growing reminiscent (in fact, as well as in the rhetoric of the administration's opponents) of America's decades-long commitment to high-intensity COIN operations in Vietnam. Time (as Petraeus, with his observation about the "half-life" of an army of liberation) works in favour of insurgents, and each attack provided the war's opponents, both at home and abroad, with more ammunition to hurl against the Bush Administration. Washington needed to end the deadlock and swing the operational balance decisively back in the Coalition's favour.

The ISG grew out of a series of conversations between Congressman Frank Wolf, a member of the House Appropriations Committee, and the U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP) in late 2005. The Group was launched in March of 2006 with the goal of providing a fresh, bi-partisan assessment of the situation in Iraq, and offering recommendations as to how the Bush Administration might change its approach to resolving the deteriorating security situation in the country. In consultation with the USIP, as the sponsoring organization, and interested members of Congress, former Secretary of State James Baker and former Congressman Lee Hamilton were selected as co-chairs. Committee members included a number of high-profile individuals from both parties: William Perry, Leon Panetta and Vernon Jordan on the Democrat side, and Sandra Day O'Connor, Ed Meese and Lawrence Eagleburger for the Republicans. Over the following six months, the Committee took testimony from members of the Iraqi Government, and hundreds of officials from the Bush Administration, including all senior executive-level officials, as well as senior military commanders, Department of State and Intelligence personnel, Senators, Congressmen, various foreign officials, numerous individuals from previous Administrations, and even journalists.

The Group's report, delivered on 6 December 2006, was characterized by some observers as a "rebuke" to the Bush Administration. Most considered it a detailed plan for a new approach to the war.[106] The report's recommendations were founded on a call for "new and enhanced diplomatic efforts in Iraq and the region," and a "change in the primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq that [would] enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly."[107] The report's recommendations were divided into two overarching thrusts: a new "external" approach, and a new "internal" approach. Under the aegis of external activities, the report's authors argued that Washington "should immediately launch a new diplomatic offensive to build an international consensus for stability in Iraq and the region." Such a consensus, the authors argued, should include "every country that has an interest in avoiding a chaotic Iraq, including all of Iraq's neighbours;" and these countries, along with others outside of the Middle East, should form a "support group to reinforce security and national reconciliation within Iraq." The report's

[105] Smith and MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens", pp. 43-50.
[106] See http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/06/world/middleeast/06cnd-iraq.html?hp&ex=1165467600&en=478d2213bb30b863&ei=5059&partner=AOL.
[107] *Iraq Study Group Report*, 6 December 2006, p. 6.

authors further recommended that Washington should engage Iran and Syria "constructively," leaving questions of Iran's nuclear programs (the plural may have been designed to avoid sparking debate over the contentious question of whether Iran's overt nuclear power program supported a covert nuclear weapons program) to be dealt with by the permanent members of the UN Security Council. Finally, in something of a stretch beyond their original mandate but in response to a perceptible public appetite for discussion of the issue, the authors argued that the US would not be able to achieve its goals in the Middle East "unless it [dealt] directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict," and made a "renewed and sustained commitment…to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace on all fronts."[108]

Regarding "internal" challenges, the report argued that the U.S. had to "adjust" its role in Iraq "to encourage the Iraqi people to take control of their own destiny." The authors suggested that Washington "should significantly increase the number of U.S. military personnel, including combat troops, imbedded [*sic*] in and supporting Iraqi Army units" in order to allow "US combat forces [to] begin to move out of Iraq." The primary mission of the U.S. forces in Iraq, the authors averred, should become one of providing support to the Iraqi Army, and set a rather ambitious timeline for this objective: "By the first quarter of 2008…all combat brigades not necessary for force protection should be out of Iraq." The authors acknowledged that the Iraqi government would still need assistance from the U.S. "for some time to come," but then argued that Washington "must make it clear…that the United States could carry out its plans, including planned redeployments, even if the Iraqi government did not implement their planned changes." The threat implicit in this recommendation was obvious: "If the Iraqi government does not make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones on national reconciliation, security and governance, the United States should reduce its political, military or economic support for the Iraqi government."[109]

Opponents of the war saw the report as an indictment of the Bush Administration's policies; supporters of the administration expressed dissatisfaction with the report's explicit threats of abandonment of the Iraqi government, and its placatory stance towards regional powers deeply involved in encouraging and sustaining the insurgency (especially Iran). While administration officials downplayed the report as merely one idea among many, some commentators dubbed it a pivotal moment that would force Bush to "redefine what victory in Iraq is achievable".[110]

Bush's initial response was cautiously non-committal; in a press conference with the co-chairs on the day the report was released, he agreed that the report contained "some really very interesting proposals," and that it could serve as a basis for finding "common ground" on a way forward.[111] Administration spokesmen parsed the report's language carefully, highlighting excerpts that reinforced existing policies (one former administration argues that the report simply called for the administration to do more of what it was already doing).[112] In his weekly radio address three days later, for example, Bush noted that the authors had endorsed his strategic vision of an Iraq that can "govern itself, sustain itself, and defend itself," and that they were equally clear about the

[108] Ibid., p. 6.
[109] Ibid., p. 7.
[110] See http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/05/AR2006120501526.html.
[111] See http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/12/20061206.html.
[112] See Feaver, "Anatomy of the Surge."

potential consequences of a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq.[113] The extent to which Bush disagreed with the report, however, did not become entirely clear until the following month, when he announced new military and civilian leadership, and a new COIN strategy for Iraq. The resulting change of course was diametrically opposed to the report's recommendations, and instead of a drawdown, would see a significant influx of combat troops destined for a new offensive, in close cooperation with Iraqi security forces, to regain the initiative from the enemy, protect the Iraqi population, and decisively defeat the insurgency.

3.2 Changing Course

On 10 January 2007, barely a month after receiving the ISG Report, Bush addressed the American people to lay out the new strategy for Iraq. In his speech, he described how the hopes for peace and reconciliation that had flourished in the wake of elections the year before had been dashed by the outbreak of sectarian violence in 2006—particularly the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra—and he took personal responsibility for any errors made in designing the original strategic approach to the conflict.[114] Bush offered an olive branch to Baker and Hamilton, thanking them for the "thoughtful recommendations" contained in their report, and described the nature of the problem in terms similar to those they and their committee members had employed. He then laid out a new strategy for Iraq that was, in substance, the precise opposite of what they had recommended.

The problem, Bush argued, was that the Coalition and Iraqi forces did not have sufficient troops to hold areas after they had been cleared of insurgents. The greatest concern was Baghdad; most of the violence in the country was taking place within 50 kilometres of the capital, and stability there was essential to enable the Iraqi government to implement the legislative measures that were deemed necessary to placate alienated communities and bring peace to the country. America's part in solving this problem, Bush announced, was to temporarily dispatch more than 20,000 additional combat and support troops to Iraq, in order to give his designated theatre commander the resources to both undertake operations to root out insurgents, and hold what he had liberated. The first push, he stated, would come in Anbar province, where he had directed that 4,000 additional US troops be deployed to attack al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in its home base, and to support the local Sunni tribes that had begun to turn against the insurgents.

In Anbar, Bush argued, America had an opportunity "to deal a serious blow to the terrorists." This new approach, according to the updated strategic concept for victory in Iraq, altered the "key assumptions" driving American planning. Where previously it had been thought that "political progress [would] help defuse the insurgency and dampen levels of violence," the administration now understood that "while political progress, economic gains and security [were] intertwined, political and economic progress are unlikely absent a basic level of security."[115] This realization led to a series of new strategic objectives that would form the core of Washington's realigned approach to Iraq: "1. Defeat al-Qaida and its supporters and ensure that no terrorist safe haven

[113] George W. Bush, "President's Radio Address," 9 December 2006, accessed at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/ releases/2006/12/20061209.html.

[114] "Where mistakes have been made, responsibility rests with me." George W. Bush, "President's Address to the Nation," 10 January 2007, accessed at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html.

[115] National Security Council, "Highlights," slide #7.

exists in Iraq; 2. Support Iraqi efforts to quell sectarian violence in Baghdad and regain control over the capitol; 3. Ensure the territorial integrity of Iraq by encouraging strong democratic institutions impartially serving all Iraqis and preventing the return of the forces of tyranny; 4. Help safeguard democracy in Iraq." [116]

The creation of stable democratic institutions, once the principal focus of the campaign, had fallen to third and fourth priority, after defeating al Qaeda and helping Iraqis regain control of their capital. This constituted a major change of course for the administration. Bush warned that even if this new strategy were to prove successful, victory would not be immediate, easy or cost-free. With every success, though, however small, U.S. forces would build additional confidence and trust, and gain the time necessary for political compromise to be achieved:

> Our enemies in Iraq will make every effort to ensure that our television screens are filled with images of death and suffering. Yet over time, we can expect to see Iraqi troops chasing down murderers, fewer brazen acts of terror, and growing trust and cooperation from Baghdad's residents. When this happens, daily life will improve, Iraqis will gain confidence in their leaders, and the government will have the breathing space it needs to make progress in other critical areas.[117]

In view of the events of the next subsequent twelve months, these remarks seem almost prescient.

3.3 The surge

The movement of the new draft of troops to Iraq began almost immediately. Concurrent with this, the administration pushed the Senate confirmation of General David Petraeus, Bush's choice for Coalition force commander in Iraq. Petraeus' confirmation, which took place on 26 January, was rapid and unopposed, and a few weeks later, he had assumed command in Baghdad, taking over the preparations for the conduct of counter-insurgency operations designed "to safeguard the Iraqi people, to pursue al Qaeda in Iraq, and to combat criminal elements and militia extremists, to foster local reconciliation, and to enable political and economic progress."[118]

Petraeus and Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, commander of the Multi-National Corps in Iraq, designed three successive, large-scale combat operations to break the grip of the insurgents on Iraq. The first was the Baghdad Security Plan (or *Fardh al-Qanoon*), which involved deploying U.S. and Iraqi forces throughout the capital to secure the neighbourhoods and prevent attacks on inhabitants. The second, Operation Phantom Thunder, was a country-wide counter-insurgency offensive intended to root the enemy, particularly AQI, out of his sanctuaries; and the third, Operation Phantom Strike, was intended as a long-term pursuit and exploitation endeavour, designed to chase down displaced insurgents, denying them the opportunity to find safe havens, regroup, or escape.[119]

---

[116] National Security Council, "Highlights," slide #8.
[117] Bush, "Address to the Nation," 10 January 2007.
[118] Petraeus, "Report to Congress," 8 April 2008.
[119] Kimberley Kagan, "How They Did It: Executing the winning strategy in Iraq," *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 13, Issue 10, 19 November 2007.

The Baghdad Security Plan went into effect in February 2007, immediately after Petraeus' confirmation, while the build-up of surge forces was still under way. Two combat brigades, along with comparable numbers of Iraqi troops, were dispatched to Baghdad to set up secure areas and live among the populace, establishing anti-VBIED (Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device) roadblocks, setting up Joint Security Stations, and engaging the local population in establishing safe neighbourhoods. The immediate impact of this new approach was a measurable drop in sectarian killings and random suicide bombings throughout Baghdad. More troops (another three brigades' worth) were positioned across the transportation networks surrounding Baghdad, clearing insurgent redoubts and bomb factories, and restricting movement by enemy forces. All of this had a calming effect on the capital. By the end of May 2007, the full strength of what had come to be called the "surge" forces was in place: some 30,000 additional US military personnel, the vast majority of them combat troops. The new phase of security operations got under way shortly thereafter, setting the conditions for the next stage of the surge offensive.

Operation Phantom Thunder began on 15 June, as soon as the last of the surge forces were in place, trained and acclimatized. The battle began at Baquba, northeast of Baghdad, with Coalition forces surrounding the city and clearing it of insurgent positions. More troops were simultaneously tasked to clear insecure parts of Baghdad and the insurgent strongholds of Fallujah and Karma. Within six weeks, all of these areas, as well as AQI and JAM (*Jaish al Mahdi*, or "Mahdi Army", Moqtada al Sadr's Shiite militia) strongholds in Musayyib and south of Baghdad were in Coalition hands. More than 1100 AQI and JAM fighters were killed in the opening battles, and more than 6700 detained; still more were tracked down, and captured or killed as they attempted to flee their fallen redoubts.

The flight of displaced insurgents segued naturally into Operation Phantom Strike, which began in mid-August and continued through autumn 2007. Where Phantom Thunder consisted largely of classical, high-intensity counter-insurgent combat operations, Phantom Strike comprised fast, short-notice raids against terrorist staging areas and extemporized insurgent hard points. The aim of Phantom Strike was not only to kill or capture as many displaced insurgents as possible, but also to pursue and prevent them from recovering their balance, re-establishing their strongholds, and re-taking the initiative. The Operation took place over a far broader proportion of the country. Over the coming months, hundreds of individual combat operations would take place, leading to the discovery of innumerable arms caches, the disruption of IED and VBIED factories, and the capture or death of thousands of insurgents.

3.4 Early Results

By the time Petraeus delivered his very cautious and nuanced report on 11 September 2007, the insurgency had been dealt a serious blow. Some in the media were already beginning to suggest that the enemy was on the brink of suffering a decisive defeat, while others were more cautious. Many remained were openly sceptical about claims of modest progress.

On 28 June 2007, during an address to the staff and students of the U.S. Naval War College, President Bush restated the key principle underlying the surge ("to help the Iraqi government and its security forces protect their population from attack"), and provided the first executive-level appraisal of how the new approach was proceeding thus far. Using Odierno's words, Bush noted that the last of the additional troops had arrived in early June, and that for the previous two weeks, the U.S. presence in Iraq had shifted from "surging in forces" to "surging in

operations”.[120] As he had promised in January, the first beneficiary of the new influx was Anbar province, where intense U.S. combat operations to clear Ramadi of insurgent and terrorist forces provided local tribal leaders with the breathing space necessary to solidify the gains facilitated by the “Sunni Awakening”—the conscious decision by a significant part of the Sunni community to reject the insurgents, and throw in their lot with the US and Iraqi government forces.

By early July, progress was sufficiently noticeable that even the most adamantly anti-war and anti-Bush critics had begun to acknowledge the effectiveness of ongoing U.S. operations against insurgent strongholds.[121] The administration’s supporters, in addition to heaping praise upon the new strategy and its architects (especially Petraeus), made much of the fact that these indications of progress were coming at a time when many of the Administration’s erstwhile allies were, pace Margaret Thatcher, “going wobbly” in the face of persistent, if unsuccessful, attempts by the Democrat-controlled Congress to engineer an immediate U.S. withdrawal during what pro-Administration pundits were calling “the summer of defeat and retreat”.[122] The mood prevailing among domestic critics was perhaps best captured by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, who on 6 September, despite abundant evidence to the contrary, declared that the “facts are self-evident that the [*sic*] progress is not being made”.[123]

In fact, analysts familiar with the tone and content of military reports had since early August been recognizing that surge operations were making significant headway, not only in dislodging insurgent strongholds in the countryside, but also in tightening the noose around Baghdad. Some measure of the effectiveness of Petraeus’ strategy may be found in a multiple car-bomb attack carried out on 14 August 2007, targeting civilians of the Yazidi sect in a northern Iraqi town, killing 250 and wounding many hundreds more. Al Qaeda failed to recognize that popular rejection was a result of their campaign of terror against the civilian population, and they responded not with persuasion, but with more brutality. While media opponents of the war highlighted the incident as an example of how the surge was failing to live up to expectations (“The bombings came as Gen. Petraeus and others claimed to be making progress in their campaign against al-Qaida”[124]), such criticisms missed the point. Petraeus’ strategy had since June been aimed at driving a wedge between the insurgents and the civilians who formed their physical environment and support network. Overt acts of barbarity like the 14 August bombings, while no doubt intended by AQI to demonstrate the futility of US attempts to bring security to Iraq, further alienated a populace that had already begun to turn away from them. Each subsequent atrocity only hastened the process.

3.5 The Petraeus/Crocker reports

On 10 September 2007, General Petraeus and the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, delivered reports to a Joint Hearing of the House Committees on Foreign Affairs and Armed

[120] See http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/06/20070628-14.html.
[121] E.g., http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/08/weekinreview/08burns.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print &oref=slogin.
[122] Charles Krauthammer, “Deserting Petraeus,” *The Washington Post*, 13 July 2007, p. A17.
[123] S.A. Miller, “Dems already dismissing Iraq war report,” *Washington Times* Online, 6 September 2007.
[124] “21st Century barbarism,” *The Washington Post*, 16 August 2007, p. A14.

Services.[125] By this time, surge operations had been under way for nearly three months, and all observers were looking forward to what Washington's front-line officials had to say, with different parts of the political spectrum hoping for different results. Not surprisingly, Petraeus' report focussed on the operational aspects of U.S. operations in Iraq (given his audience, Coalition forces and operations received scant coverage). He had a number of positive developments to report, including:

- The military objectives of the surge were, "in large measure," being met;
- Coalition and Iraqi forces had "dealt significant blows to al Qaida-Iraq;"
- Iranian-supported terrorists, Shiite militias and even Lebanese Hezbollah operatives had been disrupted and either killed or detained;
- Ethno-sectarian violence, while still at "troubling" levels, had been sharply reduced; and
- The Iraqi security forces were slowly beginning to shoulder more responsibility, fighting and sustaining losses, despite continuing concerns about their sectarian stability.

Petraeus highlighted, as "the most significant development of the past 8 months," the tribal revolt against AQI that had begun in Anbar province and was spreading to other parts of Iraq. The report provided a variety of examples showing appreciable drops in sectarian attacks, suicide bombings and improvised explosive device incidents, all of which had declined over the preceding three months. He provided a list of AQI cells disrupted and noted that hundreds of key leaders and thousands of "rank-and-file fighters" had been captured or killed. Throughout the briefing, he was careful to provide both sides of the picture, acknowledging that while the "overall trajectory" had been favourable, security improvements have not been uniform in all areas across Iraq.

Petraeus made a number of key points designed to deflect the criticism directed his way by opponents of the administration and of the war, asserting that his report was based on analysis founded on sound data collection and trend assessment, using long-baseline methodology and rigorous analytical techniques that had been reviewed by "two US intelligence agencies," both of which had concluded that the data produced by Petraeus' headquarters was "the most accurate and authoritative in Iraq." He also struck back at those in Congress and elsewhere who had pre-emptively dubbed his account of events "the Bush Report," stating at the outset that he had written his testimony himself, and that it had not been "cleared by, nor shared with, anyone in the Pentagon, the White House, or Congress."

Concerning the state of the Iraqi security forces, which by September 2007 numbered close to half a million personnel, Petraeus noted that despite significant training and equipment gaps, "many Iraqi units across Iraq now operate with minimal coalition assistance." He also noted that recent decisions by the Iraqi government would add a further 40,000 personnel to the total by the end of 2007; and that Iraq had, for the preceding two years, spent more on its security forces than it had received in military assistance, making Iraq "one of the United States' larger foreign military sales customers"—another sign of growing independence.

Petraeus concluded his report by offering a number of recommendations based on a report he had recently delivered to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the thrust of which was contained in its title:

---

[125] The full text of the Petraeus and Crocker reports, and the slide package that accompanied their testimony, may be found at http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0907/5735.html.

"Security While Transitioning: From Leading to Partnering to Overwatch." According to Petraeus, the U.S. should aim to gradually shift responsibility for national and internal security to Baghdad, moving from "leading" (conducting tactical operations on behalf of the Iraqi government), to "partnering" (providing operational-level support to Iraqi forces that are taking the lead in their own security) and eventually to "overwatch" (maintaining a strategic focus on Iraq in order to be able to take corrective measures should the need arise). The pace of the transition, Petraeus argued, should be tied to the ability of the Iraqi government, security forces, and people to effect the transition—not to artificial timetables imposed by outside agencies.

Based on this approach and his recommendations, Petraeus predicted being able to reduce U.S. force totals in Iraq beginning in mid-December 2007, with the foal of reaching the pre-surge level of 15 Brigade Combat Teams by mid-July 2008. While he predicted that force reductions could probably continue, he cautioned against trying to plan too far in advance, noting that nobody could have anticipated, for example, the galvanizing effect of the tribal revolt against AQI in Anbar province. For the time being, he argued, any change in America's fundamental strategic direction in Iraq would be premature. America's effort in Iraq would be long term, with "no easy answers or quick solutions", and any "premature drawdown of [U.S.] forces would likely have devastating consequences."

Ambassador Crocker's testimony, by contrast, focussed more directly on the political and strategic aspects of the situation in Iraq. He argued that "the cumulative trajectory of political, economic, and diplomatic developments in Iraq is upwards, although the slope of that line is not steep." Like Petraeus, he noted that political progress had been uneven, halting and sporadic, and cautioned that the nature of political change was such that turning points are generally recognizable only in retrospect. He likened what was going on in Iraq not just to "regime change," but rather to a "revolution." Iraq, Crocker argued, was a "traumatized" nation that needed to rebuild not only the most basic of institutions, but even the intramural confidence and trust without which state institutions cannot function.

On the question of political progress, Crocker acknowledged the failure of the Iraqi government to meet established legislative objectives. He argued that this comparatively small area of governmental activity should not be accorded undue significance as a metric of achievement, contending that, in many areas, the goals of legislation were being met through alternate means (this was a subtle critique of the previous week's report by the Government Accountability Office, which had found that the Maliki government had met only three of 18 benchmarks set by Congress). On the subject of regional and international dynamics, Crocker noted that Iraq was making significant progress in expanding relations and trade with its neighbours, adding that oil was once again being exported through Turkey as well as the Persian Gulf. Regional actors were continuing to pose challenges to the reconstruction of Iraq: suicide bombers were still crossing into Iraq from Syria, and Iran was providing "lethal capabilities to the enemies of the Iraqi state." Crocker made a point of reminding his audience that "[t]he Iranian President has already announced that Iran will fill any vacuum in Iraq," and invited them to think about what that might mean. "Our current course is hard," he asserted, but he added that "[t]he alternatives are far worse."

Overall, Crocker argued, 2006 was "a bad year" for Iraq, and 2007 "has brought improvement." He acknowledged that "enormous challenges remain." Nevertheless, he emphasised that the majority of Iraqis "genuinely accept[ed] Iraq as a multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian society," so long

as the balance of power between individual interest groups could be sorted out. In this context, the surge "had helped change the dynamics in Iraq for the better" by providing Iraqi communities with the sense of security and stability they needed in order to be able to carry on improving their lot.

Post-facto reaction to the dual testimony was, like support for the war, largely split along partisan lines. By and large, most Republicans praised Petraeus and Crocker for delivering a balanced review of a complex situation, calling for patience and taking the long view; most Democrats either denounced it as having been manufactured by the White House, or they simply restated positions derived from adamant opposition to the war (e.g., Tom Lantos, a Democrat, and Chair of the House Foreign Relations Committee, told Petraeus and Crocker, "It's time to go, and go now").

The Petraeus/Crocker reports implicitly justified the Bush Administration's plan to continue with the surge strategy. This is not surprising, as it was generally recognized that a precipitous, near-term US withdrawal from Iraq would almost certainly lead to an explosion of sectarian and inter-ethnic violence, a resurgence of al Qaeda, and expanded Iranian attempts to undercut the emergence of representative democracy in the Middle East. American patience and persistence were almost certainly, as Petraeus and Crocker argued, the key factor in providing Iraqis with a window of stability within which to build a functioning state; but they were also, and undeniably, the only thing staving off an immediate and catastrophic descent into civil war.[126]

3.6 Accelerating improvement

By the end of September 2007, after the heaviest fighting of Operation Phantom Thunder had ended, the U.S. military casualty rate had dropped by more than 50 percent from August, and by more than three-quarters compared to September 2006.[127] U.S. military personnel killed in action had fallen by more than 40 percent, to the lowest point since July 2006, and the total for September (43) was one of the five lowest monthly fatality totals since the insurgency had began in earnest, three years earlier. U.S. military, and Iraqi military and civilian, casualties continued to fall throughout October. During the month of Ramadan (mid-September to mid-October 2007), traditionally a period of intense insurgent activity, casualty rates continued to fall; the *Washington Post* reported that 36 U.S. soldiers were killed during this period, compared with 97 who died in combat during the 2006 Ramadan celebrations. All indications were that the continuing surge operations were achieving positive results, prompting the *Post*'s editors, perceived by many as self-identified opponents of the war, to acknowledge that "those inside and outside of Congress who last month were assailing Gen. Petraeus' credibility and insisting that there was no letup in Iraq's bloodshed were—to put it simply—wrong."[128]

On 1 November 2007, Lieutenant General Odierno held a briefing for Pentagon officials in which he provided detailed numbers on the decline in attacks during the one-month period ending on 26

---

[126] Petraeus and Crocker returned to Washington on 8 April 2008 to provide a joint briefing on the situation in Iraq to the Senate Armed Services Committee. While General Petraeus' briefing on this occasion has been referenced a number of times in this paper, a comprehensive review of these briefings is not provided, as this paper is concerned largely with the period of June to December 2007.
[127] "Better Numbers", *The Washington Post*, 14 October 2007, p. B06.
[128] Ibid, p. B06.

October.[129] The statistics seemed to speak for themselves. On the day after the mounting stage of the surge officially ended, the combined total of attacks reached the high water mark of the war. Once the surge operations began, all forms of attacks declined precipitously. By the first of November, the aggregate total of attacks against all types of targets in Iraq had fallen to a level not seen in more than two years. By year's end, the three-month total casualty numbers were the second lowest of any three-month period of the war.[130]

Casualties among Iraqi security forces and civilians had likewise dropped precipitously.[131] Beyond these welcome declines, however, Coalition casualty patterns told an important story. Deaths in action peaked in the period immediately before the beginning of surge operations in mid-June, while the numbers of personnel wounded peaked just as surge operations were getting underway. Both numbers began to fall off dramatically thereafter.

3.7 What happened?

The reduction in violence in Iraq from June through December 2007 is attributable to a number of significant strategic transformations. The first and most important was the change in strategy adopted by the Bush administration—the decision to increase U.S. combat forces in Iraq in order to give a new commander the operational flexibility necessary to pursue a different and more aggressive counter-insurgency approach. Petraeus' strategy of directly confronting both AQI and the JAM hard-liners, eliminating insurgent strongholds, and mobilizing local tribal forces to provide stability and prevent re-entry of insurgent forces after the departure of U.S. forces, was key to turning the tide. While much of the progress that occurred after surge operations began in June 2007 was certainly facilitated by other factors as well, none of these could have come into play had Bush not changed tracks in January, appointed a new commander with a fresh perspective, and given him the additional forces needed to put his ideas into practice. It is important to note that, in doing so, Bush rejected not only the strategy previously designed by officials of his own administration, but also the advice of the Iraq Study Group.[132] Given the significance of the results and the rapidity with which they were achieved, it seems likely that

[129] See http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4077.

[130] From a briefing by Lieutenant General Odierno, U.S. DoD, 1 November 2007. More recent numbers are available, but this paper remains concerned with the period June to December 2007.
See http://www.defenselink.mil/dodcmsshare/briefingslide/317/071101-D-6570C-004.jpg.

[131] Odierno briefing, 1 November 2007, at http://www.defenselink.mil/news/briefingslide.aspx?Briefingslide id=317. More recent numbers are available, but this paper remains concerned with the period June to December 2007.

[132] It is equally interesting to note that the total surge numbers (c. 30,000) come very close to the 40,000 additional troops that Paul Bremer, while head of the CPA, had mused publicly about in the summer of 2003. In his memoirs, entitled *My Year In Iraq* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), Bremer recalls asking Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the top American commander in Iraq, what he would do with two more divisions, as many as 40,000 more troops. "General Sanchez did not hesitate to answer. 'I'd control Baghdad,' he said." Numbers, of course, are never the whole story, and it cannot be known how Bremer or his field commanders would have employed the additional personnel, had they been made available. But the coincidence is interesting nonetheless. Dexter Filkins, "Desert Sturm," *The New York Times*, 26 February 2006.

posterity will recognize the decision to execute the surge as a political and military risk that paid off, dealing "devastating and perhaps irreversible blows to al-Qaida in Iraq."[133]

While the surge was the decisive factor, the others that came into play, enabled by the new U.S. approach, should neither be ignored, nor their impact underestimated. The most important of these has variously been called "the Sunni awakening" or "the rise of the Iraqi people." Simply put, surge operations to eliminate insurgent strongholds, and deliberate efforts to mobilize local, often tribal (and often ex-insurgent), leaders to create ad-hoc security organizations to hold liberated areas, played upon a growing transformation in popular sentiment about the ability of Iraqis to create stability out of chaos. This is the model that was tested and proven by Colonel MacFarland's brigade in Ramadi in the summer and autumn of 2006. Three years of intensifying attacks by extremists bent on leveraging sectarian tensions and mistrust had obviously begun to wear on the collective public psyche. Iraqis apparently concluded that neither AQI nor the JAM offered a future beyond more bloodshed. With these groups temporarily driven out, the less militant of the militants fell away, and cast their lot with the Coalition and the Iraqi government in hopes of achieving something better. The transformation was widespread; under the aegis of the "Concerned Local Citizens" ("Sons of Iraq") program, more than 30,000 Iraqis volunteered for service with the police and security forces over the six-month period ending in October 2007.[134]

By November, what begun in Anbar Province the previous year had begun successfully spread to more than half of the country, and encompassed both Shia and mixed Sunni-Shia communities. Senior military officials in Baghdad estimated that there were more than 200 "concerned local citizens" groups comprising more than 67,000 security volunteers[135]—a potent factor in securing local neighbourhoods and freeing up Iraqi Army and security personnel for offensive operations against remaining pockets of the insurgency. The effectiveness of these organizations was demonstrated on 9 November, when fighters of the Islamic Army in Iraq (IAI) ambushed AQI forces near Samarra, killing 18 and capturing another 16. The commander of the IAI, himself a former insurgent, contacted the Iraqi Army before the battle, asking them to advise the US military about his plans, and requesting that they stay out of the fight. Another former insurgent organization, the 1920's Revolution Brigades, launched a similar attack against AQI forces near Diyala the following day.[136]

The change in allegiance by their former allies must have been a telling blow to the increasingly isolated AQI membership; in an audio message attributed to Osama bin Laden and released on 29 December 2007, Iraqi Sunnis were warned not to take up arms against AQI.[137] The roots of the awakening are unclear, but simple pragmatism likely played a deciding role; as historian Victor Davis Hanson put it, "many of the sheiks suffered horrendous losses among their tribes to the U.S. in the past four years….So, when they weighed the odds—increasing oil-generated wealth on the one hand versus being mowed down by the U.S on the other—the choice was to join

---

[133] Thomas E. Ricks and Karen DeYoung, "Al-Qaida in Iraq Reported Crippled," *The Washington Post*, 15 October 2007, p. A1.
[134] "Iraq's Golden Silence," *Investor's Business Daily* Online, 1 October 2007, 1620 PT.
[135] Bill Ardolino, "Why Violence has Declined In Iraq," 8 November 2007, accessed at http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/11/why_the_violence_has-print.php.
[136] See http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/11/10/africa/ME-GEN-Iraq.php?page=1.
[137] Associated Press, "Bin Laden Message Warns Sunnis Against Fighting Al Qaida," 29 December 2007, accessed at http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,318990,00.html.

us."[138] What is clear is that the process began long before the surge was announced or the ISG Report was even submitted. Although neither the administration nor Petraeus can be credited with creating the awakening, they nonetheless made good use of it.

Other factors driving the transformation included the Iraqi Army, which, according to Lieutenant General Odierno had during 2007 experienced a surge of its own, growing from 10 to 12 divisions. Size is less important than capability and experience, however, and what likely made the difference was improvement in average quality and capability gleaned through partnering with U.S. ground force units. According to Coalition headquarters, by November 2007, three of 44 combat brigades were assessed to be fully independent, while 32 (more than three quarters of the total) were "in-lead" in combined operations with U.S. forces. Only nine remained "partnered." The Iraqi police forces had grown by 45,000 over the year to more than 200,000 (20,000 newly-trained Iraqi Army soldiers were graduating from basic training every five weeks). Next to these numbers, the U.S. surge forces seem almost insignificant. The improving capability of Iraqi security forces began to be demonstrated early on; for example in the rescue, in early November 2007, of a number of sheiks kidnapped on their way to a reconciliation meeting, and in counter-insurgent operations throughout the "Sunni Triangle" shortly thereafter, in which hundreds of insurgents were killed or captured.

Another important factor was the truce declared on 29 August by Mahdi Army figurehead Moqtada al Sadr. Al Sadr's announcement had mixed results; many of the JAM fighters were, and are, "dead-enders," characterized as "truly irreconcilable, almost as bad as AQI."[139] Also, al Sadr's credibility and stature seem to have declined since his decision to flee to Iran in February 2007, simultaneously highlighting both his penchant for self-preservation, and his connections with the regime in Tehran. These facts notwithstanding, many of his followers continue to observe the truce, leading to a drop in attacks across many of the Shia-dominated areas of Iraq. One analyst has argued that the most important aspect of this transformation "is that the violence…has ceased being political, and is therefore no longer nearly as important as it was," and that "having al Sadr playing political games instead of military ones is the most positive thing that could be happening in Iraq."[140] Al Sadr's grudging acquiescence also gave the U.S. the opportunity to co-opt the less reticent among the JAM membership into the same sort of ad-hoc security organizations being created elsewhere. That said, it is important not to overstate the importance of the Sadr ceasefire; it was never universal, and it broke down in March and April of 2008, without crippling ongoing stabilization efforts. Evidently, Sadr's temporary quiescence allowed enough time for improvements elsewhere (especially among Iraqi security forces), so that even new sporadic outbreaks of violence in Baghdad were not sufficient to derail the improving situation.

Some critics of the surge have argued that violence declined not because of successful combat operations, but rather because deliberate "cleansing" and refugee movements had reduced the opportunity for, and therefore the frequency of, sectarian clashes. Coalition forces and the Iraqi

[138] Victor Davis Hanson, "Iraqi Thoughts," accessed at http://pajamasmedia.com/xpress/victordavishanson/2007/11/13/iraqi_thoughts.php.
[139] Bill Ardolino, "Why the violence has declined in Iraq," *Long War Journal*, 8 November 2007, accessed at http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/11/why_the_violence_has.php.
[140] Bartle Bull, "Mission Accomplished," *Prospect Magazine*, Issue 139, October 2007, accessed at http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/printarticle.php?id=9804.

Red Cross Society disagree on the figures, but clearly there remain large numbers of internally displaced persons in Iraq, and the civilian exodus from parts of Baghdad doubtless influenced the drop in killings to some extent. This should be an easy contention to confirm or disprove; if violence has only abated due to sectarian segregation, then it should flare back up again as refugees continue to return to their former neighbourhoods. According to the Red Crescent, refugees continue to return;[141] and according to the Coalition, violence continues to decline.[142] One must conclude that other factors are at work here.

Reports from the Iraqi Government of the return of thousands of families and refugees to parts of Baghdad once plagued by sectarian violence are a positive sign, but the numbers remain small compared to the overall refugee figures. It has also been suggested that the drop in foreign fighters entering Iraq (from about 85 to 50 per month, according to the Brookings Institution's Iraq Index),[143] as well as the decline in IED incidents involving explosively-formed projectiles of Iranian origin,[144] are attributable to efforts by the governments in Damascus, Tehran and Riyadh to slow down the movement of insurgents and material. This is somewhat more speculative, particularly in Iran's case, which has a strong and continuing interest in maintaining disorder in Iraq.

If the purpose of the surge was, as Bush argued in June 2007, "to help the Iraqi government and its security forces protect their population from attack", then by early 2008 it could be argued that it was succeeding. But this was not the only reason for the surge; it was also intended to recapture the initiative that had been lost to the insurgents while an embattled White House held to its previous strategy, and a hostile Congress flirted openly with precipitate withdrawal. Bush's original strategy had been designed around the assumption that Iraqis would be able to quickly and decisively construct a credible, effective and representative national government capable of producing sectarian reconciliation and extending its control over the whole of the country in relatively short order. This proved to be an unrealistic expectation of a people with virtually no living memory of freedom or democracy, and beset by daily, brutal violence. The result was a strategic vacuum that the insurgency exploited to foment chaos and sectarian strife, with the ultimate goal of preventing the emergence of a stable polity.[145]

At time of writing, most, if not all, military and political trends seemed positive. In January 2008, it was announced that al Anbar province—the home base of al Qaeda in Iraq, the hotbed of the insurgency in 2006, the focal point of the "Sunni Awakening," and the first target of the surge—would be ready to be handed over to Iraqi Security Forces in March.[146] By the time

---

[141] Reuters, "Red Crescent says 46,000 refugees return Iraq end 2007", 8 January 2008, accessed at http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L0855951.htm.

[142] Karen de Young, "Violence in Iraq Still Falling, But Pace of Decline Slows," *The Washington Post*, December 18 2007, p. A10.

[143] See http://www.brookings.edu/saban/iraq-index.aspx.

[144] Odierno briefing, 1 November 2007.

[145] Interestingly, in January 2008 Bush seemed to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in building democracy in a country that has never known it, stating (in response to a reporter's question about political progress in Iraq), "To go from a tyranny to a democracy overnight is…virtually impossible." See http://wcco.com/national/President.Bush.Troops.2.628326.html. Had this understanding been incorporated into the grand strategy and operational planning for Iraq, more realistic targets for progress might have been set.

[146] Robert Burns, "General: Anbar Ready for Handover," Associated Press, 10 January 2008, accessed at

Petraeus reported to Congress on 8 April 2008, fully half of Iraq's 18 provinces were in Iraqi hands. During his confirmation hearings (for the position of Commander CENTCOM), he informed the Senate Armed Service Committee that violence in Iraq was at a four-year low—which is to say, lower than at any time since before the insurgency began to gather momentum.[147] That same week, the US casualty rate was the lowest of the entire war.[148] By any measure, this is a major success story. Politicians and soldiers are understandably cautious about declaring victory; but at time of writing it seemed increasingly clear that, as one team of analysts put it, "the job in Iraq [was] moving rapidly towards something closer to Iraqi police work than American war."[149]

---

http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D8U3B17O0&show_article=1.

[147] Peter Spiegel, "Violence at four-year low, says Petraeus," *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 23 May 2008, accessed at http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/violence-at-fouyear-low-says-petraeus/2008/05/23/1211183102680.html.

[148] "Iraq hits milestones on U.S. troops deaths, oil," accessed at http://www.reuters.com/article/middleeastCrisis/idUSL01687040.

[149] Bartle Bull, "Mission Accomplished," *Prospect Magazine*, Issue 139, October 2007, accessed at http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/printarticle.php?id=9804.

4 Key Elements of a COIN Strategy

When General Petraeus returned to brief the Senate Armed Services Committee on 8 April 2008, he reinforced these themes, labelling the progress achieved to date “significant but even,” and warning that gains made since the spring of 2007 were “fragile and reversible.”[150] Petraeus attributed the success of the “surge” to the availability of additional troops (both the 30,000 reinforcements dispatched by Bush, and the more than 100,000 personnel added to the ranks of Iraq’s military and police forces in 2007, for a total of more than 540,000); the conduct of country-wide COIN operations “to safeguard the Iraqi people, to pursue al Qaeda in Iraq, and to combat criminal elements and militia extremists, to foster local reconciliation, and to enable political and economic progress;” and, to an “attitudinal shift among certain elements of the Iraqi population,” notably amongst the Sunni communities, leading to the creation of the Concerned Local Citizens organizations, subsequently dubbed the “Sons of Iraq.” (In fact, of the 91,000 Sons of Iraq recruited to date, Petraeus noted that more than 21,000 had already been accepted into Iraq’s normal security services).[151]

From the perspective of deriving lessons about what works and what does not in COIN warfare, it is worth noting that three of the key factors cited by Petraeus in enabling the surge―the manpower-intensive nature of COIN; the importance of focusing COIN operations primarily on protecting the populace; and the need to create a sense of ownership among host nation personnel by engaging them in their own defence, rather than “doing it for them”―are three of the key features of COIN doctrine identified in the last chapter of this Technical Memorandum.

In this final chapter I examine and enumerate the key elements of COIN strategy derived from the transformation of the COIN campaign in Iraq in 2007; and determine the doctrinal genealogy, if any, of the strategic principles that appear to have played key roles in the success of the surge. The seven key elements that emerge from the surge strategy are:

- political primacy as the driving consideration in the design and execution of COIN operations;
- the integration of all activity, military and civilian, host nation and supporting coalition, in the COIN effort;
- balancing the need to use force (in some cases, overwhelming force) to eliminate insurgents, especially fanatics, against the imperative of ensuring the physical security, and preserving the sympathy and support, of the local populace;
- building the confidence, capacity and legitimacy of the HN security forces by assisting them in key tasks, instead of performing key tasks for them;
- the dilution by insurgencies of technological advantages, increasing the importance of manpower;
- recognizing that the enemy is not necessarily monolithic, and that where fault lines exist, it may be beneficial to exploit them; and,
- putting the security of the host nation population before all other considerations.

---

[150] Testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee by General David H. Petraeus, Commander, Multinational Force―Iraq, “Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq”, 8 April 2008.
[151] Ibid.

Each of these key strategic elements is being addressed in turn. This is followed by a conclusion that evaluates how closely the strategy designed and executed by Generals Petraeus and Odierno correlates with the design principles for COIN operations described in FM 3-24 and its predecessors. Lastly, I offer an assessment of the extent to which the success of the surge was due to "new and groundbreaking" strategic concepts.

4.1 Political primacy

The primacy of political considerations in COIN operations is often misunderstood. It is important not to conflate political evolution as a *casus belli* or a "desired end-state," with political considerations as a key strategic assumption in the design and execution of a military campaign. The former is the subject of section 4.5 of this chapter.

"In a successful counterinsurgency," one analyst notes, "it is impossible to separate military and political success."[152] Whereas in a conventional war, military considerations are usually the key consideration in deciding when, where and how to engage a target, in a COIN campaign, political considerations almost always drive such decisions. This is because the primary focus of any COIN campaign is to restore government control over the population and territory of the state. Government control, especially in a democracy, is heavily dependent upon the extent to which the government is seen as legitimate by the population. Public perceptions of government legitimacy are in turn heavily influenced by public judgements as to whether the government, its members, and those supporting it are working to reassert and support the rule of law, or are working outside and in contravention of it. This, as FM 3-24 notes, is one of the areas where insurgents enjoy a comparative advantage over COIN forces: the latter are constrained by legal concerns and questions of proportionality and care for the well-being of the public they are tasked to protect; the former, as demonstrated by the means they employ and the ends they seek, are not.

As a result, weighing the potential political impact of any prospective military operation prior to executing it is a key element of COIN strategy. As noted above, any operation that risks creating more insurgents than it eliminates, or that may decrease the legitimacy of the government (or the COIN forces) in the eyes of the citizenry (e.g., by demonstrating a disregard for public safety, disdain for the law, or contempt for cultural or religious norms), may prove too costly in the long run. While some operations are of sufficient strategic importance to take risk in this area (Petraeus, in his "Observations" article, cites the battle to kill or capture Uday and Qusay Hussein, which saw the use of heavy force in an urban area to avoid any possibility of such high-value targets escaping), most are not. Petraeus, and the new doctrine, argue that, in a COIN campaign, it is important to assess the benefit of a planned operation against the potential political downside of carrying it out, and if necessary, change the operational concept, or abandon it altogether. In the long run, it may be less dangerous to forego a target, than to attack it at the risk of creating ten new targets that will have to be engaged at some point in the future. While it may be militarily counterintuitive to forego an important target for fear even of limited collateral damage, this is an inescapable principle of COIN strategy. As Petraeus argues, the COIN commander's goals should be "to end each day with fewer enemies than [you] had when it started."[153]

---

[152] Yon, "Let's 'Surge' Some More," p. A17.
[153] Petraeus, "Observations", p. 6.

4.2 Integration of effort

Another key strategic theme emerging from the success of the surge is the importance of integrating all activities—military and civilian, strategic and tactical, host nation and supporting nation, combat and reconstruction—involved in the COIN campaign. Integration is crucial for four reasons: to build synergy by allowing separate "thrusts" to capitalize upon each others' successes; to avoid interference or conflict between different but parallel thrusts; to prevent waste of scarce resources; and to ensure that reconstruction efforts follow close upon the heels of combat action aimed at clearing and securing local areas.

Once again, the prototype of an integration strategy was demonstrated on the ground in Ramadi, in the summer and autumn of 2006. As Colonel Sean MacFarland notes,

> Clearing and holding are the bloody but relatively straightforward part of any counterinsurgency effort; building the infrastructure to sustain military success is the complicated part. In Ramadi, it was essential to begin building at the beginning of a clearing operation, so there would not be a gap between establishing security and implementing projects…
> …the Western part of Ramadi was undergoing redevelopment even while combat operations in east Ramadi continued during that autumn. This rebuilding effort demonstrated that normal services could function again and helped convince the people of Ramadi that local security improvements were permanent.[154]

The practice created by Petraeus and Odierno in Iraq was to extend this principal to link all of these different levels and lines of activity as closely together as possible in order to obtain maximal benefit from each. One analyst described the procedure in the following way: "First, US and Iraqi security forces project into an area and provide initial security, then locals are recruited into auxiliary forces, and reconstruction and aid projects quickly follow, which encourage the population to engage with security forces for a new tier of security."[155] This is an admirably concise summary of the campaign plan for the surge, and it is worth noting how closely it parallels MacFarland's "reconstruction tactics" in Anbar.

In any COIN campaign, consolidating military gains can be a far more complex endeavour than simply making them. The liberated population naturally looks to its liberators not only to free it from the threat of violence, but also to restore basic services, rebuild valuable infrastructure, and in general bring about quickly the improvements in quality of life that are understood to be the direct result of liberation. Any COIN campaign, Petraeus warns, is "a race against the clock to achieve as quickly as possible the expectations of those liberated."[156] Achieving those expectations—before the liberated population becomes disillusioned and turns to the insurgents for aid and answers—demands intimate integration not only of intelligence, combat and combat support forces, but also those ancillary capabilities following immediately behind the main body, and armed with bulldozers, corrugated steel, electrical cable, sewer pipes, and, perhaps most importantly, suitcases of cash.

---

[154] Smith and MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens," p. 51.
[155] Bill Ardolino, "Why the violence has declined in Iraq", November 2007, accessed at http://longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/11/ why_the_violence_has.php.
[156] Petraeus, "Observations," p. 4.

4.3 Force and restraint

One of the paradoxes of COIN operations cited in FM 3-24 is that "sometimes, the more force is used, the less effective it is."[157] In conventional military operations, the key consideration in mission planning is almost always mission success; the application of force is designed to accomplish the mission as expeditiously as possible, at minimal cost to friendly forces. American forces, accustomed through long practice (as noted in the doctrine) to substituting firepower for manpower, are equally accustomed to erring on the side of caution, and using whatever level of force may be necessary to ensure that a mission is accomplished. At the strategic level, this is reflected in the principle, post-Somalia, that the U.S. military prefers to commit to overseas operations only with overwhelming force. In the large-scale conventional military operations of the past, the question of "collateral damage" generally only became an issue in cases where carelessness or incompetence resulted in avoidable or unnecessary death or damage. Such is, for many reasons, no longer the case.[158]

Unconventional military operations set the bar for collateral damage much lower. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the U.S. military has been involved in an array of complex, non-linear deployments, most of which are best categorized as "peace support" operations. In such operations, even minor damage or injuries, to say nothing of fatalities, may generate political repercussions capable of derailing an operation or campaign. During the NATO bombing of Kosovo and Serbia under the aegis of Operation Allied Force in 1999, for example, U.S. aircraft misidentified a target in Belgrade, accidentally bombing the Chinese Embassy. This incident ignited a diplomatic firestorm that, in addition to vastly complicating the problem of achieving consensus at the UN Security Council on a Resolution governing the post-war fate of Kosovo, had severe downstream repercussions when Chinese authorities refused to return a U.S. aircraft and crew forced down on Chinese territory after a mid-air collision in 2001.

Iraq (and for that matter, Afghanistan) offered innumerable, and often far more perplexing, examples of this principle. Incidents where COIN forces were perceived to be guilty of using excessive force—for example, firing shots to stop speeding vehicles at checkpoints, and killing or wounding the driver or passengers, either inadvertently or as a result of persistent failure to stop—invariably generate as much, if not more, local outrage than insurgent suicide bombings targeting innocent civilians. The difference, of course, is that the insurgents are not attempting to build and maintain trust and legitimacy. Nor are they attempting to maintain an international coalition and support from fractious allies. However, the events of the past year demonstrate that the "excessive force" calculus can work against the insurgents as well as in their favour. Once the Sunni tribes in Anbar had begun to reject al Qaeda in the summer of 2006, for example, the terrorists made every effort to beat them back into submission:

> On 21 August [2006], the insurgents attacked a newly established IP [Iraqi Police] station in a tribal stronghold with an immense suicide…VBIED. The IPs, however, refused to be scared away. Despite offers of safe haven at a nearby

[157] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, 1-27.

[158] During major military campaigns of the past, adversaries customarily demonized or even dehumanized their enemies on the basis of ethnic or cultural characteristics, or of their actions. This option is no longer available, at least to Western democracies (although it is still employed extensively by jihadists and their supporters, e.g. the portrayal of Israelis and Jews in general in the Arab media). Thus, Western publics are less likely to tolerate collateral damage—an attitude diametrically opposed to that of the adversary.

> coalition base, the survivors remained at their posts, ran their tattered flag back up the flagpole, and even began to conduct patrols again the same day.
>
> Hours later, Al-Qaeda attempted to intimidate future recruits by murdering and desecrating the body of a leading local sheik who had been instrumental in our early push at recruiting tribe members into the ISF. The attack inflamed tribal sentiment against [al Qaeda] and drove several fence-sitting tribes to support our police recruitment.[159]

What is significant in this equation is the fact that while COIN forces can easily alienate a local population and force them into the arms of the insurgency, excessive violence by insurgents can only alienate local citizens, and push them towards the government if there are capable and legitimate COIN forces in proximity, who are able and prepared to provide protection against the inevitable campaign of reprisals.

Exercising careful restraint is a challenge for Western military forces (which tend to be trained and equipped for high-intensity conventional warfare) whenever they are tasked to conduct COIN operations. When it comes to firepower, the conventional approach (especially from a U.S. perspective), is that “more is more;” in COIN operations, the rule of thumb is that “less may be more.” Using less force, however, is not merely a matter of control; it may entail entirely new weapon systems. Many of the combat systems available to Western forces are, after all, optimized to destroy comparable systems. The best direct-fire weapon system, after all, is a tank—but tank ammunition tends to be designed to destroy other tanks, and can at the same time be both too powerful, and not powerful enough, to engage unarmoured and lightly-armed irregulars inside cinder-block or adobe buildings.[160] The same holds true for many of the other showcase US weapon systems: anti-tank missiles, high rate-of-fire artillery pieces, surface-to-air missiles, et cetera. Restraint can mean voluntarily scaling back one’s deployment of advanced weapon systems in order to avoid collateral damage—a further reduction of the technological advantage normally enjoyed by Western armies.

The precise, discriminate use of force, in addition to enhancing the legitimacy of the COIN forces and the government in local eyes, also helps to transition the population from a “war footing” (where the use of force is routine, heavy, widespread, and may seem indiscriminate) to a “peacetime environment”, where force is used rarely, with a light hand, against discrete, identified targets—a situation more akin to police and law enforcement than to military operations. This reduces fear and increases trust between the population and the COIN forces, assisting public perceptions of the return to normalcy—which, after all, is the ultimate goal of any COIN campaign.

---

[159] Smith and MacFarland, “Anbar Awakens,” p. 47.

[160] Depleted uranium long-rod penetrators (such as the APFSDS-T round) are optimized to destroy modern main battle tanks; in an urban conflict, they can easily penetrate opposing walls of an occupied structure without harming any of the occupants, and continue on for hundreds of meters to cause collateral damage in an entirely different part of the city. Even relatively “small” aircraft bombs (e.g., the 250 kg high-explosive bomb), is big enough to level not only the targeted building, but those around it as well. This is one of the reasons that the US military is investigating lower-yield, more precise weapons, such as the Small Diameter Bomb (SDB); and is working on numerous different non-lethal weapon systems, some of which have already been fielded in Iraq (e.g., the microwave-based Area Denial System).

4.4 Building legitimacy

The shadow of Vietnam lies heavily upon any discussion, in American political circles, of "intervention," or "counterinsurgency," or "nation-building." While this phenomenon is understandable given the cost, duration and outcome of U.S. efforts to bring democracy to Southeast Asia, such parallels as exist between the Vietnam and Iraq wars are more rhetorical than instructive. Whether comparisons are justified or not, however, the impact of the Vietnam legacy on U.S. politics when military questions are in the air can neither be denied nor avoided; and it goes a long way towards explaining why, for example, allegations of an "open-ended commitment" is one of the most damaging brickbats that can be hurled at a president; and why an otherwise intelligent and well-read officer individual like Colin Powell could establish, without attracting ridicule and as a key element of his eponymous doctrine, the availability of an "exit strategy" as a non-negotiable prerequisite to any commitment of U.S. forces abroad.[161]

It is difficult to calculate, and probably equally difficult to overstate, the strategic—and very negative—impact of domestic calls for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops on the COIN effort in Iraq. While working to spark the Sunni Awakening, Colonel MacFarland noted that his force disseminated two different messages via information operations. The first was aimed at "alienat[ing] the people from the insurgents while increasing the prestige of supportive tribal leaders;" the second was aimed at the sheiks:

> Instead of telling them we would leave soon and they must assume responsibility for their own security, we told them that we would stay as long as necessary to defeat the terrorists. That was the message they had been waiting to hear. As long as they perceived us as mere interlopers, they dared not throw in their lot with ours. When they began to think of us as reliable partners, their attitudes began to change.[162]

Legitimacy is a two-way street, and a COIN commander, when attempting to attract the firm (and, per Odierno's guidance, irrevocable) support of key local leaders, must remember that his would-be allies could end up paying a high price should their benefactors prove inconstant. One less than may doubtless be drawn from the Vietnam experience is what can happen to the leadership of an embattled host nation facing a totalitarian insurgency when its COIN support is withdrawn.

At the same time, it is logical (and, from a financial, material, and human perspective, critical) to draw down and eventually withdraw one's forces from a COIN campaign once the situation is sufficiently stable, and the HN government and forces are capable of dealing with any residuum of the insurgency. Accordingly, one of the key elements of any COIN strategy should be building the capacity and legitimacy of vital HN institutions as quickly as possible. Experience—especially recent experience in Iraq and Afghanistan—demonstrates that this is at once easier and far more difficult than it appears to be. On one hand, lack of capacity—especially

---

[161] Given Powell's formative military experience in Vietnam and the fact that he formulated his doctrine largely in response to the Gulf War and the abortive U.S. mission in Somalia, it would be difficult to argue that his doctrine applied only to full-scale, force-on-force warfare. Indeed, he himself drew no such distinction. In any event, COIN campaigns, by their very nature, are long-duration enterprises that do not lend themselves to easy delineation of "exit strategies".

[162] Smith and MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens," p. 44.

in less developed countries or countries that, like Iraq, have spent decades in the grip of a murderous kleptocracy—is often closely linked to lack of resources. It is difficult to train policemen, for example, in a building that lacks power and sewage facilities (and even more so in a culture that has no experience of the rule of law or of impartial and egalitarian justice). It is especially difficult to do so if the government lacks the money to pay them. These are relatively non-complex problems for COIN forces to solve, requiring little more than money, materials, know-how and manpower to resolve.

Other sources of incapacity can be rather more complex. In some states (not Iraq), widespread illiteracy may preclude the use of materials as basic as training literature or rules-of-engagement cards. Lack of public or personal transport may make it too difficult for prospective employees to attend training sessions or come to work.

Cultural mores that restrict the social role of women may eliminate half of the employable population. Sectarian divisions may make it difficult for civilians of one sect to trust or even serve alongside security personnel from another sect. Language barriers may severely complicate the vital cooperation, demonstration and mentoring processes that both the doctrine and Petraeus recommend. Some of these problems (and many others) may be difficult to overcome, even for a state with the vast human and material resources that are available to Washington.

None of these concerns lessens the importance of building the capacity and legitimacy of HN institutions. As Petraeus observed, and as is expanded upon extensively in FM 3-24, it is almost always better for a representative of a HN institution to do something adequately, than for a foreign individual to do it perfectly. In his "Observations" article, Petraeus cited T.E. Lawrence (also known as "Lawrence of Arabia") who, with specific reference to the Arabs he encountered while helping to direct an uprising against the Turks, argued that, from his perspective, it was "better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly." This was a clever and critical observation for reasons of both capacity and legitimacy. It is an axiom of instructional technique that one learns more from performing a task one's-self, even if one makes mistakes, than from watching it performed.

Petraeus, like Lawrence, found it necessary to remind soldiers accustomed to executing tasks as expeditiously and efficiently as possible that HN forces cannot learn or build the capacity necessary to operate on their own if their foreign teachers are continuously doing the work for them. This admonition is repeated in the "Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency Operations" section of FM 3-24. Legitimacy flows in large part from perceptions of capacity; and if the HN security forces cannot demonstrate that they are capable of responding to the needs of the population in a timely and effective fashion, they will never gain the legitimacy necessary to relieve the supporting forces. Capacity engenders confidence; as one U.S. planner in Iraq remarked, one of the most tangible benefits of the "Sons of Iraq" groups was "whole communities sensing empowerment….[Iraqis think] 'We can do things now.'"[163]

[163] Colonel Donald Bacon, Chief of Strategy and Plans, Strategic Communications, Multinational Force—Iraq. Cited in Bill Ardolino, "Why the violence has declined in Iraq," accessed at http://longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/11/why_the_violence_has.php.

4.5 Manpower

Perhaps the best-known, and most controversial, aspect of the surge was the dispatch of an additional 30,000 U.S. military personnel, most of them combat troops, to provide Petraeus and Odierno with the additional forces necessary to implement their COIN strategy. This decision revived a debate that had been simmering below the surface since the outbreak of the insurgency in early 2004: whether there were "enough troops" in Iraq to do the job. This debate had been fostered with great determination by the administration's critics, and the administration put very little effort into refuting the charge—directed largely at Rumsfeld—that "transformation" had deprived commanders in Iraq of the manpower necessary to execute their mandate.

What most critics declined to address was the fact that the definition of "enough" depends entirely on the nature of the "job." Early critics of General Franks' plan for the invasion of Iraq (many of whom argued that such an operation, like the 1990-91 invasion of Kuwait, would require a half a million troops) fell silent when the US-led coalition took Baghdad in under three weeks with fewer than half the troops employed in Operation Desert Storm. The muttering grew again in the wake of the invasion, as the insurgency began to gather steam, and political progress in Iraq failed to keep pace with Washington's expectations. The source of the problem was simple enough—American forces, as noted above, are used to fighting with an unmatchable technological edge, and that edge had been honed to an extraordinary degree by the introduction of the "network-centric" concept. Such advantages, however, are severely diluted when fighting an enemy that eschews direct combat, hides among (and is virtually indistinguishable from) the protected population, operates in small numbers (obviating much of the utility of satellite and signals intelligence), does not employ aircraft or military-pattern vehicles, and uses simple, low-cost and easily concealed weaponry.

The situation was exacerbated by the nature of COIN warfare which (as noted above) demands protecting the population as a priority, which in turn requires "presence"—close, routine contact with civilians, not only to build confidence, but also to gather than human intelligence that is the sine-qua-non of COIN operations. In conjunction with the need to "get out and walk" (to use Odierno's words), these activities vastly increase demands on personnel. "A small, wired force," one analyst notes, "leaves generals with too few nodes on the military network to secure the peace. There aren't enough troops to go out and find informants, build barricades, rebuild a sewage treatment plant, and patrol a marketplace."[164] The problem is further exacerbated once the enemy is located; rather than directing a close air or artillery strike against an urban dwelling suspected of housing insurgents, infantry personnel must encircle and enter the building, killing or capturing any suspected insurgents, without harming innocent occupants or neighbours, or damaging their property. This also increases the demand on personnel. In the words of one observer, "counterinsurgency, like community policing, requires lots of boots on the ground. You can't do it from inside a jet or a tank."[165]

Simply put, COIN is a vastly more manpower-intensive type of operation than meeting a qualitatively inferior army in battle, and overwhelming it through firepower and manoeuvre. The calculus is complicated by the further fact that COIN operations are far more demanding on the

[164] Noah Shachtman, "How Technology Almost Lost the War: In Iraq, the Critical Networks Are Social – Not Electronic," *Wired*, Issue 15.12, 27 November 07, accessed at http://www.wired.com/print/politics/security/ magazine/15-12/ff_futurewar.

[165] Yon, "Let's 'Surge' Some More," p. A17.

skills and expertise of the individual soldier than large-scale conventional battle. In addition to the full array of standard infantry skills, for example, effective COIN operations rely heavily on training and experience in fighting in built-up areas (also known as MOUT, Military Operations in Urban Terrain); are often carried out at night; demand precise, closely-coordinated small-unit tactics, linguistic skills and cultural knowledge; rely on the ability of relatively low-ranked personnel to interact diplomatically with frightened or hostile (but innocent) civilians; and, most of all, hinge upon the ability of section/squad or platoon commanders to make rapid tactical decisions while taking into consideration strategic and political concerns that would not normally be of concern to them. COIN operations require not only more personnel than conventional combat; they require more training and expertise as well. Once again, it is surprising that the Army that fought a protracted counter-insurgency campaign in Vietnam, and that—amongst other things—had to dig insurgents out of places like Hue City, took so long to re-learn how manpower-intensive a true COIN campaign can be.

Much of the blame for this shortcoming must fall at the feet of the senior levels of leadership. Evidence suggests that it was assumed that Iraqi security personnel would be available and would be willing to assist in the task of controlling the population in the immediate post-bellum period; US officials assumed that "they would receive great help from the Iraqi police, the army and the ministries, all of which were seen by many experts as salvageable."[166] This proved to be a false hope; these institutions were inept and in many cases corrupt, and such residual capacity as remained was largely destroyed by de-Ba'athification. "The only realistic potential sources of large numbers of troops were either the U.S. armed forces or the retrained Iraqi military and police forces….[but] Bremer [believed] that the Iraqi army should not have responsibility for internal security."[167] This difference of opinion between DOD and the Coalition Provision Authority, Feith argues, "was costly" because it ignored objective conditions on the ground. The US needed manpower to police Iraq, but—due at least in part to decisions made by U.S. officials on the ground, especially Ambassador Paul Bremer—Iraqis were neither able nor inclined to provide it.

The nature of the war in Iraq after the end of "major combat operations" in May 2003 was such that, with very few exceptions, most of the advantages enjoyed by the US military were less effective than in open battle. In these circumstances, the transformation sought by Rumsfeld since 2001—more lethal soldiers, but a lot fewer of them—did the war effort no favours (enhanced lethality does not help when soldiers cannot employ the full spectrum of their firepower for fear of undermining political imperatives). That Rumsfeld did not foresee this eventuality when he launched his transformation program in 2001 is not his fault; but he must bear a large share of the responsibility for failing to recognize the impact of declining force numbers and his Department's ability to sustain a massive overseas COIN campaign, and take steps to reverse it once the burden of Iraq (and to a lesser extent, Afghanistan) on the Army and Marines began to make itself felt.

4.6 Identifying and exploting fault lines

The phenomenon known as the "Sunni Awakening" first began in 2005 as a local initiative among the Sunni tribes of Anbar province, and was ruthlessly crushed by al Qaeda. The process

[166] Joseph J. Collins, *Choosing War: The Decision to Invade Iraq and Its Aftermath* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, April 2008), Occasional Paper No. 5, p. 20.
[167] Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism,* pp. 516-17.

was reignited the following year by U.S. troops deliberately re-forging lapsed relationships with local sheiks who were fed up with the depredations of the insurgents, but who required assistance in defending their people while they built the capacity to do so themselves. U.S. forces underwrote this process, providing security through combat outposts in key locations, recruiting local Sunni tribesmen and training them as police, employing targeted information operations to widen the gap between citizen and insurgent, and leveraging local HUMINT gained via this process to identify and destroy insurgent cells.

Petraeus took this approach, first tried in Ramadi in mid-2006, and exploited it nationwide. The creation of the CLCs was an ingenious solution that made significant progress in resolving a number of different but intimately inter-connected problems. Because Saddam's regime had unduly favoured Sunnis, the de-Ba'athification process that followed the defeat of the regime (and its replacement by a Shiite-dominated government) had a disproportionately large impact on the Sunni tribes. Beyond simply generating resentment, however, de-Ba'athification hurt the Sunnis economically by causing local unemployment to skyrocket. Participation in operations against Coalition forces and Shiite civilians was well-remunerated by the Sunni insurgents. Hindsight suggests that what appeared to be widespread Sunni support for the goals and practices of the insurgents may in many cases have been the result of economic hardship.

The CLCs also provided a means whereby badly-needed employment opportunities could be funnelled preferentially to those Sunni tribes that openly rejected the insurgency and cast their lot with the Government of Iraq. The benefit was, in fact twofold; not only did the CLCs deprive the insurgency of a significant proportion of their reserves of ad-hoc manpower, that manpower was added to the COIN forces, at first informally, and later through formal recruitment of CLC personnel into the Iraqi security forces. As CLC membership climbed, local support for the insurgents fell, in effect draining the "swamp" from which they drew their support. It is difficult to overstate the positive impact on Petraeus' COIN campaign of the recognition of the sources of much of the support for the insurgency, and the subsequent drive to overcome them, and co-opt one-time insurgents into the counter-insurgency fight on the side of the Government. The success of this approach highlights the importance to any COIN campaign of gaining an intimate understanding of local cultures and social dynamics. The U.S. Army recognizes this, and has set aside more than $40 million to create "Human Terrain Teams," consisting of social scientists, "software geeks," and experts on local culture to be embedded with military units throughout Iraq and Afghanistan.[168] Mapping and understanding the "human terrain" is at least as important in a COIN effort as knowing the physical terrain.

4.7 Security first

When the Bush Administration, through the National Security Council, published its *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* in November 2005, primacy of place among America's goals for Iraq's future went to the objective of nurturing political development in Iraq.

> Our strategy is clear: We will help the Iraqi people build a new Iraq with a constitutional, representative government that respects civil rights and has security forces sufficient to maintain domestic order and keep Iraq from

---

[168] Shachtman, "How Technology Almost Lost the War: In Iraq, the Critical Networks Are Social—Not Electronic."

> becoming a safe haven for terrorists. To achieve this end, we are pursuing…three integrated tracks – political, security and economic…[169]

This hierarchy of approach to a certain extent reflected Bush's oft-stated belief that the liberation of Iraq and the elimination of the Ba'ath party dictatorship would be transformative, driving the political evolution from which other benefits—security, economic, and so forth—would naturally follow. This belief coloured much of the Administration's policy towards Iraq for the first several years after the fall of Baghdad—the focus was invariably on the stand-up of the Coalition Provisional Authority, or the installation of the interim Iraqi government, or on plebiscites ranging from local and federal elections to adoption of a temporary constitution. "There was the feeling," Petraeus argued, "that elections would enhance the Iraqi sense of nationalism. Instead, the elections hardened sectarian positions as Iraqis voted largely based on ethnic and sectarian group identity."[170] The politics-first approach was not working. To the extent that security concerns drove the overall strategic agenda, they were often linked to providing either security for the apparatus of government, or security for temporary, event-based manifestations of political activity. In hindsight, this should probably not have come as a surprise, given that event unfolded in a similar fashion following elections in Bosnia and Kosovo.

The watershed moment came when the administration, driven at least in part by Petraeus' arguments (substantiated in the newly-published FM 3-24), realized that securing the population from attack was a necessary prerequisite to political development. Once again, this was not a matter of theory or calculation, but a strategic factor that had been demonstrated in Anbar. According to MacFarland, prior to the summer of 2006, U.S. forces had dealt with the insurgent stronghold in Ramadi through "drive-by COIN…they exited the FOB, drove to an objective or patrolled, were attacked, exchanged fire, and returned to base."[171] Such an approach was lose-lose; the U.S. troops were predictable in their movements, and the civilians in the city were entirely at the mercy of the insurgents. This problem led to the implementation under the surge strategy of combat outposts, or COPs (at combat team, which is to say reinforced company, strength) which were used as "lily pads" to maintain a continuous presence in the city, and from which COIN operations could be launched. The COPs initially attracted insurgent attacks, which were decisively defeated; and, once these tapered off, they served as anchor points for development of needed infrastructure, and for the recruitment of more Iraqis into the police forces. As the COIN forces moved further into the city (following a pattern, according to MacFarland, analogous to Macarthur's "island-hopping" campaign in the Pacific), COPs were turned over to and manned by the Iraqi Police. This approach had the benefit of rendering the COIN forces less predictable; facilitating operations against the insurgents; and extending protection to the local population.[172] It was a tactical-level model that Petraeus and Odierno extended to whole provinces, and used successfully against the Sadrist militia forces in Baghdad.

As one former National Security Council member remarked, "…we once thought…political change should precede everything else. That approach did not work. Our new strategy was based on the contrary assumption that security came first, and that parliamentary progress would lag

[169] NSC, "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq," pp. 7-8.
[170] Petraeus, "Advance Policy Questions," p. 3.
[171] Smith and MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens," p. 45. The similarities between this account and the characterization of US mounted patrol practice in "Hussayn's Story" (Annex A) are worthy of note.
[172] Ibid, p. 46.

significantly behind other elements."[173] This reorientation has been characterized, somewhat nebulously, as a "shift" from "counterterrorism" to "counterinsurgency," but what it meant in practice was that the COIN forces—especially U.S. forces—had to demonstrably throw in their lot with the people they were supporting. Protection is not accomplished by the ability to respond to terrorist attacks, but by preventing them, and a continual presence by COIN forces is the key enabling factor in prevention. National stability, in this understanding, is conceived as the aggregate of local stabilities. "Petraeus and Odierno pursued a vision of local-level reconciliation aimed at supporting the overall political goals" of the Iraqi government, and thus far, this approach appears to borne fruit.[174] As Petraeus stated in his written answers to Senate questions prior to his confirmation hearings,

> Population security is the top priority. We must clear and hold the neighborhoods of Baghdad to break the cycle of violence that is preventing political progress in Iraq. We can only do this by establishing persistent presence – coalition, as well as Iraqi—in Iraqi neighborhoods. I plan to ensure that some of our forces locate in neighborhoods they protect and that they fight closely linked with their Iraqi counterparts—with the Iraqis in the lead whenever possible—to secure the population. [175]

It is difficult to overstate the importance of this fundamental change in strategy. All of the COIN doctrine manuals from 1980 onwards argued that an insurgency is inevitably about a struggle for political power, and one of the key challenges facing the government is establishing its legitimacy in the minds of the population. The first duty of any government is to protect its people from direct attack, and if it cannot do this, then its legitimacy is automatically called into question. As a result, insurgent violence is an easy, and therefore preferred, means of delegitimizing the government. The calculus was simple and inarguable; unless the violence could be stemmed, political evolution could not take place. Once political progress as a war aim was made secondary to securing the population, the situation in Iraq began to turn around.

This shift in strategic emphasis may have been the single most important factor in averting what appeared to be an irreversible slide into civil war in Iraq, and it is important to recognize the courage necessary to bring it about. Inertia is the default option in any government; it is always easier to "stay the course" than to take the risk of changing policy—especially when doing more of the same is the advice of allegedly bipartisan expert groups like the ISG. Changing course may have been easier for Bush, as the unsuccessful policy was his own, and the odium accruing from any failure would therefore be charged to his account. Switching horses in mid-gallop, after all, is a less daunting prospect if one's mount appears headed for a cliff—but doing so nonetheless takes a modicum of pluck, and it is always easier (if not necessarily wiser) to hang on tight, and hope that the nag will veer off.

Historians expounding from the comfortable vantage of perfect hindsight may assert that Bush had no other choice, and that any option was preferable to doing nothing in the face of strategic stalemate; but to take such a line requires overlooking the vast uncertainties associated with

---

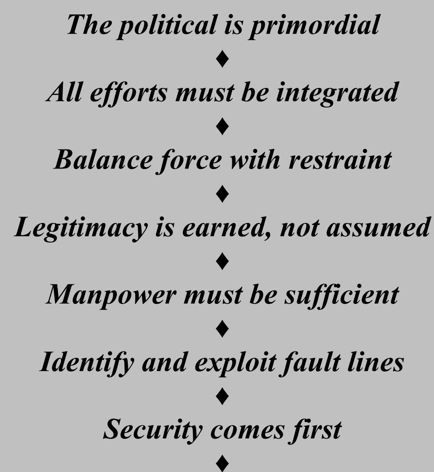
[173] Feaver, "Anatomy of the Surge," p. 28.
[174] Kimberly Kagan, "How They Did It: Executing the winning strategy in Iraq," *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 13, Issue 10, 19 November 2007.
[175] Petraeus, "Advance Policy Questions," p. 4.

adopting a new commander and a new strategy, and risking an exchange of costly stalemate for immediate disaster. To argue that Bush had no other option also requires ignoring how rare a thing it is for a politician to recognize that his policy has failed, to abandon it, and to try something else.

5 Conclusion

My principal aim was to identify how the U.S. military's understanding of, and strategic approach to, COIN warfare has been transformed by FM 3-24. This was undertaken in part to determine the extent to which recent alterations in the US military's approach to COIN warfare may have contributed to the apparent success of the surge in Iraq. To these ends, chapter one examined the key strategic concepts expressed in FM 3-24 and its two predecessors; drew on the "Observations" published by then-Lieutenant General Petraeus in 2006, which informed the development of FM 3-24; and enumerated the COIN principles deriving from the Counterinsurgency Guidance issued by Lieutenant General Odierno as the surge got under way in June 2007. Chapter two examined the surge itself, from its inception in mid- to late-2006, through to the first unequivocal indications of success a year later. And chapter three, drawing on the two preceding chapters, attempted to distil, from current COIN strategy and the experience of the surge, a series of key strategic elements that appear to be closely associated with success in COIN operations. These are listed in table 7. In order to answer the question I posed in the introduction, therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the extent to which these seven key strategic elements represent a departure from, or a confirmation of, historical understandings of how to conceive, plan and execute a COIN campaign.

Table 7: Key elements of COIN strategy



The political is primordial
♦
All efforts must be integrated
♦
Balance force with restraint
♦
Legitimacy is earned, not assumed
♦
Manpower must be sufficient
♦
Identify and exploit fault lines
♦
Security comes first
♦

5.1 Something old, something new

5.1.1 The political is primordial

The suggestion that political concerns must remain foremost in the minds of those charged with planning a COIN campaign is not a new one. Where FM 3-24 states that "political objectives must guide the military's approach" and enjoins commanders to "consider how operations contribute to strengthening the HN government's legitimacy and achieving U.S. political goals,"[176] the 1980 edition of the Marine Corps COIN doctrine warns that "political concerns may be more important than military concerns," and advises commanders to "continually assess the possible effects of operations and ensure their compatibility with political objectives."[177] The 1990 manual argues that "political objectives drive military decisions at every level," and enjoins planners to understand the impact of military operations on political considerations.[178] That there is no substantive difference in this area between three doctrine manuals drafted over the course of a quarter-century, across very different global security environments, suggests that there is

[176] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, 1-22.
[177] MCWP 3-33.5, 42.
[178] FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, Chapter 1, 5.

something enduring in the principle that political considerations must be given primacy in COIN planning.

This is hardly surprising, as insurgencies have traditionally sought to advance their causes by employing military means to influence political activities. Mao addressed this very subject in his 1937 treatise on guerrilla warfare, arguing that "without a political goal, guerrilla warfare must fail," and adding that:

> There are some militarists who say: "We are not interested in politics but only in the profession of arms." It is vital that these simple-minded militarists be made to realize the relationship that exists between politics and military affairs. Military action is a method used to attain a political goal. While military affairs and political affairs are not identical, it is impossible to isolate one from the other.[179]

As long as insurgents have attempted to overthrow government by impeding or countering their political activities, governments have sought to avoid providing insurgencies with political "ammunition" through over-reaction and brutality; and foreign forces assisting in COIN campaigns have done likewise. That this lesson is reinforced in FM 3-24 and has re-emerged from the U.S. experience in Iraq should come as no surprise.

5.1.2 All efforts must be integrated

If strategy may be defined as the employment of all necessary resources to accomplish a given mission in accordance with political direction, then development of a strategy for a COIN campaign does not differ in principle, but only in particulars, from the development of strategy for a conventional military campaign. The difference between the two is that a COIN commander, due to the nature of counter-insurgency operations and the circumstances requiring them, is likely to have a more diverse array of non-military resources to coordinate. Conventional force commanders generally focus on defeating the enemy; COIN commanders must do the same, but must also ensure that other mission-critical tasks are met, ranging from the provisions of essential services to providing protection for civilians and officials, delivering or protecting deliveries of food aid, providing emergency medical care and evacuation, repair vital infrastructure, assisting or carrying out civil affairs missions, coordinating the movement and activities of non-governmental organizations and aid agencies, and a whole host of other essential non-military operations. He will almost certainly also be required to integrate and coordinate HN reconstruction efforts, if only to deconflict activities and ensure that his own assets are used to best effect. Petraeus hinted at this in his April 2008 testimony to Congress, noting that defeating al Qaeda in Iraq took "not just actions by our elite counterterrorist forces, but also major operations by coalition and Iraqi conventional forces, a sophisticated intelligence effort, political reconciliation, economic and social programs, information operations initiatives, diplomatic activity, the employment of counterinsurgency principles and detainee operations, and many other actions."[180]

---

[179] Mao Tse-Tung, *Yu Chi Chan* [Guerilla Warfare], pp. 43 and 89.
[180] Petraeus, "Report to Congress," 8 April 2008.

The integration and coordination task may not be fundamentally different for the COIN commander, but it is likely to be considerably more complex; the descriptive phrase most often applied to the Petraeus strategy is "Clear; Hold; Build." In other words, once an area has been cleared of insurgents and is being held by COIN forces, the needed institutions and infrastructure can be built to address the needs of the population. None of these tasks can be done in isolation, or in any other order. Coordination of these efforts is vital because, as noted above, meeting the expectations of the protected population in a timely and sustainable fashion is itself a mission-critical requirement in a COIN campaign. As with the primacy of the political in COIN operations, however, the importance of integrating all available operational and reconstruction efforts in a COIN has long been understood. The 1980 Marine Corps COIN doctrine, for example, advises that, whereas all of the myriad activities that fall under the rubric of "civil affairs" occupy a supporting role in limited and conventional warfare, "in counterinsurgency, because of the necessity to separate the people from the dissidents, the role of civil affairs takes on increased importance." This requires the COIN commander to ensure that "all operation plans are based on an integrated civil-military approach."[181] The 1990 Army/Air Force manual is more explicit, arguing that "unity of effort" is one of the key imperatives of any low intensity conflict campaign.[182]

A COIN campaign may be assigned sufficient or insufficient resources, and the job of integrating and de-conflicting support and assistance may be well or poorly done, and all of these possibilities will play a role in determining whether reconstruction programs succeed or fail. But the importance of integrating all reconstruction efforts—whether civil, military, HN or non-governmental—into a coherent whole has long been recognized as a key strategic enabler in COIN planning.

5.1.3 Force must be balanced with restraint

America's current military predominance is noteworthy, but it is not unprecedented. History has seen many imperial powers enjoy unmatchable military superiority over their foes, particularly when engaged in "small wars" against qualitatively or technologically inferior—often vastly inferior—opponents. During the century of the *Pax Britannica*, the British Empire, between Waterloo and the outbreak of the First World War, was engaged in no less than 35 conflicts serious enough to merit the appellation "war." The vast majority of these were against opponents vastly inferior to Britain in military resources and expertise. Italy, France, Spain and Holland enjoyed similar military superiority when carving out their respective empires, as did Rome, which was not seriously threatened between the defeat of Carthage in the Third Punic War and the sack of the imperial capital nearly six centuries later.[183]

The history of major powers fighting "small wars" against less capable adversaries teaches the value of restraint in the use of force. This has long been understood to be of extreme importance in COIN campaigns, when the government must attract and maintain the support of the population, and the COIN commander must gain the people's trust and confidence in order to glean the human intelligence necessary to enable him to conduct precise, low-impact operations

[181] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 54.

[182] FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, Chapter 1, 5.

[183] Except, of course, by its own citizens, who from time to time lead Roman troops in revolt during the numerous outbreaks of civil war from Sulla onwards.

against insurgents. The negative impact on COIN campaigns of excessive brutality—e.g., Napoleon's treatment of Spanish guerrilleros during the Peninsular War,[184] Nazi reprisals against partisans on the Eastern Front between 1941 and 1944, and Viet Cong atrocities against their unfortunate compatriots are, by way of contrast, equally instructive.

In his 1899 study of the principles and practice of "small wars," Colonel C.E Callwell of the Royal Artillery noted that while it was occasionally necessary, even desirable, to deprive insurgents and guerrillas of the material means necessary to their operations, the "wholesale destruction of the property of the enemy may sometimes do more harm than good."[185] This principle is expressed with greater clarity by Shakespeare, who, writing (in the late 16th Century) his version of Henry V's 1415 *cheuvauchée* from Harfleur to Calais, had the king give unequivocal direction on the importance of honourable conduct and restraint:

> …we give express charge that in our marches through the country there be nothing compelled from the villages, nothing taken but paid for, none of the French upbraided or abused in disdainful language; for when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner.[186]

Clearly, the principle of restraint in responding to the provocations of guerrillas and insurgents has been understood and acknowledged for some time—as have the difficulties likely to be experienced by military superpowers when attempting to cope with the asymmetric tactics available to qualitatively inferior opponents.[187] This advice notwithstanding, however, most COIN campaigns, particularly of the past century, featured massive material destruction and dislocation of HN populations. The U.S. COIN campaign in Iraq represents a fortunate confluence of the desire to avoid excessive harm, and the technological ability to do so while still accomplishing vital military goals. This is probably not unconnected to the fact that the vast majority of history's COIN campaigns have been executed as adjuncts to wars of conquest. Washington's efforts (since the Philippines) stand in sharp contrast; in Vietnam, El Salvador, Afghanistan and Iraq, her designs have been explicitly and demonstrably non-imperial.

A conqueror can afford to exemplify the maxim of Gaius Caesar, aka Caligula: *Oderint dum metuant* ("Let them hate, so long as they fear"). One who comes in the guise of a liberator, however, can certainly not afford to be hated, and should strive not to be feared—especially if he aims to turn a one-time enemy into a trusted and trustworthy ally.

---

[184] In which Mameluke troops beheaded and mutilated suspected guerrilleros, and the Emperor himself threatened to cut off the ears of monks suspected of aiding them. Owen Connelly, *Blundering to Victory: Napoleon's Military Campaigns* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1992), pp. 121-24.

[185] Colonel C.E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principle and Practice*, 3rd ed., 1906 (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 149.

[186] William Shakespeare, *The Life of King Henry the Fifth*, Act III, Scene VI, v. 117-123. The hanging of the fictional character Bardolphe for stealing a pyx, which precipitated this soliloquy, is a matter of historical record; but the generalized rapine and plundering by Henry's troops, a common feature of warfare in the High Middle Ages, suggests some differences between Medieval and modern understandings of "lenity". Desmond Seward, *Henry V: The Scourge of God* (New York: Viking Books, 1987), pp. 71-73.

[187] These principles have been flouted just as often, e.g. by Napoleon against the Spanish guerrilleros, or by Hitler during his attempted conquest of the Soviet Union. In both cases, occupying powers committed innumerable atrocities in the drive to stamp out a smoldering insurgency. Neither campaign turned out well for the occupiers.

5.1.4 Legitimacy is earned, not assumed

The principal purpose of eschewing the use of excessive force in COIN operations, of course, is to avoid imperilling attempts to build and maintain legitimate governmental institutions. The chief goal of any COIN campaign, after all, is to leave the government in control of the country and capable of handling any residual insurgents or further outbreaks of disorderliness. Foreign forces assisting in COIN operations may have other objectives as well, but their primary strategic focus should be ensuring that the supported government is capable of carrying on without their aid, and the sooner the better.

The principal challenge in building legitimacy in an established or nascent democracy is that popular support can only be earned; it is valueless and temporary if compelled.[188] HN forces earn legitimacy and support through demonstrating that they are capable of providing peace and stability in accordance with the rule of law. Absent such a demonstration, the population is likely to support whoever is capable of providing the common folk with protection from attack. Not surprisingly, the 1980 Marine Corps COIN manual has something to say about this phenomenon, noting that "support is rendered [to insurgents] when the population lacks confidence in the government's ability to protect them," and adding that "[c]onfidence can be restored by a strong government, and fears overcome through the [provision of] protection by local security forces."[189]

This calculus underlay much of the violence in Iraq in 2006 and early 2007, when what had previously been an anti-Coalition campaign of violence evolved into a sectarian struggle, sparked by atrocities by Sunni insurgents and jihadists against Shia civilians, and leading (with stunning rapidity) to Sunni fighters providing protection to their tribes against Shiite militia attacks, and vice versa. The key to breaking this "cycle of violence" (an overused term, but one that is clearly applicable to this situation) was reasserting the role of the Iraqi Government in providing security in place of the armed gunmen of the rival sects. This was accomplished, in essence, by killing irreconcilable fanatics (al Qaeda and its ideological fellow travelers), transforming many of the Sunni fighters into "Sons of Iraq" (making them "part of the solution" instead of "part of the problem"), and beating down the Shiite militias to the point where they faced a choice between offering a ceasefire and being wiped out.

Throughout this process, U.S. and Iraqi forces operated in close cooperation, with the latter increasingly taking the lead as they accumulated experience and confidence. By the time Petraeus reported to Congress in April 2008, nine of Iraq's 18 provinces had been transferred to Iraqi control, and more than 100 Iraqi Army combat battalions were taking part in routine operations alongside US troops (and taking three times the US casualty rate).[190] While Petraeus assessed that the Iraqi security forces were not yet ready to assume responsibility for security nationwide, clearly enormous progress had been made in building their capacity to do so. By dint of hard work, sound training, experience under fire and the example set by U.S. personnel working alongside them, the Iraqi security forces were able to make progress on the road towards

[188] The 1980 Marine Corps doctrine states that "winning the willing support of the population to the side of the threatened government is one of the principal goals of countering an insurgent situation." MCWP 3-33.5, 134 (emphasis added). The 1990 Army/Air Force manual states that legitimacy cannot be created, only "encouraged and sustained" by one's actions. FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, Chapter 1, 5.
[189] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 41.
[190] Petraeus, "Report to Congress," 8 April 2008.

competence and trust, establishing crucial legitimacy in the eyes of their compatriots.[191] While the importance of building institutional legitimacy has a long pedigree, it is difficult to find a better historical example of a concentrated effort, under the aegis of a COIN campaign, to create effective national security institutions virtually "from scratch."

5.1.5 Manpower must be sufficient

This is another area where past doctrine offers some support to one of the key strategic elements derived from this study. As noted above, the surge demonstrates that the manpower requirements necessary to stage a successful COIN campaign are rather larger than the number of troops that a technologically advanced army needs in order to defeat a much larger, but qualitatively inferior, enemy force. In an interview in late autumn of 2007 after the surge had been under way for some five months, Lieutenant General Odierno made a point of emphasizing the enabling role played by the fresh drafts of troops he had been granted. Those forces allowed him to launch

> …a surge in simultaneous and sustained offensive operations, in partnership with Iraqi security forces…to operate in areas that had not yet seen a sustained coalition presence…to retain our hard-fought [*sic*] gains…to put pressure on al Qaeda and other extremists and deny them safe havens and sanctuaries…with the goal of protecting the population….[and] just as importantly to maintain our gains.[192]

Neither Petraeus' "Observations" article nor FM 3-24 goes into great depth about the manpower requirements of COIN operations as compared to conventional operations. This disparity may be attributable to the fact that the "transformation" of the U.S. armed forces, which was designed to result in a decline in the overall force size, is a relatively recent phenomenon. As noted above, American forces have long sought to replace manpower in battle with firepower; however, with few exceptions, this has been done by augmenting existing forces with enhanced capabilities. During the "Reagan rearmament," for example, the overall size of the US armed forces increased, and they received new and vastly more capable equipment. During the Clinton presidency, when America (like most Western nations) sought an illusory "peace dividend" after the collapse of the Soviet Union, US forces were substantially reduced, but without any comprehensive and planned program of rearmament to compensate for smaller numbers by enhancing individual effectiveness. It was only during Rumsfeld's transformation program that Washington attempted to simultaneously reduce the force while improving its overall lethality and effectiveness.[193] In

---

[191] On 23-24 May 2008, Iraqi Army and National Police personnel executed numerous raids throughout Baghdad, against Sadrist Mahdi Army and Iranian Special Groups forces, with US personnel in a supporting role (Bill Roggio, "Iraqi Army dismantles Mahdi Army caches in Sadr City"). The gradual assumption of responsibility for security is a key part of building the legitimacy not only of the security forces, but also of the government, which Iraqis must be able to trust to wield power equitably and only in accordance with the rule of law.

[192] Kimberly Kagan, "How They Did It: Executing the winning strategy in Iraq," *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 13, Issue 10, 19 November 2007.

[193] During Reagan's two terms, the total size of the US armed forces grew from 2,159,630 in 1980 to 2,301,594 in 1988 (hitting a high of 2,359,866 in 1986), an increase of 6.6 percent. During Clinton's two terms, the US armed forces shrank from 1,953,337 in 1992 to 1,530,430 in 2000, a decrease of 21.7 percent. During Rumsfeld's term as Secretary of Defense (2001 to 2006), the force actually expanded to

fact, as a result of 9/11, the total size of the U.S. military actually increased by a larger proportion than it did during Reagan's two terms. The end result, however, as has already been mentioned, was a force that was powerful enough to defeat a distant country in three weeks, but not big enough to easily undertake the more manpower-intensive, long-term work of securing and stabilizing it.

This key element of COIN strategy is a feature of current doctrine. FM 3-24 notes that "successful COIN operations often require a high ratio of security forces to the protected population,"[194] and sets the target figure at one counterinsurgent for every 50 host nation civilians. This equates to approximately half a million trained and effective personnel to conduct a COIN campaign in a country with Iraq's population,[195] and it is worth noting that the sum total of US and Iraqi forces is only now beginning to approach this figure. The U.S. military is probably still adapting to the constraints that are the ineluctable obverse of the capabilities they expected to gain through transformation. It is also possible that this question was not discussed more deeply in COIN doctrine because task-tailoring force size to operational requirements is a standard step in any military planning process (although, as Collins notes, there were more than a few voices raised in concern about available troop totals before the war began and in the weeks and months following the invasion).[196] In any case, the surge demonstrates that COIN operations invariably require more, and more intensively and specially trained, personnel than conventional operations; and that having adequate manpower to do the job is at least as crucial a consideration for the latter, as for the former. In view of the experience of the past year, this element of COIN strategy will probably have a higher profile in future doctrinal publications.

5.1.6 Identify and exploit fault lines

The "Sunni Awakening" was one of the transformative events of the signal turnaround in the struggle to pull Iraq back from the brink of civil war. While Petraeus' COIN strategy cannot be credited with creating this breach (if for no other reason than that it began long before Petraeus was appointed, or the new strategy adopted), he, and the administration, deserve credit for recognizing and capitalizing on it. As one observer argues,

> …the change [Petraeus] brought to bear was not so much military as political. Certainly, he deployed his forces differently than his predecessors, dispersing some of them in small units based in villages and neighborhoods contested by insurgents. That was not a trivial change, but it was not as important as the process of political discussion he began with local leaders….He sought to recruit elements previously regarded as irredeemable, and with threats, bribes and other inducements, forced open splits among Sunnis and Shia.[197]

"The most important thing Petraeus did," this author suggests, "was to reduce the cohesion of U.S. enemies by recognizing they were not in fact a cohesive entity, and moving forward on that

---

1,646,362, an increase of 7.6%. Data from the US DOD personnel statistics website at http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/ersonnel/MILITARY/Miltop.htm.

[194] FM 3-24, p. 1-2.

[195] Collins, *Choosing War: The Decision to Invade Iraq and Its Aftermath*, p. 23.

[196] Ibid., pp. 22-24.

[197] Friedman, "Petraeus, Afghanistan and the Lessons of Iraq."

basis." The CLCs were the most visible element of how Petraeus "moved forward." He did so by deliberately adopting the techniques trialed by Colonel MacFarland's unit in Ramadi in 2006, and adapting them to theatre-wide use. It is probably equally fair to suggest that Colonel MacFarland made practical use of some of the observations made by fellow soldiers in articles on counter-insurgency published during the preceding few years; cross-pollination between field and office is, after all, what military professional publications are designed to encourage.

Petraeus' "Observations" highlighted the importance of understanding the relationships between various local groups, local and regional history, and local leaders,[198] and this article was almost certainly available to Colonel MacFarland when he took up his duties in Ramadi six months after it appeared. But translating ideas into actions is a field commander's task. The cultural aspects of the Ramadi situation were set out with stunning eloquence in a slide presentation developed by Captain Travis Patriquin (under Colonel MacFarland's command) in the summer and autumn of 2006. This presentation, entitled "How to Win the War in Al Anbar," outlined the provincial social context, its dynamics and its problems, and proposed means of leveraging the influence of local tribal leaders to marginalize and ultimately defeat the insurgency.[199] The Patriquin presentation (which exploded across the internet in late 2006 and early 2007) is, in effect, a thumbnail sketch of the socio-cultural side of the surge strategy, variations on which played out across Iraq the following year.

While Patriquin regrettably did not live to see his ideas implemented theatre-wide (he was killed in action in Ramadi on 6 December 2006), the success of the concept in Ramadi must have been gratifying—and there were indications that the "Awakening" was spreading. For example, on 29 November 2006, a soldier blogging from Iraq reported that "A local sheikh came to the Army unit in charge of the sector he lived in, announced he wanted to fight the insurgents, and asked for help in doing so….To demonstrate his commitment, he organized his militia and began to quell some of the violence in the sector. With days, indirect fire attacks against U.S. bases dropped to nearly zero."[200] These events demonstrate unequivocally that US forces played a larger role in igniting and nurturing the "Sunni Awakening" than is generally recognized. Soldiers like Patriquin and MacFarland deserve credit for developing and implementing ideas that made the difference locally; Petraeus, Odierno and those who advised and assisted them deserve credit for recognizing the significance of these ideas, and translating them into a theatre-wide campaign.

It is likely because of socio-cultural phenomena like the "Awakening" that Petraeus argues that COIN strategies must involve more than merely military means, and "must include, above all, efforts to foster a political environment that helps reduce support for the insurgents and undermines the attraction of whatever ideology they may espouse."

> In certain Sunni Arab regions of Iraq, establishing such a political environment is likely of greater importance than military operations, since the right political initiatives might undermine the sanctuary and assistance provided to the insurgents.[201]

[198] Petraeus, "Observations," p. 8.
[199] Captain Patriquin's presentation at http://abcnews.go.com/images/US/how_to_win_in_anbar_v4.pdf.
[200] Jack Kelly, "How to Win the War in Al Anbar", Real Clear Politics, 19 December 2006 accessed at http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2006/12/separating_the_good_bad_guys_i.html.
[201] Petraeus, "Observations," pp. 8-9.

It is noteworthy that this "observation" was published some months before the Ramadi transformation got under way—but not too noteworthy, given that understanding and leveraging local politics has been an element of counter-insurgency warfare since time immemorial. The importance of driving a wedge between the insurgents and the people, incidentally, is explained most forcefully by Odierno, who, as the last of the ten points listed in his COIN guidance, emphasizes the need to "make the people choose" irrevocably between the insurgents and the government—and then to protect the latter (and, presumably, destroy the former).[202]

Taken in conjunction with Petraeus' observation that "money is ammunition," it is clear that the roots of this key element of COIN strategy lie firmly in historical understandings of insurgency and counter-insurgency, and were reflected in the observations Petraeus drew from his earlier tours in Iraq. This principle was put into practice by U.S. forces in Ramadi with great success, and was incorporated into and expanded upon in FM 3-24. The doctrine manual explains that insurgents may be motivated by different things, including pecuniary concerns, and notes that "rifts between insurgent leaders, if identified, can be exploited."[203] This is not the first time this observation was made in doctrine; the experience of the 1980s, when the US military was involved extensively with unfamiliar cultures, resulted in the 1990 Army/Air Force manual reminding readers that, "a deep understanding of host national culture is indispensable to making effective decisions and avoiding costly mistakes."[204] Appendix C of the manual goes even further, arguing that COIN planners need to "identify divisions within the leadership" so as to understand "differences of opinion among leaders as to purpose and method," with a view to exploiting weaknesses.[205] In earlier doctrine manuals, insurgencies were seen as more or less ideologically monolithic organizations (for example, no successful attempt was ever made to identify, or drive a wedge between, diverse factions of the Viet Cong). All insurgencies are of course different, and some may be more amenable to 'fission' than others; but this fact only reinforces the importance of recognizing and exploiting fault lines to split the enemy from his support base, and defeat the resulting fragments piecemeal.

5.1.7 Security comes first

The final key element derived from the foregoing analysis is the principle that in any COIN campaign, securing the population is a necessary prerequisite to achieving the political progress essential to secure long-term stability—not the other way around. As with the manpower requirements of a COIN campaign, this lesson seems to have been relearned at the hands of the harshest of teachers, failure. But it was not a new aspect of counter-insurgency; the 1990 doctrine, for example, argues that, of the three tasks facing the civil police, paramilitary and military forces engaged in a COIN campaign, the first two are "to isolate or protect the people" from covert and overt insurgent agencies (the third task is to defeat the guerrilla forces).[206]

As noted above, the administration's grand strategy for Iraq, described on many occasions by President Bush, foresaw liberation leading to political progress towards representative democracy, which would then create the institutions that would provide lasting security for Iraq,

---

[202] Odierno, "Counterinsurgency Guidance," p. 3.
[203] FM 3-24, pp. 1-8 to 1-9, and 1-19.
[204] FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, Chapter 1, p. 7.
[205] Ibid., Annex C, p. 5.
[206] Ibid., Chapter 2, p. 12.

and, in turn, help to secure and advance U.S. interests in the region. Two years after the invasion, the administration's policy still assumed that political progress would lead to stability; The 2005 *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, for example, argued that "progress in the political process—meeting political benchmarks—will provide momentum against the insurgency."[207] While, contrary to the rhetoric of the administration's critics, it was never assumed that US forces would be welcomed as liberators with open arms (Feith argues that Rumsfeld and other senior DOD figures anticipated quite the opposite[208]), the official policy of the Administration continued to place political progress above security in the order of things to be achieved in Iraq, arguing that the latter would flow from the former long after there was any realistic hope that this would happen.

The explosion of sectarian violence in 2006 cured this delusion and forced the administration to recognize that political progress could not occur in an atmosphere of sectarian suspicion that deepened with each successive attack. Ironically, this sort of toxic dynamic had long been understood. The 1980 Marine Corps manual, for example, acknowledged bluntly that "effective government control cannot be restored until the causes of the insurgency are removed and insurgent organizations purged," and argues that these goals should therefore be "uppermost in national strategy."[209] To a certain extent, Coalition forces in Iraq were doing precisely this—concentrating the bulk of their efforts on destroying the insurgency. While this was at least a step in the right direction, it represented a strategic oversight, because this approach did not take into consideration the *purpose* for which the insurgents were being destroyed. By 2006, the insurgents were directing the bulk of their attacks against defenceless civilians rather than the more formidable U.S. forces; accordingly, the principal purpose of destroying the insurgency should have been to protect Iraqi civilians. Instead, the posture adopted by US forces, stationed in large and well-defended bases, and characterized by "drive-by COIN", seemed to be designed for self-defence. This approach contradicted both the 1980 doctrine, which listed "ensure the security of the population" as the first military task in a COIN campaign;[210] and the 2004 manual, which listed "protect the population" as the first of five "critical tasks" for any COIN force.[211] Thus the problem for US forces before inauguration of the surge strategy seems to have been less a matter of not having the right doctrine, than of not following the doctrine they had.

Petraeus resolved this problem by reminding everyone that neutralizing insurgents was only a means to an end, not an end in itself; the end sought by the COIN forces was securing the Iraqi population from attack. Changing the institutional focus of the COIN campaign from "counterterrorism" (for lack of a better word) to counter-insurgency necessitated the redeployment of U.S. troops to forward operating bases and smaller combat outposts. This re-established intimate contact with the protected population; rebuilt the trust and confidence between Iraqis and counterinsurgent forces, both Iraqi and Coalition; prompted the accelerating accession of the Sunni tribes to the "Sons of Iraq"; re-created the flow of human intelligence upon which so much in a COIN campaign depends; allowed rapid and precise strikes against insurgent

---

[207] NSC, "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq," p. 15.
[208] Rumsfeld laid out all of the potential downsides of invading Iraq in a memo that Feith later referred to as the "Parade of Horribles". At the end of the memo, Rumsfeld noted that it was possible to write a similar memo listing the dangers of leaving Saddam in power. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*, pp. 332-35.
[209] MCWP 3-33.5, p. 41.
[210] Ibid, p. 41.
[211] FM 3-07.22, p. viii.

targets; and enabled U.S.-led COIN forces to rout the Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Baghdad. In the words of a soldier who was there, "the populace represents the 'key terrain' of the conflict."[212] This one insight—that providing security to the populace was the single most important counter-insurgency function, more a re-discovery of long-standing doctrine than the invention of something fundamentally new—was the foundation for all of the other gains to date that are attributable to the surge, making it the single most important element in the transformation of America's COIN strategy for Iraq.

5.2 "Re-learn, and adapt"

In COIN, the side that learns faster and adapts more rapidly…usually wins.[213]

The seven elements of a successful COIN strategy outlined above are neither an exclusive nor an exhaustive list; they are offered merely as a summary of what appear to be the key enabling factors in development of a COIN campaign as demonstrated by recent U.S. experience in Iraq. The principal doctrinal resources reviewed for this work—the four doctrine manuals, Petraeus' articles and Congressional testimony, and the counter-insurgency guidance issued by Odierno—represent only a minute fraction of the military and scholarly work that has been produced on this topic over the past few years (let alone in the annals of military strategic thought). As such, the analysis and conclusions presented in this paper would undoubtedly benefit from more in-depth study in each of these seven areas, as well as in any other domains related to COIN operations that may, for one reason or another, appear likely to play, or to have played, a decisive role in bringing about success or failure in counter-insurgency.

Each of the references reviewed in the course of this study offers an array of "aspects," "imperatives," "principles" and "paradoxes" for COIN operations; enumerating all of them would take dozens of pages, and providing an in-depth analysis of each would consume volumes. Such a research approach would not be beneficial, as a great many of these "principles" represent well-known and long understood aspects of the art and science of military strategy, and are as applicable to conventional as to COIN campaigns. It is not especially illuminating, for example, to investigate the principle, stated in FM 3-24, that "intelligence drives COIN operations",[214] because intelligence drives all operations of war—as much today as in the past, when the Duke of Wellington argued that the "whole art of war consists of getting at what is on the other side of the hill." What is significant is *how* intelligence is gathered and used in COIN operations; how intelligence gathering and dissemination in COIN situations differs from conventional operations; and how the need for rapid acquisition and dissemination of, and action on, HUMINT drives military activity (by producing, *inter alia*, direction to soldiers to get out of their vehicles and walk). Similarly, the advice that "counterinsurgents should prepare for a long-term commitment" is, in view of the US experience in Vietnam, not at all revolutionary, and is more a reaction to the appetite for "quick fixes" to which Western publics (especially in the U.S.) have, after decades of unquestioned American military superiority, understandably become conditioned. Finally, Petraeus' last three observations—concerning the importance of trusting small-unit commanders to handle complex and challenging situations; the need for commanders to be flexible and adaptable; and the role of the leader in "setting the right tone"—could all have come from

[212] Smith and MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens," p. 52.
[213] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. ix.
[214] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. 1-23.

virtually any classical treatise on the military art published in the last two millennia. Such qualities are important in any military endeavour; that they are more important in a COIN context is a matter not of kind, but of degree.

At the beginning of this Technical Memorandum, I asked whether U.S. COIN strategy was fundamentally transformed by the new doctrine outlined in FM 3-24 that was based, at least in part, on Petraeus' "Observations." The answer, not surprisingly, is both "yes" and "no." Many of the key elements of a COIN strategy identified above—the primacy of political considerations in operational planning, the need to integrate all aspects of effort into a single COIN campaign, the injunction to exercise restraint in using force, and the importance of building legitimate and capable HN institutions, especially security forces—derive from earlier doctrinal guidance, based on past experience in COIN operations and, indeed, on a great deal of military history and strategic thought. For example, each of the five "criteria for success" identified in the 2004 manual—protect the population; establish local political institutions; reinforce local governments; eliminate insurgent capabilities; and exploit information from local sources[215]—form part and parcel of Petraeus' successful strategy. However, certain other aspects of COIN—its extraordinarily manpower-intensive nature, the potential benefits to be gained from recognizing and capitalizing on internal divisions in the enemy camp, and the mission-critical importance of securing the population before seeking to promote political evolution—seem to have been influenced by more recent phenomena. But even these are not "novel" in any historical sense; as noted above, the importance of protecting the population from insurgent attacks was recognized in earlier doctrine, while identifying and exploiting internal fault lines amounts to a strategy of *divide et impera* ("divide and conquer," the phrase coined by 5th Century author Flavius Vegetius Renatus to describe Caesar's subjugation of Gauls). These are strategic concepts of ancient pedigree.

Much of what often appears to be revolutionary innovation in war actually consists of recalling, re-learning, and re-applying age-old lessons, shifting the strategic emphasis from one set of campaign objectives ("counter-terrorism") to another ("counterinsurgency"). If there is anything innovative in this, the innovation lies in recognizing impending disaster, and changing strategy and methodology in time to stave it off, instead of waiting until disaster strikes before designing and implementing corrective action. All things considered, where massive political and military bureaucracies are concerned, acting in advance of, rather than in response to, a disaster may itself be a novel innovation.

In short, what may look painfully obvious in hindsight is not always evident *ante-facto*. It is therefore greatly to the credit of Petraeus and those who assisted in the re-invention of U.S. COIN doctrine that these critical elements were recognized in time to craft and implement a solution based *inter alia* on their successful application in Anbar province; and equally to the credit of the Bush Administration that the Executive was able to recognize impending failure, and willing to accept the risks associated with altering course. Clearly, the injunction, stated in FM 3-24, that those charged with designing and implementing a COIN campaign need to be able to "learn and adapt,"[216] applies not just to military forces, but to their political masters as well. Given how often the key elements of a successful COIN strategy appear in past doctrine and crop up, again

[215] q.v., Section 1.3.
[216] FM 3-24 / MCWP 3-33.5, p. 1-26.

and again, throughout military history, it might be equally appropriate to enjoin military commanders facing an insurgency to "re-learn, and adapt."

In concluding that the successes of the surge are due more to re-learning than to innovation, it is natural to go one step further, and argue that principles cannot be "re-learned" unless they have first been forgotten. But this is not necessarily true. As has been argued above, switching one's institutional focus from conventional to counter-insurgency warfare is more a matter of shifting and rebalancing than one of fundamental change. Such shifts are driven by external factors, especially threats and resource pressures, as much as by the preferences of leadership. If the U.S. military was focussed on fighting and winning corps- and army-scale conventional operations during the 1980s, this is not because COIN was deemed unimportant, but rather because it necessarily took a back seat to the far greater threat posed by the Red Army in Europe; and if this focus persisted into the 1990s, this was probably due as much to caution in the face of uncertainty and the innate conservatism of the military establishment, as to institutional inertia. In short, if the U.S. military had to relearn COIN after 9/11, one must not be too eager to assign blame. As one senior U.S. military officer has argued, "[e]verybody beats up the Army and the Marine Corps because we forgot about counterinsurgency after Vietnam. [But] we didn't forget; there was just no money in it."[217]

If there is one meta-principle that emerges from this investigation, it is this: many if not most of the key strategic elements of COIN operations tend to increase individual risk for personnel involved. The need for more troops; the imperative of getting them out of their fortified bases and living among the people; the importance of patrolling on foot in densely-populated urban areas; the injunction to avoid the use of heavy firepower; the requirement to eschew action if the potential political cost exceeds the anticipated operational benefit; the need to proceed with discretion in order to establish and maintain public support; the value in maintaining long-term observation of insurgents for purposes of intelligence-gathering, rather than engaging and destroying them the moment they are identified; the notion that "tolerable" performance by host nation personnel is usually preferable to perfect performance by supporting foreign personnel; and, perhaps most of all, the primordial importance of protecting the people, are all counterintuitive to conventional military practice because they expose personnel to higher levels of individual risk. Taken in conjunction with the fact that asymmetric insurgent tactics tend to dilute the qualitative superiority enjoyed by Western military forces, this means that casualty ratios for forces engaged in a COIN campaign will almost certainly be higher than those that the same force would, *ceteris paribus*, expect to incur in a conventional conflict. This assessment, incidentally, is supported by U.S. casualty statistics in both Iraq and Afghanistan, where the counter-insurgency phases of the campaigns have seen far higher casualty rates than the initial combat operations that defeated, respectively, the Saddam and Taliban regimes.[218]

In the final analysis, the success of the surge in Iraq between June and December 2007 is attributable to many factors, of which the reorientation of the strategic approach to the ongoing COIN campaign was only one. All of the other aspects of a military campaign necessary to support a comprehensive and effective strategy—well-trained and well-motivated troops, solid

[217] This comment was offered on a not-for-attribution basis by a senior US military officer during a symposium entitled "Strategic Re-Assessment: From Long-Range Planning to Future Strategy and Forces" at the National Defense University, Washington, D.C., 3-4 June 2008.
[218] A thorough review of US Casualty rates in the war on terror are addressed in a separate publication.

political backing, sustained and resilient logistic support, adequate (which is to say, vast amounts of) financial support, and so forth―played equally important roles, and they would all benefit from further research and analysis (as would the question of whether the approach that appears to have worked in Iraq would, or would not, be likely to work in Afghanistan).

In the meantime, states contemplating the provision of assistance to a host nation engaged in fighting a counter-insurgency campaign would do well to familiarize themselves with the seven key elements of COIN strategy outlined above, as well as the more in-depth aspects of contemporary U.S. COIN doctrine and strategic thinking. Regardless of the origins, historical or recent, of the concepts and innovations contained in FM 3-24, the success thus far of the surge strategy in Iraq demonstrates the importance and value of these elements as a guide to counter-insurgency planning, and their growing relevance to the sort of asymmetric warfare that seems increasingly likely to characterize warfare in the modern world.

Afterword

Success, they say, has a thousand fathers; but some names, among many that doubtless deserve mention, surfaced repeatedly in the course of this study. While nothing in this paper should be taken to suggest that General David Petraeus was either the sole originator of the concepts set forth in FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency*, or the sole author of the document itself, by virtue of his appointment, his frequent Congressional testimony, and the success of his tenure as Commander MNF-I, General Petraeus became the public face of the US COIN campaign in Iraq. He thus stands *primus inter pares* and features prominently herein. Other names of note include Lieutenant-Colonel David Kilcullen, Australian Army, who served as a consultant on COIN operations for the US Department of Defense, and reportedly played a significant role in developing the new strategy; Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, US Army, author of *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), who extracted important lessons from historical COIN campaigns and ongoing operations in Iraq, and incorporated them into FM 3-24; Colonel Sean MacFarland, Commander of the Ready First Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armoured Division, US Army, whose unit helped to midwife the "Sunni Awakening" in Anbar province in the summer of 2006; Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, Commander Multinational Corps Iraq, who put the new strategy into practice while the surge unfolded; and finally, Captain Travis Patriquin, US Army, who developed and disseminated, in a readily-understood form, crucial ideas on how to leverage Iraq's complex social and sectarian dynamics, and co-opt the Sunni sheiks in Anbar province.

Even the grandest of military theories, however, is of no use without capable and dedicated soldiers to put them into practice. This paper (with all humility, and with sincere apologies for any errors of fact, omission or interpretation it may contain) is dedicated to the tens of thousands of troops – American *and* Iraqi – whose labours and sacrifice during the surge gave Iraq another chance at freedom and peace. Their victory may indeed be "fragile and reversible"; victories often are. But it is real, and it is theirs.

In September 2007, just as the surge was beginning to make obvious and undeniable progress, the *Economist* – that bastion of conventional wisdom – predicted that reversing the deteriorating situation in Iraq would take "a miracle."[219] In fact, what it took was a sharp commander with a solid plan, and tough, well-trained, well-disciplined and battle-hardened soldiers to carry it out. If what happened in Iraq over the past year was truly a miracle, then (to borrow a line from the film *Zulu*), it was "a short-chamber Boxer Henry .45 calibre miracle."

And a bayonet – with some guts behind it.

- Don Neill, August 2008

[219] "Waiting for the general (and a miracle)," *The Economist*, 6 September 2007.

Annex A Husseyn's Story

The following story was posted at www.thedonovan.com by William Tuttle, a U.S. Army aviator (helicopter pilot). Mr. Tuttle is currently working as a contractor providing flight instruction to Iraqi Air Force personnel in Iraq.[220]

HUSSAYN'S STORY

The visual-only sim[ulation] can be a stomach-churner, but a couple of the IqAF [Iraqi Air Force] Fling-Wing [helicopter] pilots who have come up here from Taji are pretty tough – the only thing that gets to them is my coffee.

Hussayn was recovering from a cup of my extra-strength double espresso with a bottle of tamarind soda (if you're curious, take a can of Doctah Peppah [*sic*] and add a couple of ounces of OJ, then sip, cautiously).

He gave me a bit of perspective on what it's like to have Crusader Myrmidons roaming your neighborhood.

> "After Baghdad falls to the US, I am cashiered out of the Air Force and take a job in one of the markets in my neighborhood. One night, some of my friends are visiting, and we have a barbecue and are watching videos of cowboy movies. There is a knock on my door. I open it and there is a US patrol. They ask if they can enter my house and I say, 'Sure, come in.' I offer them some barbecue, because we see them on patrol; we recognize them and know how long they are out before they return to base. They say, 'No, thank you. We have eaten recently.'
>
> "Then they ask if I have weapons. One of my friends says to me in Arabic, 'Tell them "No" because they will take your guns and you will be defenseless.' I tell him in Arabic, 'I will not lie to them or they will not trust us.'
>
> "So I say, 'Yes, I have a submachinegun, an AK and a pistol.' The patrol leader says, 'Bring them, please. We need to see them.' So, I bring them out. The patrol leader examines them, the submachinegun, the AK and the pistol. He tells me, 'The lubricant you have been using is bad quality.' But I know he is really checking to see if they have been fired recently.

[220] This post has been copied from http://www.thedonovan.com/archives/2008/05/hussayns_story.html in its entirety and is used with the permission of the author, William Tuttle. It was originally published on 14 May 2008. The name 'Hussayn' is a pseudonym; the individual featured in the story would likely be subject to al Qaeda reprisals if his identity were known.

“Two of his men strip the weapons, clean them, give me new lubricant, show me how to use new lubricant, re-assemble the weapons and return them to me. They say, ‘We must leave now―thank you for allowing us into your home.’

“They return every night, the same patrol, and ask if my family is well. I offer them food, tea, they say, ‘Thank you,’ and sometimes they stay for a bite to eat, or a cup of tea. I see them in the marketplace, we say ‘Hello, how are you?’ and ask about their families, too. They are friends with all the neighborhood.

“One day, everything changes. The patrols are all in Humvees and they travel fast. The soldiers all look at us with suspicion from the Humvees and we do not understand why. Then I hear of Wahabi in the neighborhood, but I do not report them to the patrols―I cannot, the Humvees travel fast and no one comes to my house any more. More and more, we hear shooting down the street, and one morning a bomb destroys the market where I work. I could get another job in another market, but that market might also be destroyed by a bomb. Only a few Wahabi are where I live, but there is no one to tell―no patrols, no police.

“So I come back to the Air Force. I come back because I want to get the Wahabi out of my neighborhood, get them out of Iraq.

“One month ago, the patrols are back, and they are walking, not in Humvees. Different soldiers from the soldiers in the first patrols, but behaving like them―very courteous, very watchful.

“When the patrol knocks on my door, I say, ‘Please come in―I would like some lubricant for my pistol.’ The patrol leader looks at me with a funny look, then he smiles, then they all come in and drink tea and I draw a map of where the Wahabi are...”

List of symbols/abbreviations/acronyms/initialisms

AFP	Air Force Publication
AO	Area of Operations
AQI	al Qaeda in Iraq
CLC	Concerned Local Citizens
COIN	counter-insurgency
COPs	Combat Outposts
DOD	U.S. Department of Defense
EFP	explosive-formed projectile
FM	Field Manual
FMI	Field Manual-Interim
FOB	Forward Operating Bases
HN	Host Nation
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
IAI	Islamic Army in Iraq
IDAD	Internal Defense and Development
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IP	Iraqi Police
ISG	Iraq Study Group
JAM	*Jaish al Mahdi* (Mahdi Army)
LIC	low-intensity conflict
MCWP	Marine Corps Warfighting Publication
MOUT	Military Operations in Urban Terrain
PSYOPS	Psychological Operations

UN	United Nations
USIP	United States Institute for Peace
VBIED	Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

Distribution list

Document No.: DRDC CORA TM 2008-041

Information

Internal

DG
Chief Scientist
DDG
SMO
Section Heads
Library
Authors

External

DM
Assoc DM
CDS
VCDS
DOS SJS
ADM (Pol)
ADM (S&T)
CMS
CLS
CAS
CMP
Comd CANCOM
Comd CEFCOM
Comd CANSOFCOM
Comd CANOSCOM
ADM(IE)
C Res & Cdts
COS VCDS
CDI
Comd CFC
Comd CLFCSC
CFD
CFPM
DGIP
DG Cap Dev
DGFDA
DGMFD

DGLCD
DGAFD
DGIS Pol
DG Pol Plan
D Strat A
D Pol Dev
DMTAP
D NATO Pol
DPK Pol
DWH Pol
DAD
DAT
DLSP
D Air Sp
DMPOR
DSOA
DFSA
DPFL
DRDKIM

Monik Beauregard
Deputy Executive Director
International Assessment Staff
Privy Council Office
59 Sparks Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A3

Director – Policy Research Division
Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G2

Dr. Jeremy Littlewood
Canadian Centre of Intelligence and Security Studies
The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA)
Carleton University DT-1404
1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6

Dr. Marc Milner
Director
The Brigadier Milton F. Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society
Tilley Hall Room 43
9 Macaulay Lane
University of New Brunswick
P.O. Box 4400
Fredericton NB E3B 5A3

Brigadier General (Ret) James S. Cox, OMM, CD, MA
Analyst, Political and Social Affairs Division
Parliamentary Information and Research Service
Library of Parliament
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A9

Library
Canadian Forces College
215 Yonge Blvd.
Toronto, Ontario M5M 3H9

Professor Hugh White
Head
Strategic and Defence Studies Centre
Level 3, Hedley Bull Centre
Australian National University
130 Garran Road
Canberra ACT 0200
Australia

Caroline Flintoft
Director of Research and Publications
International Crisis Group
149 Avenue Louise
Level 24
B-1050 Brussels
Belgium

Álvaro de Vasconcelos
Director
EU Institute for Security Studies
43 Avenue du Président Wilson
75775 Paris cedex 16
France

Dr. Oliver Thränert
Stiftung Wissenschaft un Politic
Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit
Ludwigkirchplatz 3-4
10719 Berlin
Germany

Dr. Karl-Heinz Kamp
Director – Research Division
NATO Defense College
Via Giorgio Pelosi, 1
Cecchignola
00143 Rome, Italy

Director of Research
National Defence College
Drottning Kristinas väg 37
Box 27805
SE-115 93
Stockholm
Sweden

Professor Keith Krause
Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement
The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
132, rue de Lausanne
Case postale 136
CH 1211 Genève 21
Switzerland

Dr. Robin Niblett
Director
Royal Institute of International Affairs
Chatham House
10 James's Square
London SW1Y 4LE
United Kingdom

Dr. John Chipman
Director-General and Chief Executive
The International Institute for Strategic Studies
Arundel House, 13-15 Arundel Street, Temple Place
London WC2R 3DX
United Kingdom

Dr. Jamie MacIntosh
Advanced Research and Assessment Group (ARAG)
Defence Academy of the United Kingdom
Headquarters
Greenhill House
Shrivenham
Nr Swindon
Wiltshire SN6 8LA
United Kingdom

Robert S. Litwak
Director, International Security Studies
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20004-3027
United States

Dr. Eric Thompson
International Affairs Group (IAG)
The Center for Strategic Studies
The CNA Corporation
4825 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22311
United States

Richard K. Betts
Arnold A. Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies
420 West 118th Street
13th Floor, Room 1336, MC 3347
New York, NY 10027
United States

Professor Douglas C. Lovelace, Jr.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute (SSI)
United States Army War College
122 Forbes Avenue
Carlisle, Pennsylvania 17013-5244
United States

Dr. Jacob Kipp
Deputy Director
School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS)
Eisenhower Hall Rm. 271
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027
United States

Lieutenant General, US Air Force (Ret.) Tad J. Oelstrom
Director, National Security Program
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University
79 John F. Kennedy Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
United States

Dr. James Schear, Director of Research
Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS)
National Defense University
Fort Lesley J. McNair
Washington, DC 20319-5066
United States

Director, USAF Institute for National Security Studies
HQ USAFA/DFES
2354 Fairchild Drive, Suite 5L27
USAF Academy, CO 80840
United States

Mr. Brian Fishman
Director of Research
Combating Terrorism Center
Lincoln Hall
U.S. Military Academy
West Point, NY 10996
United States

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew M. Johnson
School of Advanced Military Studies
CGSC Special Operations Education Element
100 Stimson Avenue
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301
United States

Dr. Jarrod Wiener
Director
Brussels School of International Studies
University of Kent
Boulevard de la Plaine 5
1050 Bruxelles
Belgium

DOCUMENT CONTROL DATA

(Security classification of title, body of abstract and indexing annotation must be entered when the overall document is classified)

1. ORIGINATOR (The name and address of the organization preparing the document. Organizations for whom the document was prepared, e.g. Centre sponsoring a contractor's report, or tasking agency, are entered in section 8.)	2. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION (Overall security classification of the document including special warning terms if applicable.)
Centre for Operational Research and Analysis Defence R&D Canada 6CBS, NDHQ Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K2	UNCLASSIFIED

3. TITLE (The complete document title as indicated on the title page. Its classification should be indicated by the appropriate abbreviation (S, C or U) in parentheses after the title.)

"The graduate level of war": Continuity and change in U.S. counter-insurgency strategy

4. AUTHORS (last name, followed by initials – ranks, titles, etc. not to be used)

Neill, D.A.

5. DATE OF PUBLICATION (Month and year of publication of document.)	6a. NO. OF PAGES (Total containing information, including Annexes, Appendices, etc.)	6b. NO. OF REFS (Total cited in document.)
August 2008	101	0

7. DESCRIPTIVE NOTES (The category of the document, e.g. technical report, technical note or memorandum. If appropriate, enter the type of report, e.g. interim, progress, summary, annual or final. Give the inclusive dates when a specific reporting period is covered.)

Technical Memorandum

8. SPONSORING ACTIVITY (The name of the department project office or laboratory sponsoring the research and development – include address.)

9a. PROJECT OR GRANT NO. (If appropriate, the applicable research and development project or grant number under which the document was written. Please specify whether project or grant.)	9b. CONTRACT NO. (If appropriate, the applicable number under which the document was written.)

10a. ORIGINATOR'S DOCUMENT NUMBER (The official document number by which the document is identified by the originating activity. This number must be unique to this document.)	10b. OTHER DOCUMENT NO(s). (Any other numbers which may be assigned this document either by the originator or by the sponsor.)
DRDC CORA TM 2008-041	

11. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY (Any limitations on further dissemination of the document, other than those imposed by security classification.)

Unlimited

12. DOCUMENT ANNOUNCEMENT (Any limitation to the bibliographic announcement of this document. This will normally correspond to the Document Availability (11). However, where further distribution (beyond the audience specified in (11) is possible, a wider announcement audience may be selected.))

Unlimited

13. ABSTRACT (A brief and factual summary of the document. It may also appear elsewhere in the body of the document itself. It is highly desirable that the abstract of classified documents be unclassified. Each paragraph of the abstract shall begin with an indication of the security classification of the information in the paragraph (unless the document itself is unclassified) represented as (S), (C), (R), or (U). It is not necessary to include here abstracts in both official languages unless the text is bilingual.)

In December 2006, the US Department of Defense (DOD) issued FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 *Counterinsurgency*. This new doctrine manual was billed as a significant departure from the US military's previous approach to counterinsurgency (COIN) warfare, elements of which dated back to the immediate post-Vietnam period. This document has since been cited as the foundation upon which General David Petraeus built the 'surge' strategy that has been credited with forestalling civil war and stabilizing the security situation in Iraq. This paper examines that claim by comparing the new manual to the publications that it superseded (FMI 3-07.22 *Counterinsurgency Operations*, issued by the US Army in October 2004; and MCWP 3-33.5 *Counterinsurgency Operations*, issued by the US Marine Corps in January 1980) with a view to identifying how the US military's understanding of, and strategic approach to, COIN warfare was transformed by the new manual. It concludes that while most of the key strategic elements that enabled the COIN campaign in Iraq to succeed are drawn from earlier doctrine and historical experience, three factors – catering to the greater manpower requirements of COIN versus conventional operations, the importance of identifying and exploiting internal division in the insurgency, and the need to secure the population as the primary goal of a COIN force – were relatively recent innovations, and played a crucial role in the success of the surge strategy between June and December of 2007.

14. KEYWORDS, DESCRIPTORS or IDENTIFIERS (Technically meaningful terms or short phrases that characterize a document and could be helpful in cataloguing the document. They should be selected so that no security classification is required. Identifiers, such as equipment model designation, trade name, military project code name, geographic location may also be included. If possible keywords should be selected from a published thesaurus, e.g. Thesaurus of Engineering and Scientific Terms (TEST) and that thesaurus identified. If it is not possible to select indexing terms which are Unclassified, the classification of each should be indicated as with the title.)

U.S. Armed Forces; COIN; counter-insurgency; transformation; insurgency; Iraq; Afghanistan; strategy; operational doctrine; strategic doctrine; Petraeus; Iraq Study Group; surge; FM 3-24; U.S. Marine Corps

www.drdc-rddc.gc.ca