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**Phoenix Rises Again:  
HUMINT Lessons for Counterinsurgency Operations**

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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May 16, 2006

## **Abstract**

Today's lessons from military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have given rise to the question of how to best develop counterinsurgency strategies that will integrate Human Intelligence (HUMINT) approaches designed to achieve the established objectives. Vietnam demonstrates that this is not a new question. There were then, as there are now, operational-level seams in the fields of HUMINT and counterinsurgency approaches which must be stitched together. This paper will examine the lessons of counterinsurgency in Vietnam and suggest as its thesis that today's doctrine must enhance the conventional tenets of the Joint HUMINT and Counterintelligence (J2X) role by incorporating an aggressive strategy for synchronizing tribal and indigenous human intelligence. To redefine U.S. counterinsurgency operations, we must leverage human networks at the operational-level of war. This tribal-indigenous thread is an important nexus of military and political networks.

The military HUMINT mission calls for a confluence of management with indigenous security forces, while simultaneously building and moderating tribal networks. Accordingly, this will provide greater equilibrium between the need for security and the needs of the people within an insurgency. In the absence of a CORDS or Phoenix-like interagency approach to counterinsurgency, it remains crucial that the J2X role be expanded to synchronize tribal interactions and indigenous security forces to close this operational-level HUMINT gap.

Today's lessons from military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have given rise to the question of how to best develop counterinsurgency strategies that will integrate Human Intelligence (HUMINT) approaches designed to achieve the established objectives. Vietnam demonstrates that this is not a new question. There were then, as there are now, operational-level seams in the fields of HUMINT and counterinsurgency approaches which must be stitched together. This paper will examine the lessons of counterinsurgency in Vietnam and suggest as its thesis that today's doctrine must enhance the conventional tenets of the Joint HUMINT and Counterintelligence (J2X) role by incorporating an aggressive strategy for synchronizing tribal and indigenous human intelligence. To redefine U.S. counterinsurgency operations, we must leverage human networks at the operational-level of war.

In August 2002, before the invasion of Iraq and the emergence of the insurgency, a journalist asked: "Can your friend's enemy be your friend?"<sup>1</sup> This question remains relevant today because the convergence of counterinsurgency approaches and HUMINT necessitates thoughtful engagements with tribal leaders and local security forces to unify efforts against insurgents. This tribal-indigenous thread is an important nexus of military and political networks. Indeed, tribal engagements remain a largely untapped human domain, which offers alternative operational-level approaches for counterinsurgency operations, rather than over-reliance on "brute force."<sup>2</sup>

These tribal and indigenous interactions must be grafted to more sophisticated HUMINT programs that focus on social and cultural dimensions of insurgency. In the case of Afghanistan, there were interactions with notorious warlords and sub-national actors, such as Pasha Khan Zadran (PKZ) and Rashid Dostum. In Kabul, the Combined Forces Command Afghanistan (CFC-A) increasingly found itself caught between warlords who

were opposed to the newly established Afghan Government, but yet were aligned with U.S. goals for destroying al-Qaeda.<sup>3</sup> These tribal-military interactions rest in the middle ground between tactical and strategic intelligence. They are less about producing intelligence, and more about influencing behavior and building an indigenous base of support.<sup>4</sup> Only reflexively, due to the impulse generated by obvious shortcomings in HUMINT, did CFC-A's operational-level HUMINT staff (C2X) initiate meetings with Dostum and PKZ.<sup>5</sup> These meetings were an attempt to moderate tribal behavior for CFC-A's Commander. Despite the fact that these C2X meetings were improvised and outside the doctrinal boundaries of a combined operational staff, there were some modest successes.<sup>6</sup>

Like early critics of counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan, some observers have raised questions about tribal alliances in Iraq, while also conjuring up the specter of Vietnam.<sup>7</sup> This paper reframes the question: What, then, are the past HUMINT counterinsurgency lessons from Vietnam and what conclusions might be drawn that would help us effectively counter an insurgency? Examining the answers through a HUMINT lens may redefine future counterinsurgency approaches and alter doctrine to reflect a greater emphasis on leveraging human networks at the operational-level of war. The first task then is to reexamine the lessons of counterinsurgency in Vietnam, and to examine programs like Phoenix and Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS). The second task is to examine the operational-level seams as they relate to current HUMINT experiences in Iraq in order to offer doctrinal prescriptions and draw some final conclusions on HUMINT and counterinsurgency operations.

## **I. Alternatively**

Before continuing, a counterfactual point should be addressed about the nature of the war in Vietnam. The late military strategist, Harry Summers, fundamentally disagreed with the idea that the nature of the Vietnam War was a failure to implement U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Summers argued that defeat was linked to conventional war, and his analysis was richly colored with Clausewitzian theory, rather than the more popular undercurrent of revolutionary explanations for defeat.

This question will not be settled conclusively here, but author Jeffrey Record's idea that "Iraq exposes the limits of conventional military power in unconventional settings" is consistent with this author's premise that Vietnam revealed gaps in military HUMINT in an unconventional setting.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan underscore the value of examining new doctrinal HUMINT approaches that break from conventional warfare patterns to address tribal factors. This more unconventional approach seeks to balance the cause and effects of HUMINT keyed to the population. To be sure, the U.S. conventional military in Vietnam had initiated a broad pacification campaign later in the war, rather than in the early years of the conflict.<sup>10</sup>

## **II. Pacification**

In 1966, the topic of pacification and the need for a "Vietnam Czar" was settled in Warrenton, Virginia.<sup>11</sup> Robert Komer was President Johnson's interim National Security Adviser, when he was redirected to go to Vietnam for the purpose of synchronizing and unifying U.S. civilian agency pacification programs with the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). This move underscored the President's impatience with the progress of the war, and moved a step closer toward militarizing the pacification effort.<sup>12</sup>

Predictably, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), State Department, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) all opposed both Komer and the idea that military leadership would eventually control pacification. Komer's program, titled Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), was integrated into a "framework" within the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV).<sup>13</sup>

Despite some successes, Komer's days were numbered. When General Creighton Abrams took over MACV from General Westmoreland, William Colby succeeded Komer. Colby was later credited by some for making appreciable progress in the war by blending pacification programs with a combination of HUMINT programs designed to aggressively target Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI).<sup>14</sup> Despite successes with pacification, time was *the* critical factor in Vietnam. Much later, President Richard Nixon would comment that there is a "hidden timer" running when a President sends troops to war.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, this metaphorical *timer* was indeed ticking when General Abrams announced that he was going to take some risks in terms of "really getting going with the guerillas, the infrastructure, the local force, all that stuff."<sup>16</sup> This "stuff" was the other war that Abrams turned into one war.

### **III. Vietnam and the "Other War"**

The U.S. approach for fighting in Vietnam has been characterized as a two war phenomenon. The first of these wars embraced the tactical pursuit of large-scale conventional battles, while the "other war" confronted pacification with covert and clandestine means to counter the insurgency.<sup>17</sup> The latter war in the shadows began years earlier, with ambitious civilian—mostly Central intelligence Agency (CIA) run—programs for pacification and security, and had evolved over time. Eventually, these programs sometimes became a confusing amalgamation of organizations, programs, and variegated human

networks that were plagued by contradictory and sometimes conflicting goals. Still, at the end of the Vietnam War, pacification was managed by MACV. General Creighton Abrams effectively fused these ‘two wars’ in 1968. To sum up the consequences, U.S. troops became far more directly involved in the “Pacification Campaign” during Abram’s tenure.<sup>18</sup>

The convergence of the “two wars” was a coherent strategy that achieved a positive outcome in Vietnam. A demonstration of this strategy was the use of intelligence derived from local villagers, police, and U.S. military HUMINT sources, coupled with indigenous paramilitary and special South Vietnamese military units. This pacification strategy sought to enhance security and affect a positive outcome in the Vietnam War. However, as pointed out by a senior CIA officer, Nelson Brickham, an unintended consequence of the military’s inheriting pacification programs was a “perversion” of the intelligence. In other words, military HUMINT tended to become a means for simply executing tactical operations. Frustratingly for the CIA, it seemed that HUMINT was too restrictively channeled toward tactical military operations in support of the U.S. Army, and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam Forces (ARVN).<sup>19</sup> Could it be that military intelligence practitioners and MACV planners somehow missed the broader more sophisticated goals of counterinsurgency operations?

It seems that these fragmented pacification programs lacked a broader operational-level framework. Indeed, this dynamic is in some ways a “tacticization” problem.<sup>20</sup> In Vietnam, military HUMINT existed mostly at the lowest level of war, rather than rising to the necessary status of a cohesive HUMINT-counterinsurgency campaign. Put differently, HUMINT was perhaps too narrowly used to produce battlefield engagements, rather than



addressing the more complex *people* dimension of the insurgency, and therefore never fully reconciled the complex linkages between security, village leaders, and the population.<sup>21</sup>

This *tacticization* trend suggests that there is a gap in today's HUMINT approach for counterinsurgency operations, which may also have existed in Vietnam. If this is so, the organization of military HUMINT in Vietnam to support counterinsurgency operations was lacking.<sup>22</sup> This latter point suggests that analysis of events in Iraq raises relevant questions of how military HUMINT can be addressed to reverse this trend. To answer such questions, it is necessary to evaluate the parts of pacification and the Phoenix Program in greater detail.

#### **IV. The Seeds of the Phoenix Program**

The Phoenix Program was a branch of the broader pacification program that was used “to identify and root out the secret Communist apparatus within South Vietnam.”<sup>23</sup> But well before Phoenix congealed into a concept, or before any large-scale U.S. troop deployments to Vietnam, the CIA had imported counterinsurgency programs. The programs were adopted from other insurgency battlegrounds, like the Philippines, in order to help improve security for the Government of Vietnam (GVN). These early counterinsurgency programs used civic action programs as platforms for countering Viet Cong (VC) activities as early as 1955.<sup>24</sup> In balance, these programs were both offensive and defensive initiatives for countering the insurgency.

On an offensive front, propaganda and indigenous GVN political cadres were used to counteract communist propaganda, and to induce VC defections. From a more defensive standpoint, U.S. teams trained and advised rural self defense forces in concert with cooperative village chiefs in order to protect the population.<sup>25</sup> In parallel, the CIA built the both the GVN's internal security capabilities and its Central Intelligence Organization (CIO)

intelligence structure.<sup>26</sup> Besides the obvious benefits of building human intelligence networks, the CIA took primacy for developing indigenous human networks to neutralize Communist insurgents in Vietnam.

Considering the lessons from Mao, the idea behind some of these diverse programs were to isolate and separate the *people* from the “guerrilla *fish*,” while ruthlessly targeting clandestine VC networks.<sup>27</sup> To this end, some segments of the rural Vietnamese population were also resettled into protected camps. Not surprisingly, the cumulative effect of all of these mostly CIA programs was an interaction dynamic that resulted in a complex battle for the *people*, waged throughout South Vietnam. On the other hand, the U.S. Army mainly fought the *big war*—the war *not about* the *people*—but rather against conventional enemy units, seeking to find and destroy them.

Although it would be impossible here to provide a comprehensive history of the Phoenix Program, we can gain many important insights on HUMINT and counterinsurgency by understanding that the CIA in Vietnam indeed waged a multidimensional politico-military fight early on.<sup>28</sup> Many of these programs were modeled on other successful counterinsurgency programs, such as the British-Malaya model. Over time this resulted in the CIA developing a three-tiered approach for organizing paramilitary, civilian intelligence, and police actions in order to target and disrupt the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI).<sup>29</sup>

## **V. Phoenix Rises**

By the end of 1967, what later became Phoenix was a fusion of several different HUMINT and counterinsurgency programs—not always in harmony—but under the umbrella of a coordinating structure called Intelligence and Collection Exploitation (ICEX).<sup>30</sup> There, the CIA managed: Provincial Interrogation Centers (PICS); Census Grievance teams;

Revolutionary Development Cadre (RD); and Counterterrorist teams (CTs). Interestingly, the CIA rechristened the CT program as Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), a sort of secret army working directly for the CIA. According to one CIA official “the PRU was responsible for killing about seven thousand Viet Cong per year.”<sup>31</sup> Though these figures are likely inflated, the PRU was used to fight terror with terror.

The Census Grievance teams were ostensibly used to register peasant complaints against the government, but in reality it was a massive, unilateral CIA “low-level spying program.” The Rural Development (RD) Cadres comprised sixty-man Vietnamese teams operating in hamlets at the Province-level to neutralize the VC, and generally, “win the hearts and minds” of the population through rural civic action projects.<sup>32</sup> The CIA also advised the GVN “Special Branch” of the Vietnamese Police which was an important capability for developing intelligence on the VCI.<sup>33</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, the U.S. military worked closely with the Vietnamese Military Security Service (MSS), ARVN intelligence and South Vietnamese Regional forces. Not surprisingly, the U.S. Army “ran” a country-wide tactical HUMINT program.<sup>34</sup> This left the Agency for International Development (AID) to manage repatriation programs, public safety and a rural tactical security effort.<sup>35</sup> Defining the exact capabilities of these diffuse missions is less important than understanding that each of the programs dealt with Vietnamese cultural factors. Misunderstanding these cultural dimensions could potentially weaken the foundations of any of these counterinsurgency programs.<sup>36</sup> Finally, in November 1968, ICEX was renamed Phoenix–*Phuong Hoang* in Vietnamese—by the CIA, along with a nod from Abrams to accelerate all the fragmented pieces and parts of the pacification campaign in Vietnam.<sup>37</sup>

## VI. Lessons of Pacification and Phoenix

In reality, Phoenix—and the “other war”—was the “hard-line approach” to Vietnam’s insurgency.<sup>38</sup> Notwithstanding persistent and sensational claims that Phoenix was a CIA assassination program, the program only achieved mixed results.<sup>39</sup> In spite of everything, it was perhaps the *better war* for fighting a complex insurgency. The overall goal of pacification was to improve security throughout Vietnam’s diverse tribal landscape, to strengthen and rebuild village cooperation at the local level, and to use HUMINT for precise targeting of the VCI. But in the end, the *timer* Nixon talked about proved to be the decisive factor.

Unquestionably, the GVN did not adequately account for ideology and cultural factors in their counterinsurgency approaches. Paradoxically, the GVN often times reversed local justice in the villages, and widened the “gap between village officials and the central government.” Instead of protecting peasants, the GVN security apparatus was responsible for arresting and extorting from villagers for only minor transgressions and crimes. The GVN maintained a corrupted quota system, which was indiscriminately applied, and often ignored the Village Chief’s advice on tribal matters.<sup>40</sup> The VC, rather than the government, would then appear like the proverbial phoenix, rising from the ashes to offer the better alternative to Village Chiefs, who were always under pressure to protect their constituencies. In many cases, the peasant was “often better off with the Viet Cong than with the GVN.” Many villagers viewed the Saigon government as the greater evil.<sup>41</sup>

Not surprisingly, the struggle for the *people* in Vietnam is a tale of U.S. bureaucratic concepts, and discordant HUMINT programs operating in an environment interconnected with complex security, cultural and ideological dimensions. Vietnam also offers cautionary

lessons on contradictory HUMINT and counterinsurgency programs, perhaps too narrowly focused on tactical results, which may have obscured some of the broader goals of counterinsurgency operations.<sup>42</sup>

It seems that some preliminary lessons about HUMINT and counterinsurgency for Iraq, Afghanistan, and future operations emerge from the Vietnam experience. This paper's emphasis on human networks remains valid. Today, as in Vietnam, warlords and tribal leaders still carry out complex interactions with central governments, each battling for his *security*, which remains a common currency. It is imperative that HUMINT practitioners and counterinsurgency planners navigate through these complex environments with coherent and complementary programs, rather than working at cross-purposes.

There are several other points to consider: the *timer* is ticking in the Iraq insurgency; and with hindsight, the early U.S. military approach in Iraq may have been too fixated, for too long, on tactical conventional engagements versus addressing politico-military problems. Nevertheless, the U.S. is now undeniably in one war—a multidimensional insurgency.<sup>43</sup> Attention to past experiences cannot be ignored. It is not enough to merely acknowledge these lessons; success demands we use them to our advantage.

## **VII. Iraq**

In December 2003, the United States Central Command's J2X hand carried a concept briefing to the U.S. Headquarters, Baghdad to offer assistance for coordinating HUMINT operations between Special Operations Forces (SOF) and other governmental agencies. The objective was to address the longer-term HUMINT problems—to free up time and staff to focus on the more pressing near-term operational problems—which were undoubtedly daunting at the time.<sup>44</sup> In short, the unified command wanted to help shape the *other war*,

which had not yet taken form, but was seemingly in the early stages of insurgency. The offer of support was not accepted by JTF-7.<sup>45</sup>

Instead, the same team deployed to Afghanistan to provide CFC-A with a functional C2X staff that would allow Task Force 180's subordinate J2X staff to organize tactical HUMINT, and correspondingly allow CFC-A's newly established C2X staff to address operational-level HUMINT and counterintelligence issues. These initiatives included engagement with warlords as discussed at the outset of this paper.<sup>46</sup>

One year later, the USCENTCOM team reassembled in Baghdad, and was granted approval to provide counterinsurgency training for the Iraqis. The backdrop for this specific counterinsurgency training was the uncertain security situation before the first general election in post-Saddam Iraq, in January 2005.<sup>47</sup> Previous Multi-National Forces Iraq (MNF-I) efforts for military-sponsored intelligence training programs had stalled. Still, the USCENTCOM team put together an intensive Iraqi Reconnaissance and Surveillance Training (IRST) course—providing training for operationalizing intelligence—for Iraqi Army Brigades; the Ministry of Defense (MOD); and the Ministry of Interior (MOI). Though the primary focus was the Iraqi Army, the team took on the idea of baseline intelligence training for non-military Iraqi security organizations. These Iraqi teams were trained to develop actionable intelligence to disrupt terrorist-insurgent infrastructures and networks.<sup>48</sup>

Working with indigenous counterinsurgency organizations in Iraq can only be loosely compared to Vietnam's more comprehensive pacification programs, and an important distinction must be made: in Iraq—as contrasted with the multidimensional programs in Vietnam—there was a great deal of improvisation aimed at transforming intelligence programs into Iraqi self reliance.

More importantly, the problem was again *tacticization* of HUMINT, which by now is a common strand throughout this paper. Despite the presence of U.S. intelligence trainers to engage with the Iraqis through intelligence training initiatives, the mapping out of these growing partnerships, and developing information sharing arrangements to produce new streams of intelligence reporting were only just budding. The programs remained fixed to the tactical problem for ferreting out insurgents and still needed a broader focus.

To sum up, in the aftermath of Iraq's first election in January 2005, the insurgency seemed disquietingly stalled. The aggressive coalition hunt for Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) had by then finally given way to a two-tiered intelligence focus: countering insurgency and building Iraqi security forces capabilities to create self reliance. Here, in some ways the *two war* metaphor in Vietnam fits as an intelligence metaphor for the U.S. intervention in Iraq: the first intelligence war was an exhaustive hunt for WMD, which took primacy for leveraging strategic and operational-level human intelligence requirements and resources. Correspondingly, the other part of the intelligence war was confined to the lower-level human intelligence effort, more narrowly focused on tactical-level HUMINT-driven raid operations against insurgents. Finally, it seems that self-reliance in Iraq is analogous to *Vietnamization*, some three decades before. Thus, experiences in Iraq expose a missing operational-level HUMINT dimension that must now be grafted to future doctrine and practice.

### **VIII. The Tribal Dimension**

Andrew Krepinivich, Jr. argues in "How to Win in Iraq," that along with other counterinsurgency strategies, the U.S. needs to assist the Iraqis in developing intelligence and security services to penetrate insurgent infrastructures. But this approach comes with an

important caveat that a long-term counterinsurgency strategy must be complementary to a broader program, rather than merely a series of short-sighted operations tied to “hunting down and killing insurgents.”<sup>49</sup> Indeed, these arguments are grounded to the very nature of the conflict in Iraq. Accordingly, insurgent violence is intended to influence the Iraqi people, the American people, and the American soldier.<sup>50</sup>

Undeniably now, the *one war* in Iraq still focuses the preponderance of its tactical HUMINT against insurgents. Curiously, even the precious limited numbers of operational-level human collectors disproportionately focus their collection efforts on insurgents.<sup>51</sup> Disappointingly, though there is an ICEX-like constellation of human intelligence actors in Iraq, there is still an overwhelming allure to target insurgents, which strikingly exposes an operational-level neglect of indigenous capabilities to support a more discriminating and long-term counterinsurgency strategy. Put differently, over reliance on heavy-handed tactical operations, badly prosecuted, will negatively impact on the Iraqi people.

Recall that during the Vietnam War, many of the fragmented human intelligence programs unequally targeted the VCI. In Iraq, the U.S. again seems to favor “an approach to pacification emphasizing sticks over carrots when dealing with proven supporters of the insurgency.”<sup>52</sup> In 1920, a British officer reflected on the insurrection in Mesopotamia and wrote self-reflectively that he was “too much occupied with military matters, and too ill-informed regarding the political problem to go among the people with advantage.”<sup>53</sup> Paradoxically, the same author highlights the dilemma of force and tribal affairs by noting that a sheik advised him to give the Arab “the stick first,” even though the same tribal chieftain suggested that Arabs are “susceptible to tactful and sympathetic handling.”<sup>54</sup> Still, the stick and carrot must be somewhat balanced with *sympathetic* handling. If not, the



insurgents, rather than the Iraqi security services, might potentially offer the better alternative for tribal constituencies in Iraq.<sup>55</sup> This is eerily similar to the deleterious consequences of pacification in Vietnam.

To this end, coalition HUMINT-driven operations should be far more sophisticated, and done with far greater situational awareness of the effects of badly prosecuted targets; of collateral damage; and unwarranted detentions of ordinary Iraqis. The U.S should work with the Iraqis to develop human sources and map out tribal linkages. Conversely, the Iraqis can help the U.S. understand the intricacies of these relationships through a cultural lens. Krepinevich argues that an embedded “Iraqi affairs officer” would monitor their activities.<sup>56</sup> This recommendation deserves serious consideration.

The real lost opportunity of the Reconnaissance and Surveillance training was not selecting, vetting, or retaining some trained indigenous teams to directly support C2X operational-level HUMINT requirements in January 2005. Collection requirements for such teams could have been a more carefully thought-out variation of Vietnam’s Census Grievance teams or Revolutionary Development Cadre. The human capital expenditures of a relatively small C2X capability–partnered with Iraqis–would complement any wide-scale program of tribal interactions. The desired end state is to increase popular support to the nascent Iraqi central government by threading complex constituencies together to achieve region-wide security. This is the operational-level HUMINT gap that can be addressed with some straightforward recommendations.

## **IX. Recommendations**

Considering these insights on tribal interactions from lessons in Vietnam and Iraq, this paper returns almost full circle to the earlier example of Afghanistan. In Kabul, the C2X

managed some modest but effective tribal-military interactions for influencing tribal behavior. These kinds of tribal interactions should not be an aberration. Instead, the C2X should take on a central role for managing tribal constituencies. But the emphasis should be toward properly building and leveraging human networks with both indigenous security forces *and* tribal leaders. If these two dimensions are not synchronized, there is a risk of repeating mistakes that were made with competing, and fragmented pacification programs in Vietnam.

From a broader strategic-theater perspective, the unified command's J2X should coordinate intelligence partnerships throughout its Area of Responsibility (AOR) to ensure that it is thoroughly nested with the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism.<sup>57</sup> This means that partnerships would need to contribute to: enabling partner nations to counter insurgencies; defeat terrorists; and be linked to broader military strategic objectives. The Combatant Command must contribute to a strategic-theater engagement strategy with military partners, but also keep an *eye on understanding tribal networks* in places like Iraq and ungoverned spaces throughout the AOR. Adding a tribal dimension to an engagement strategy is a significant paradigm shift for operational-level military HUMINT.

The military must frontload counterinsurgency planning and programs. In Vietnam, the frictions between the CIA and CORDS-MACV occurred mainly because the CIA had developed vast human networks and pacification programs well before the military fought the *other war*. In contrast, in Iraq, the U.S. military unknowingly started the insurgency *timer* as it fought its way into Baghdad, where there were no preexisting human intelligence networks, or ongoing counterinsurgency programs to compete with.<sup>58</sup> So, the militarization

of pacification programs in Iraq really only began in 2003. Consequently, the lesson from Vietnam is that MACV ended up holding the proverbial counterinsurgency bag, with all of its programs at the end of the war.<sup>59</sup>

Any counterinsurgency doctrine or training schools must revise the understanding of HUMINT and its importance in an insurgency.<sup>60</sup> The most important lessons are about bad targeting and the negative consequences of HUMINT on the population. Interactions with security forces must therefore elevate learning beyond tactical considerations to influence a counter-ideological approach that inspires moderation over repressiveness.

Another suggested measure is to create a joint military intelligence cadre composed of experienced HUMINT trainers with the mission of building indigenous military HUMINT intelligence capabilities. Direct oversight of these deployed trainers must fall under the C2X. In the search for recommendations, there is a growing realization that the U.S. must rebuild armies, and concurrently provide them with a capable intelligence collection capability. Inevitably, intelligence partnerships can rise from the tactical level to have operational and strategic impact on a protracted and uncertain global war.

Lastly, to institute these recommendations, Joint Forces Command must be an advocate and engine for HUMINT doctrine to be better aligned with operational-level counterinsurgency operations. This means that HUMINT doctrine must reflect an aggressive strategy for synchronizing tribal, indigenous HUMINT, and policing, along with conventional doctrinal tenets of the J2X.

## **XI. Conclusions**

Despite these HUMINT challenges, the MNF I-C2X—was recognized as a “bright spot for centrally managing broad-based human intelligence efforts across Iraq.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed,

the very concept of a J2X has been recognized as a critical intelligence function for organizing and managing the myriad of competing HUMINT programs within a theater of operations.<sup>62</sup> Still, what remains to be crafted is a doctrinal foundation for addressing the operational-level requirements for leveraging indigenous human networks. This opens up a whole dimension of HUMINT that has largely been fragmented or abrogated to other government agencies, if addressed at all.

In conclusion, the military HUMINT mission calls for a confluence of management with indigenous security forces, while simultaneously building and moderating tribal networks. Thus, by adopting this paper's recommendations, there will be greater equilibrium between the need for security and the needs of the people within an insurgency. In the absence of a CORDS and Phoenix-like interagency approach to counterinsurgency, it remains crucial that the C2X role be expanded to synchronize tribal interactions and indigenous security forces to close this operational-level HUMINT gap. As the memories of Vietnam slowly fade, there remains much work to be done; and yet while moving forward it remains useful to remember that a *hidden timer* is ticking.

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Brian Bennett, "Can your friend's enemy be your friend?", *Time*, 26 Aug 2002, available at [www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,344141,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,344141,00.html).

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed Hashim, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), xxi. Hashim observes that counterinsurgents may tend to use "brute force at the operational-level as a way out or a panacea for all their problems."

<sup>3</sup> Bennett.

<sup>4</sup> Sean M. Maloney, "Afghanistan: From Here to Eternity?," *Parameters* 34 (Spring 2004):13. Maloney asserts that warlords who are not cooperative must be co-opted; however, "constructive engagement" might potentially "lead to moderation" of their behavior to gain their cooperation for security objectives.

<sup>5</sup> Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, *J2X Whitepaper (Draft)*, (Washington D.C.: 2005), 3. It is useful right up front to define the roles and responsibilities of a J2X/C2X. Also, keep in mind that there are no doctrinal provisions for indigenous training or tribal interactions. An overview: "Joint U.S. doctrine established J2X functions in response to the requirement for close and continuous coordination between joint force Counterintelligence (CI) and Human Intelligence (HUMINT) operations. Several operations (i.e., Joint Forge/Bosnia, Operation Enduring Freedom/Afghanistan, and Operation Iraqi Freedom/Iraq) have since provided "Lessons Learned" on CI and HUMINT support to joint operations. These are under constant review

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to improve doctrine, training and actual operational practices. The J2X combines and represents the principal authorities for all DOD CI and HUMINT support to a deployed joint force commander. The J2X tasks, manages, coordinates, synchronizes and deconflicts all DOD and coalition CI and HUMINT source operations in the JOA. In concert with this mission, a J2X should be established in all joint force structures at every level across the entire spectrum of conflict. In addition, individual service components may often establish their own “2Xs” to manage internal CI and HUMINT functions, which interact with the joint force J2X. While the United States will always be prepared to act unilaterally, it is more likely that U.S. forces will deploy as part of a coordinated, multinational effort. For this reason, terms such as: “joint force,” joint task force,” and “combined joint task force” are interchangeable.”

<sup>6</sup> As the CFC-A C2X, the author crafted a plan and approach strategy to engage Pasha Khan Zadran (PKZ) which was approved by Commander, CFC-A, LTG David Barno and the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad. Later, in the lead up to Afghanistan’s Presidential elections, PKZ was mistakenly apprehended by U.S. forces who did not know who he was. The previous engagement strategy paid off, when the C2X was able to have him released, which defused a politically volatile situation. PKZ had periodically met with members of the C2X staff, which proved valuable in terms of *security* and establishing tribal-military interactions that previously were fragmented at best, if existing at all. Note that this initiative owes its origin to a senior U.S. Army Special Forces officer who imparted his carefully crafted operational-level interactions with a Bosnian-Serbian official to moderate, influence—and to some degree—control his behavior. These interactions were done under the auspices of a U.S. General Officer.

<sup>7</sup> Seymour Hersh, “Moving Targets,” *The New Yorker*, 08 Dec 2003, available at [www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?031215fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?031215fa_fact). For the purposes of this paper, the author only cautiously uses Hersh; however, it’s useful to reflect on his question that is now frequently heard: “Will the counterinsurgency plan in Iraq repeat the mistakes of Vietnam?” In addition, Hersh writes about the Phoenix Program, the use of tribal leaders and Special Operations Forces (SOF) in Iraq.

<sup>8</sup> Harry G. Summers, Jr., “Defense Without Purpose,” *Society* (Nov-Dec 1983): 4.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Record, “Why the Strong Lose,” *Parameters* 35 (Winter 2005-6): 26.

<sup>10</sup> Hashim, 272. Interestingly, Hashim observes that insurgencies are about winning the political fight, not just military actions. He writes, “The U.S. may well win the counter-insurgency in Iraq by sheer attrition of the insurgent forces. But it will not be a graceful victory. The Iraqi forces are not the Viet Cong, yet after three years the U.S. cannot be certain of victory.”

<sup>11</sup> Frank L. Jones, “Blowtorch: Robert Komer and the Making of Vietnam Pacification Policy,” *Parameters* 35 (Autumn 2005): 105.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 110-11. The CIA was very concerned that they would lose control of their rural pacification programs.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis Sorley, *A Better War* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1999), 63. Sorley sites General Robert Baer who opined that Abrams viewed CORDS as a “paper exercise.” Sorley also makes the point that Komer was “heavy-handed and insensitive” toward the South Vietnamese and “bulldozed” and bullied them to do things his way.

<sup>15</sup> Jones, 116.

<sup>16</sup> Lewis Sorley, *The Abrams Tapes 1968-1972* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2004), 62. These are taken from comments made by Abrams during a Weekly Intelligence Estimate Update (WIEU) on October 12, 1968.

<sup>17</sup> Robert M. Cassidy, “Back to the Streets without Joy: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam and other Small Wars,” *Parameters* 34 (Summer 2004): 75.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 201.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program*, (Lincoln, NE: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 2000), 115.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought* (London: Cass, 2001), 355. Handel uses a quote from Napoleon that underscores the Emperor’s over-reliance on “tactical success.” Handel argues that this *too* narrowly defined approach was a “grave mistake.” Similarly, my point here is that military HUMINT must not fall into the same *tacticization* trap. Conversely, military HUMINT must be sophisticated and nuanced enough to most effectively support comprehensive counterinsurgency operations. Thus, counterinsurgency strategy—when merged with HUMINT—presents interesting opportunities for addressing operational-level intelligence seams.

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<sup>21</sup> Samuel B. Griffith II, *Mao Tse Tung: On Guerrilla Warfare* (Baltimore, MD: Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1992), 71. Mao Tse Tung is an important theoretician on the theory of protracted war, and the relationship between insurgency and the *people*.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph A. McChristian, *The Role of Military Intelligence 1965-1967* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1974), 107. McChristian was the MACV J-2, and notes quite candidly that the military intelligence community in Vietnam had a significant “education problem” with regard to area intelligence—HUMINT—and that most of its ambitious programs in Vietnam were done at the tactical level with Vietnamese counterparts. Interestingly, U.S. Army military intelligence found itself decades later with an eroded HUMINT capability, and too few HUMINT practitioners. In order to ameliorate this situation the Army is reinvesting in HUMINT capabilities, and the U.S. Army Intelligence Center, Fort Huachuca, Arizona is presently drafting a revised Human Intelligence Collector Operations field manual to provide tactical doctrinal guidance for HUMINT. Still, what remains is a gap in operational-level doctrine to address tribal networks, and coordination of indigenous policing.

<sup>23</sup> William Colby, *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 266.

<sup>24</sup> Valentine, 25. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Edward Lansdale was detailed to the CIA, and was known as the controversial architect for many of the counterinsurgency programs in the Philippines, and later for the earlier counterinsurgency programs in Vietnam, earning him the ignoble nickname as the “Ugly American.”

<sup>25</sup> Moyar, 37. The Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDGs) were funded and organized by the CIA and staffed by U.S. Special Forces soldiers. These programs were designed to give hamlet inhabitants sanitation and medical assistance, along with pro-GVN propaganda and enhancing the village intelligence and counterintelligence.

<sup>26</sup> Valentine, 41.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 67. CIA officer Tom Donahue summed up his dilemma in Vietnam, when he posited on his challenge of “how to imprint a political system on a foreign country.” Indeed, one might draw comparisons to the double-edged nature of *democratization* and *security*, which similarly tests U.S. resolve in places like Iraq and Afghanistan today.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>30</sup> Moyar, 52. This author’s scholarly research showed that by the end of 1967 there were approximately thirty-nine provinces with ICEX committees, and one-hundred three district’s with coordination centers.

<sup>31</sup> Orrin DeForest, *Slow Burn: The Rise and Bitter Fall of American Intelligence in Vietnam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 26-8. The CT program was renamed to PRU’s. DeForest describes an interesting account of the “bad publicity” which necessitated the name change.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Colby, 266. Colby said Special Branch, along with the Vietnamese Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) “involved primarily the collecting of information on and determining the VCI’s makeup...”

<sup>34</sup> Valentine, 87. The 525<sup>th</sup> U.S. Military Intelligence Group used Case Officers as agent handlers and “employed about a thousand agents in South Vietnam, all of whom were paid through the 525<sup>th</sup>’s Intelligence Contingency Fund.”

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 99. The rural police effort was known as the field police.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 183-3. Unquestionably, it would seem somewhat intuitive today that acceptance of the need for cultural understanding is an important feature for counterinsurgency strategy, particularly in the “Long War” on terrorism. Inexplicably though, bigotry toward the Vietnamese, and achieving a better understanding of the cultural roots and depths of corruption in Vietnam, or the deleterious consequences of village vendettas did not seem to enjoy an equal emphasis in Vietnam.

<sup>37</sup> Sorley, 64. Interestingly, Sorley’s observations and examination of the lessons from Vietnam’s overdue pacification strategy have evidently become “must-reading among senior Army officers,” according to Journalist, Greg Jaffe, in “As Iraq Rages, Army Re-Examines Lessons of Vietnam” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 20, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Samuel L Popkin, “Vietnam: Politics, Land Reform and Development in the Countryside,” *Asian Survey* Vol. 10, No. 8, (Aug., 1970): 667.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 662. Popkin judged that the program had “limited success.” He makes references to Saigon-produced statistics that suggest that in 1969 the GVN spread security to 90% of the rural population, but any conclusions that the government won the fight for legitimacy would be mistaken. For a description of negative U.S.

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perceptions of the Phoenix Program, see, Zalin Grant, *Facing the Phoenix*, (London: WW & Norton Company, 1991), 320-4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 667.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 662.

<sup>42</sup> Valentine, 420. Valentine quotes Stan Fletcher, a Phoenix coordinator in Binh Dinh Province, Republic of Vietnam who stressed the challenges and complexities of *warlordism* and corruption: “but the warlords and corrupt politicians we supported in Vietnam refused to sacrifice even a tiny share of their empires for the greater good of Vietnam, and thus were incapable of countering what was a homogenous, nationalist-inspired insurgency.”

<sup>43</sup> “U.S. Counterinsurgency Giving Officers a New Mindset,” *Washington Post*, February 21, 2006. There is strong evidence that the U.S. military understands the necessity to grasp a counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq. This particular article reports on a counterinsurgency school started recently on a military base in Taji, Iraq. “The newest educational institution in the U.S. military establishment seeks, as a course summary puts it, to stress the need for U.S. forces to shift from a conventional warfare mindset to one that understands how to win in a guerrilla-style conflict.”

<sup>44</sup> Hashim, xxi. It seems that time is indeed an important factor for comprehending an insurgency; and Hashim makes some prescient observations about this phenomenon: “counterinsurgents are almost never ready to confront insurgency at the beginning. It takes time and effort and considerable trial and error before the counter-insurgent mobilizes the right sets of instruments for an effective strategy.”

<sup>45</sup> The author (then USCENCOM’s Chief, HUMINT) and the J2X briefed the concept in Baghdad to Joint Task Force-7’s (JTF-7) C2X. Several days later CENTCOM got their answer: the USCENCOM team was not logistically sustainable at that time. So, the USCENCOM J2X team instead shifted its resources to Kabul, Afghanistan.

<sup>46</sup> The interventionary cases of Iraq and Afghanistan are indeed different, but in both instances the U.S. military sought to build an army, and at the same time provide indigenous forces with a military intelligence capability, yet no U.S. organization—or doctrine—prescribed such wide-scale programs. Thus, a thread between both of these examples is an unacceptable level of improvisation for leveraging indigenous capabilities to counter insurgency. As such, the real benefit of the USCENCOM J2X experience in Afghanistan was providing a loose precedence for a more comprehensive program later established in Iraq, where the same gap—more critically—existed with Iraqi security forces. In keeping with our thesis, counterinsurgency doctrine and its programs must be raised to a higher level to address the broader problems of counterinsurgency. The operational-level staff must have a broader and wider focus. One of Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan’s (CFC-A) pillars for enduring security in Afghanistan was *shaping the Afghan security apparatus*. Countering insurgency means not only disrupting the terrorists, but also understanding the ideological basis for the anti-coalition movement’s supporting networks. Put differently, insurgencies are multi-dimensional, and require a systemic approach to neutralize insurgent-terrorists at their roots. Inexplicably, there was *no* U.S. organization—two years after the collapse of the Taliban—providing any appreciable tactical intelligence, or reconnaissance and surveillance training for the nascent Afghanistan National Army (ANA). More alarmingly, there was also no serious plan for building a more general military intelligence capability for the Afghans. Moreover, the ANA was crucially important to Karzai-government legitimacy, to symbolize a resurgent sense of *nationalism* in a cultural landscape rife with *warlordism*. CFC-A’s HUMINT and counterintelligence staff (C2X) therefore began a low-level training initiative with TF Phoenix to bridge this discernible gap. As such, an *ad hoc* U.S. training team—secondary to the C2X principle mission of organizing and deconflicting HUMINT and counterintelligence—provided select ANA soldiers with basic Tactical HUMINT collection skills to help them *operationalize* their intelligence. By no measure was this initiative a sophisticated training program, but it was a start. Interestingly, the real benefit was providing a loose model to use as a basis to argue for a more comprehensive program in Iraq, where the same gap—more critically—existed with the Iraqi security forces.

<sup>47</sup> Hashim, xxv. Some have suggested that this “lull in the insurgency in the immediate aftermath of the successful elections of 30 January was merely a time during which the insurgents were lying low and regrouping.”

<sup>48</sup> See President George W. Bush, June 29, 2005 Ft Bragg speech retrieved from the World Wide Web: [www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/06/28/national/main704936\\_page2.shtml](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/06/28/national/main704936_page2.shtml). On June 29, 2005, President Bush addressed the nation in a prime time broadcast, delivering a major speech on terrorism at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. During the speech the President highlighted U.S. training that provided the “Iraqis with important skills such as urban combat and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance techniques.” This speech raises

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interesting questions on the value of counter insurgency training, and the benefits for more broadly—and aggressively—enabling and developing partnerships with security forces in Iraq, and beyond. Here again, HUMINT programs must be broadened to more formally support the operational-level of war, which are an important point leading to the recommendations in this paper. Also, to build the IRST program, the author and his team attempted to apply the principles and use the language in Bard E. O’Neill’s, *Insurgency and Terrorism*, Dulles, VA: Brassey’s, Inc., 1990.

<sup>49</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., “How to Win in Iraq.” *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2005), 88.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 89. Furthermore, Krepinevich argues that these are parts are the Centers of Gravity (COG). The U.S. must therefore protect three areas, whereas the insurgents only need to win one of these COGs.

<sup>51</sup> The author was the MNF I C2X when operational-level HUMINT collectors appropriately shifted their major efforts from WMD (Iraq Survey Group) to the dynamic conditions associated with an insurgency. However, in the view of the author, there was a trend toward tacticization versus operational investments in longer term collection requirements. Inexplicably, there was little-to-no interest at all for DoD operational-level HUMINT collectors to leverage indigenous *training* as a vehicle for developing partnerships with Iraqi security forces.

<sup>52</sup> Jeffrey Record and W. Andrew Terrill, “Iraq and Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights,” (Carlisle, PA.: US Army Strategic Studies Institute, 2004): 27.

<sup>53</sup> LTG Sir Aylmer Haldane, *The Insurrection of Mesopotamia 1920* (Nashville, TN: The Battery Press), 313.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Hashim, 104. Not surprisingly, Hashim offers several good examples of heavy-handed coalition operations and its negative effects on tribal constituencies.

<sup>56</sup> Krepinevich, 99.

<sup>57</sup> “The National Military Strategic Plan” 4 March 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Michael R Gordon, and General Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 80. According to Trainor and Gordon, there was not “an effective network of intelligence operatives and spies in Baghdad and the south.”

<sup>59</sup> Douglas Valentine, “Echoes of Vietnam,” 08 Apr 2004, available at [www.win.it/links/v/vietnam\\_bitch.html](http://www.win.it/links/v/vietnam_bitch.html) In all likelihood, this will be no different for the U.S. military in Iraq. Valentine observed: “as in Vietnam in 1969, the CIA was slipping out of sight and putting the military up front so it could take the blame if anything went wrong--as is about to happen, big time, just like in Vietnam.” This might be an exaggerated and cynical view, but Valentine still makes my point that the military is ultimately responsible for failure or success in Iraq.

<sup>60</sup> Again, HUMINT is an important subject matter that must be considered for any training on countering insurgency.

<sup>61</sup> “US Forces in Iraq Face Obstacles in Getting Intelligence they Need,” *Inside the Pentagon*, May 5, 2005.

<sup>62</sup> *Joint and National Intelligence Support to Military Operations*, Joint Pub 2-01, Appendix A (Joint J2 Quick Reaction Checklist), 7 October 2004. (On-line at [http://dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new\\_pubs/jp2\\_01.pdf](http://dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp2_01.pdf)).



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