THE WRIGHT FLYER PAPERS

The Innate Insurgent Advantage

Can Training and Planning Bridge the Gap?

Gary W. Boyd
Department of the Air Force Civilian

Air Command and Staff College
Wright Flyer Paper No. 57

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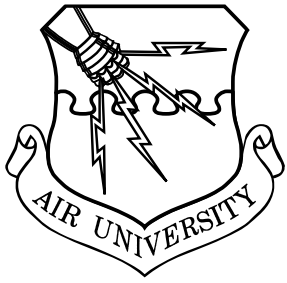

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Foreword

It is my great pleasure to present another issue of *The Wright Flyer Papers*. Through this series, Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) presents a sampling of exemplary research produced by our residence and distance-learning students. This series has long showcased the kind of visionary thinking that drove the aspirations and activities of the earliest aviation pioneers. This year's selection of essays admirably extends that tradition. As the series title indicates, these papers aim to present cutting-edge, actionable knowledge—research that addresses some of the most complex security and defense challenges facing us today.

Recently, *The Wright Flyer Papers* transitioned to an exclusively electronic publication format. It is our hope that our migration from print editions to an electronic-only format will fire even greater intellectual debate among Airmen and fellow members of the profession of arms as the series reaches a growing global audience. By publishing these papers via the Air University Press website, ACSC hopes not only to reach more readers but also to support Air Force–wide efforts to conserve resources. In this spirit, we invite you to peruse past and current issues of *The Wright Flyer Papers* at http://aupress.maxwell.af.mil/papers_all.asp?cat=wright.

Thank you for supporting *The Wright Flyer Papers* and our efforts to disseminate outstanding ACSC student research for the benefit of our Air Force and war fighters everywhere. We trust that what follows will stimulate thinking, invite debate, and further encourage today's air, space, and cyber war fighters in their continuing search for innovative and improved ways to defend our nation and way of life.

THOMAS H. DEALE
Brigadier General, USAF
Commandant

About the Author

I was assigned as senior historian to the Combined Air Operations Center in Saudi Arabia during the early phase of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). As such I witnessed the operation unfold from the combined forces air component commander historical perspective. While there was a generalized sense of accomplishment by the end of Operation Anaconda in March 2002, there was also a sense of frustration with regard to joint planning and the US Air Force's (USAF) role in Afghanistan; special operations forces dominated all aspects of the campaign. The USAF had not even been included within the execution plans for Operation Anaconda until almost too late. Airlift and support for OEF had been brokered on-the-fly with the expectation that OEF was but a transitory battle in a new war on terror. By June 2002, US Central Command told Airmen to prepare for a "rolling start" on a whole new chapter, the invasion of Iraq in what would become Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). I returned to home station in July 2002 and had less than a year before I deployed again—this time to US European Command (USEUCOM) in April 2003 as historian for the vanguard of USAF units assigned to the Phase IV rebuilding of post-invasion Iraq. I never made it to Iraq, as the security situation and insurgency evolved into generalized instability, and instead I set about capturing data for USEUCOM's support of OIF from Stuttgart, Germany. The overarching feeling within the command at that time was one of confusion. The planning, training, doctrine, and equipment of that era had been designed for massive force-on-force conflicts, and not much thought had been given to training Airmen for extended missions in post-war environments; nation building was eschewed. The strategic lapses embodied by the Beirut barracks bombing in 1983 and the Somalia relief crisis a decade later reinforced a message that the mistakes made in those events were not readiness-related so much as they were fool's errands to have sent forces there in the first place. Rather than patch the deficits in the asymmetrical side of doctrine and training, military members continued as before, training for large fights while neglecting insurgencies in the main. The ability-to-survive-and-operate training and gear were focused on a generalized war involving chemical weapons and large forces. It took years for training and equipment to catch up with the realities of modern insurgencies. Even after the end of the large occupation in Iraq, there remained a significant argument regarding whether or not the surge in Iraq "worked." The argument permeated not only military scholarship but also military-friendly research centers. The question of what caused the shift in fortunes in Iraq is one of the key questions of modern military scholarship. My central

discovery in examining the issue is that there were many fortuitous changes that took place in consonance with the surge of troop levels in Iraq in 2007. Many positive shifts in American fortunes in OIF and later OEF were facilitated by having enough boots on the ground and on-demand logistics and airpower to help secure critical cities and towns. The fact that the surge's utility is debated is a positive argument of its relevance, because success breeds many authors and failure is an orphan. The surge in troops was helpful—but not alone decisive. The surge provided space so that training, equipment, doctrinal, and planning enhancements could have maximum impact. The surge and these enhancements coexisted, and ultimately each part remained an important cohesive part of the whole picture.

Abstract

This study examines the role of training, planning, and technological changes in helping turn around coalition and American efforts in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The United States rushed headlong into protracted stabilization, security, transition, and rebuilding (SSTR) operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite the wealth of historical, doctrinal, and experiential knowledge available to help mitigate casualties and restore security in such operations, the United States and its coalition partners failed to adequately plan, train, or equip their individual forces until years after the start of the conflict.

The objective of this research was to determine if training, planning, doctrine, and concomitant technological advances helped turn the tide in OIF and later OEF as the United States and its forces institutionalized new doctrines and embraced the lessons of history. The United States and its coalition partners made great strides in reversing what had been virtual lost causes and reshaping planning, training, strategy, and tactics to affect meaningful successes and gradual withdrawal throughout the region. This brief study examines the methods, training, and decisions that helped make moderate successes possible after particularly dark days from 2004 through 2006.

The evidence suggests that dedicated planning and training were indeed decisive in bridging the advantages enjoyed by insurgents fighting in their homeland with ample outside and local support—even if a little late to the need in the concentrations required for moderate success. It is hoped this paper will contribute to a permanent knowledge storehouse on effective end-state operations after so high a price was paid for the knowledge by this generation of warriors. The author retains copies of all documents used to compile this work.

Casualties and Chaos

A study of the American military tradition was warranted with regard to insurgencies. Indeed, insurgency was a near constant in the American way of war. America's War of Independence was an insurgency with relatively low casualties—4,435 killed in action during eight years, with roughly five times as many wounded. In the two Seminole Wars, which were true counterinsurgency (COIN) operations, the United States suffered more than 1,500 killed in action among its regular troops, plus at least an equal number among the state militia, against a much smaller and more confined enemy. Later planners largely viewed those wars as disastrous. Much of the nineteenth century saw the United States in COIN operations against Native Americans and enclaves of insurgents prior to and during the Civil War. The United States showed a definite military facility against insurgencies during its early history but used ruthless and near-genocidal tactics to achieve local superiority, destroying whole villages and hunting areas while employing crude, but effective, biological agents such as smallpox blankets in a barely restrained onslaught against native peoples.[1]

In the modern era, the Vietnam War represented the critical litmus test for American COIN operations prior to the start of Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Those three conflicts—along with Operation Allied Force, discreet operations following the Arab Spring, and Operation Odyssey Dawn—provided useful case studies for the examination of casualties, tactics, and relative outcomes of modern COIN operations. For examining the utility and efficacy of training and planning, these case studies also provided a unique contemporary window on American operations. Each operation was uniquely successful or unsuccessful depending upon one's historical placement. Vietnam was often considered a resounding defeat for the American way of war. Yet, seen pragmatically from the point of view of its limited objective to stabilize Eastern Asia and keep the "dominoes" from falling against American spheres of influence, Vietnam so exhausted America's enemies that the relatively modest objectives implicit in the containment strategy were achieved. The Vietnamese themselves suffered horrific casualties, and their economy was ruined for more than a generation. For the United States, the cost of the war was high, and scholars must examine the national treasure consumed by the ideology of the containment strategy through the prism of actual worth. If ever a war had no winners, it was the Vietnam conflict; however, observers have ignored many lessons of that war, dearly purchased, based on the subjective appraisal that it was a "lost war."[2]

Background to the Current State of Operations

In Allied Force, the United States had so matured its airpower and precision-strike capabilities that its military suffered no combat deaths and only fractional losses of its attacking aircraft. In that conflict—although operating more as a peacekeeping force than COIN aggressor—the United States was, for over a decade, limiting its exposure to casualties, achieving its objectives of halting genocidal civil war in the Balkans, and reaching some degree of political stability. In OEF and OIF, the United States was thrust back into a mode of operations it had not experienced in such concentration since the Vietnam War. Casualty numbers spiked as poorly orchestrated COIN operations with little definable and state milestones became the objectives of the conflicts.[3] Training and planning proved inadequate to the challenge. Losses mounted during the decade as doctrine, equipment, and training raced to reassert a material advantage. This is what a recent study calls "dominating the fight." Maj Gen Robert H. Scales, US Army, retired, a military analyst and historian, observes that "ground forces are 'not dominant' in combat partly because of inadequate equipment and training. Compared to the overwhelming superiority that the United States has in naval and air warfare, when it comes to ground combat, the American military 'hasn't come as far as it should,' says Scales. 'It doesn't dominate in the tactical fight.'"[4]

During the past several years, despite not being completely dominant in all spheres of battle, the US military—especially the United States Air Force (USAF)—has tried to enhance the training afforded its expeditionary forces, albeit rather slowly. Doctrinal changes have attempted to correct deficits in planning and strategy that have allowed America's enemies to operate, if not with impunity, at least in relatively painful freedom of action. In the US military's training centers, there was a conspicuous emphasis on preparing for stabilization, security, transition, and reconstruction (SSTR) operations and better defining war objectives through enhanced planning, which included sober analyses of lessons learned in the present conflicts. The whole COIN doctrine underwent a significant change. The United States began to examine war—not through the lens of legacy beliefs and subsets of general war but through flexible doctrine that recognized that war was multispectral and that asymmetrical war and SSTR activities were ongoing responsibilities within the doctrinal continuum.[5]

In RAND's seminal study *How Insurgencies End*, researchers analyzed COIN operations through the centuries to determine the conditions that brought about the actual end to operations. They also considered whether the governments under siege survived, won, or capitulated in the face of

these actions. Commissioned by the United States Marine Corps initially to review operations in the al-Anbar province of Iraq in 2006, the study blossomed over four years to encompass an examination more of the totality of such operations. RAND found 89 insurgencies useful to study and looked at the variables within each, determining the conditions necessary for governmental, outsider, or insurgent success. As researchers examined the outcomes of these insurgencies, 16 were still in progress, 28 had been won by governments and 26 by insurgents, and 19 were toss-ups. The history of contemporary insurgencies revealed the significant challenges posed by such operations. Insurgents could be successful with little or no technology or equipment, requiring mostly a persistent view of a long war of attrition that RAND calculated lasted an average of 10 years. RAND's study concluded that successful insurgencies almost always required external support. In this way, the characterization of insurgent guerrillas in the popular imagination—ill-clad revolutionaries armed almost exclusively with tenacity and having limited technology and supplies—was almost completely a myth. In reality, insurgents were generally proxy warriors for other nations or well-funded entities such as religious jihadists/fundamentalists. Overcoming such an adversary to bring about conditions permissive enough for indigenous people to govern and for the United States and its allies to leave did not merely require stubbornness and withstanding attrition. Instead, insurgencies were complex, lengthy fights involving international factions that necessitated numerous levers of power to contain or dampen. Counterinsurgencies also demanded considerable unique training and planning. Despite their reputation, insurgencies were rarely isolated civil wars.[6]

Since adopting a comprehensive expeditionary-training approach as well as optimizing the use of better planning and technology, the US military began to close the gap on the innate insurgent advantage during the past several years—beginning with a surge that was cognizant of what insurgencies required to thrive in OIF in 2007 to the present day. Declining casualties in Afghanistan after the successful elimination of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 (in a neighboring state that facilitated the insurgency) indicated the United States had turned a corner on the modern derivation of COIN/SSTR operations. As for end-state operations and planning, recent operations were far more prudently undertaken. For example, the Arab Spring did not bring about limitless commitments in additional theaters but rather moderated responses focusing on sustainable, and mostly positive, outcomes consistent with national strategic imperatives. In sum, the gap had been bridged between the innate insurgent force advantage in SSTR operations and the modern fighting force of the United States. Where national objectives dictate, COIN forces now have

significantly improved, doctrinally-driven planning and better equipment, tactics, and training to confront long-haul insurgencies. Whether or not a future bridge remains between American capability and insurgent advantages depends greatly on many of the budgetary and resource decisions that will drive the Department of Defense (DOD) during the next few fiscal years.[7]

Insurgencies Should Influence Doctrine

Never was a problem so clearly demonstrated as America's unpreparedness for SSTR operations in the early twenty-first century. Unable to match combat strength, technical capability, or large-force training, enemies in Southwest Asia practiced the teachings of Sun Tzu and Mao Tse-tung. Prepared for a long war of attrition and fueled by religious fervor, they deliberately engaged the occupation forces and banked on the historic impatience of Western democracies with regard to long campaigns and persistent fatalities. Going to war was naturally a drastic enterprise with profound ramifications for all parties. The US military in particular found itself embroiled in many low-intensity conflicts during its history, especially in recent history. Researchers tend to classify the past 25 years as the post–Cold War era. In many ways, this is not a useful classification. It is important to understand that the Cold War never existed in a vacuum; rather, it was mostly a grouping of small "hot wars" and technological competition revolving around a de facto stalemate at the macro levels of Eastern and Western strategic capabilities. The Cold War's underpinnings—possible nuclear annihilation—remained. "Cold War" as a loose frame of reference for a nuclear-capable world after the end of World War II had some utility. As a means to doctrinally define an epoch, the term was not so useful and in fact was misleading and dangerous with regard to planning and training. The reality remained: the world and warfare entered into a nuclear-capable phase in July 1945 that presented an ongoing existential dilemma still relevant to contemporary planners. The posturing armies of East and West defined the popular conception of the Cold War; nuclear capability and the immediate dangers of such weapons still define the present. After 1989 the United States remained in a state of perpetual nuclear readiness while engaged in worldwide conflict, despite the overarching wish for peace dividends and demobilization. Small wars and end-state operations against insurgents were not post-1989 challenges. In a recent study of small unit operations in SSTR scenarios, *Making the Soldier Decisive on Future Battlefields*, the authors make the following statement (the term "Soldier" can be supplanted by Airmen, Marines, or special forces working in small tactical units):

> The country is now engaged in what has been identified as an "era of persistent conflict" in which the most important weapon is the dismounted soldier operating in small units. More than for soldiers in Vietnam, Korea, and WWII, today's soldier must be prepared to contend with both regular and irregular adversaries. Results in Iraq and Afghanistan show that while the US soldier is a formidable fighter, his contemporary suite of equipment and support does not enjoy the same high degree of overmatch capability exhibited by large weapons platforms—yet it is the soldier who ultimately will play the decisive role in restoring stability.[8]

The relative power and success of the US military allowed military planners the conceit of ad hoc end-state SSTR and COIN operations—brute force end games with little prior planning, training, or outcome/exit management. The 33,000 American lives lost in Vietnam, and the perhaps more than 1,000,000 losses suffered by American adversaries there, did little to change this paradigm into the present century—despite voluminous scholarship on the lessons of the war and occasional changes on doctrinal emphasis on small wars. The protracted challenges of OIF and OEF COIN/SSTR operations forced leaders to take a fresh look at training, planning, and national priorities in an attempt to moderate further damage and stem the chaos and planning omissions that brought about the problems in both campaigns. Although major combat operations had been completed in Iraq in 2003 and Afghanistan in 2001, as the forces transitioned to SSTR, casualty rates grew alarmingly. In Iraq, fully 97 percent of losses occurred after major combat operations.[9]

At the end of May 2013, American fatalities in Iraq since March 2003 totaled 4,486, while in Afghanistan the total since October 2002 was 2,227. The numbers diminished appreciably in both campaigns as training, planning, and strategy began to catch up with operations and security enhancements after 2007. Both operations were punctuated by a late surge of troop strengths followed by tactical enhancements and gradual withdrawal. As this paper was written, the United States expected to draw down forces in Afghanistan by the end of 2014. As with the end of any occupation, the best the United States could hope for was an enhanced security posture and the possibility that the nascent governments of both Iraq and Afghanistan would have a chance to thrive despite civil war. Short of a *Pax Romana*, there was little else to be achieved in an insurgency with such cultural differences. Also reassuring, the advent of the Arab Spring had thoroughly taught the United States the dangers of complete intervention in Southwest Asia. Pres. Barack Obama emphasized, "The United States is not going to deploy ground troops into Libya. And we are not going to use force to go beyond a well-defined goal—specifically, the protection of civilians in Libya. In the coming weeks, we will continue to help the Libyan people with humanitarian and economic assistance so that they can fulfill their aspirations peacefully."[10]

While Libya presented ongoing challenges, the United States had signaled its appreciation of the limits of power and was not inclined to do much more than distant support and small-unit operations. Often, the best outcome for COIN operations was to avoid them, if strategic imperatives did not necessitate an all-in approach. The differences in application of force, planning, and training could not have been more pronounced. In Libya, the United States suffered no casualties until after ceasing operations. Likewise, civilian casualties were especially light in comparison with earlier operational analogs that had used so much airpower and standoff weaponry. The United Nations estimated that 60 civilians were killed and another 55 wounded by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's intervention; up to that time, civilian casualties had been high and rising as the Libyan dictator, Mu'ammar Gadhafi, tried to intimidate his warring populace with indiscriminate shelling.[11]

Retooling Contingency Training

In 2003, after the termination of active combat operations in Iraq, the doctrinal aspects of end-state operations were still in flux and the military was badly prepared for the onslaught to come. In a contemporary article for *Parameters*, "Planning for Conflict Termination and Post-Conflict Success," Army doctrinal expert William Flavin used the word "train" only once, as an informal suggestion for incorporating the civilian entities that should do the heavy lifting in an SSTR scenario to be a part of end-state exercises.[12] A decade later, the COIN experience and lessons learned in Southwest Asia had transformed Flavin's work. Rather than looking at SSTR as something best performed by civilian entities after relatively quick military disengagement, the Army had taken to heart that end-state operations were highly predictable and relied on an extensive military presence for extended periods of time. It was wistful thinking that a quick "exit strategy" was the prime impetus for operations in unstable occupations.[13]

It would be difficult to understate how insufficiently prepared and ill-equipped the US military was for protracted end-state operations in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2001 to 2006. Much of the equipment, light brigade–centric or otherwise, was not designed for the dictates of an insurgency, especially if not available in strength. Infantry and logistical vehicles were highly vulnerable to improvised electronic devices and ambushes. The USAF was better postured for COIN support, but while it had mostly invested in high-technology aircraft since Operation Desert Storm, it found that lower-tech aircraft such as the A-10 and B-52 were typically more relevant than the newer technology attack platforms. The stability

operation—Phase IV in OIF—was never adequately planned and thus not implemented. USAF units assigned to Phase IV deployed elsewhere or stayed on in United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) and United States European Command to assist elsewhere, such as Liberia or the Horn of Africa. Eventually, the instability in Iraq reached crisis proportions. The lines of supply became so tenuous the USAF used heavy airlift to bypass the need for convoys. Convoys, when used, were so depleted of trained and equipped infantry that poorly trained Airmen and Soldiers were forced to take over duties in lieu of infantry in many dangerous corridors. In all, it was a recipe for trouble, and casualty figures bore that out.[14]

Searching for the root of failed policy in Afghanistan and Iraq, Flavin acknowledged the historical precedent for unpreparedness in COIN operations—first with the British experience in North America in the late eighteenth century and later with the US military after Vietnam. In both cases, there were difficulties resourcing a worldwide, major–conflict–postured enterprise at the same time as fielding a fully trained COIN/SSTR-postured force. Flavin's 2011 work, rather than giving scant attention to training, actually revolved around it—indeed with a full section devoted to it. It was a hard and costly slog to this recognition by the Army as an institution, which seems to confirm John Boyd's pronouncement about doctrine becoming nearly instantaneously dangerous dogma once committed to paper.[15]

In the USAF, the heady days of air superiority and precision-guided munitions had led to a similar lack of preparedness with regard to SSTR and COIN operations by 2001. The USAF concentrated on the strategic and tactical superiorities it had enjoyed since the end of the Vietnam War and had given ground operations and security operations scant attention, preferring to trust in the abilities of ground and special forces units to secure areas around air bases and operating areas. Still, with its extensive airlift and logistical responsibilities, the USAF could scarcely afford to leave its Airman to the mercy of chaotic insurgencies. Led by Secretary of Defense (SecDef) Donald Rumsfeld (20 January 2001–18 December 2006), the United States had chased the tantalizing prospect of reducing its footprint and engaging in conflicts with the lightest possible forces. For a time in Afghanistan, that approach almost seemed vindicated. However, COIN warfare required a degree of security and buy-in from the local populace that could not be optimally provided with scant resources and military personnel on the ground, and the "hard slog," as Rumsfeld himself termed it, was inevitable. The secretary had advocated for a very light invasion force and had a tendency to push planning to meet his vision of military transformation. As well documented by historians, invasion

planning for OIF and end-state SSTR planning had been woefully inadequate and unrealistic.[16] These patterns were familiar throughout the DOD at the time. When the production schedule for the mine-resistant ambush protected (MRAP) fighting vehicle would not keep up with demand, for example, Secretary Rumsfeld advocated that personnel retreat to armored vehicles–only operations when outside the wire. Such advice was dispensed in typical "snowflake" form, without a hint of changing the training, forces, or doctrinal dynamic of the insurgency that made it impossible for coalition forces to operate safely. Rumsfeld indicated that insurgents "are going to change tactics to fit the equipment."[17]

Perhaps the most important requirement to improve the training, readiness, equipment, and planning in contemporary SSTR operations was the departure of Secretary Rumsfeld since his policies and preferences lay in quick victories, light forces, and speedy departures. Personalities dominate every military. An intrusive leadership style coupled with passionate preconceptions on the shape, size, and character of the military have been a dominant part of American military history. Secretary Rumsfeld was the exemplar of the intrusive manager. He was famous for issuing reams of snowflake positional memos and guidance on all aspects of DOD operations. Often his personality stifled dissent and confounded better judgment. He could be oddly fatalistic and obstinate. His famous quote from a Kuwait town hall event for the military still resonates: "As you know, you go to war with the Army you have. They're not the Army you might want or wish to have at a later time."[18] The statement was blunt, and it shifted the blame to the military for the ongoing insurgency dilemma for being unprepared and badly equipped for COIN operations. The statement also implied that COIN warfare was a vexing planning anomaly for the DOD in that land forces were insufficiently trained to cope with security conditions in post-invasion Iraq, although the *what* had been predicted as far back as the end of the First Gulf War.[19] His personal investment in a sparse and "transformational" strategy made efforts to tailor SSTR difficult. The SecDef emphasized covert operations and small-unit quick actions. Whereas there was a place for this suite of capabilities, overreliance on unique light forces was detrimental to solving the problems that came with occupation—holding territory, projecting strength, and maintaining security. Large and positive changes in force composition and COIN doctrine transpired almost immediately from the date of Secretary Rumsfeld's departure, but these were acutely necessary due to the strategic planning and operational deficits that had marked the turbulent era. The media was quick to correlate positive changes with new defense secretary Robert Gates, in 2007, and it was true that retired general officers had even begun to make almost unprece-

dented lobbying efforts/overtures for change at the top in the DOD in 2006. However, many successful programs of later implementation preceded Secretary Rumsfeld's departure—though it should be noted that the planning and strategic choices that fared badly in Iraq rested greatly with him.[20]

Even without intervention from the SecDef—far from institutionalizing the lessons of the past, such as the Chinese offensive of 1950–51 and the Bien Hoa Air Base attacks of 1968—the US military had crafted most of its training and readiness emphasis on getting joint forces or air expeditionary forces (AEF) to and from the battle. The expectation was that technological superiority and Red Flag–type training would ensure mission success. On that latter score, the USAF was wildly successful—as indeed the Army had been in its AirLand capabilities in the initial force-on-force engagements. Success tended to evaporate once Americans forces entered into extended occupations. The USAF found that its mobility exercises and operational readiness inspections lacked the elemental training emphasis required to help Airmen survive in nonpermissive environments outside the air base fence line. The USAF, especially the Second Air Force, recognized the training and doctrinal deficits for Airmen engaged in dangerous duties in the SSTR and support phases of COIN operations. Identifying the problem and confronting it realistically required years of hard-won effort, not to mention funding commitments and an infusion of new thinking and flexibility on the part of leadership. For example, in 2004 Maj Gen John F. Regni, Second Air Force commander, noted that

> for the past five months our staff has been exploring and developing a concept to transform how AETC [Air Education and Training Command] provides various types of training to our deployed personnel. The main thrust behind this effort has been the need to synchronize both training content and delivery with the Air Force's transformation into an expeditionary force. Key factors influencing the study have been theater-specific operational requirements, the growing need for on-demand training, shifts in deployment cycles and the need to balance training availability for our airmen while in deployed and reconstitution phases of the AEF cycle. Global training delivery is an intrinsic component for any solution to these needs. Based on our research the enabling technology for global delivery is now available.[21]

A wide set of changes took place in consonance with increasing the forces available for SSTR in OIF and OEF. With freedom of action that was no longer bound to proving the concept of light-force footprints and small operational unit actions and with the charter to basically fix broken strategy and tactics, the United States embarked on ambitious course corrections in 2007 and beyond leveraged on better training, planning, doctrine, and equipment.

Altering Planning and Training

The situation on the ground in OIF and OEF by early 2007 was especially bleak. As many critics had predicted in 2002, Iraq in particular had become a quagmire. Despite the official emphasis on transformation and new thinking, troops on the ground in Iraq were at least as vulnerable as ever to asymmetric warfare and improvised explosive devices (IED). Convoy and logistical protection had gotten so bad that the USAF had begun to fly supplies around Iraq to the greatest extent possible, and Airmen had taken on traditional Army roles in ground convoy protection. Indeed, many Airmen in what had been traditionally support skills, such as supply and logistics readiness, found themselves combat veterans in their first few months of assignment to the USAF. That practical reality caused the USAF to enhance its predeployment training and to develop ways to give its "Battlefield Airmen" survival skills in the new reality. AETC began to emphasize expeditionary and global learning environment (EAGLE) realistic exercises, centering initially on Lakehurst Naval Air Station and Fort Dix, New Jersey, early in OIF. The Second Air Force commander, Maj Gen William Fraser, began to formalize efforts to align this "EAGLE Flag" concept with operational imperatives, stating that "without a doubt, we agree that the Air Force transition from Cold War to Expeditionary Forces drives the need to transform training and education to synchronize with AEF cycles." He added that "fundamentally, we also agree that an Integrated Learning Environment (ILE) combining timely training, education, learning management, and performance support are essential to the success of this effort both in garrison and deployed."[22]

By mid-2004, the USAF chose to conduct additional training as Airmen prepared to depart for their AEF cycles. As the war and urgency necessitated changes, the expeditionary training shifted to meet the needs of all Airmen who had deployment taskings as the AEF cycle expanded and began to break and more and more Airman went on extended tours to the USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR). As the DOD ramped up forces to finally meet the security needs of Iraq, the USAF tailored training to provide increasingly realistic preparation for Airmen suddenly thrust into the fore as convoy protection troops or quasi-infantry support personnel outside the garrison. The initial EAGLE Flag concept was inadequate for actual combat operations. It emphasized some aspects of SSTR skills, such as host-nation and weapons training, but the EAGLE Flag concept was geared toward Airmen who would serve in operations centers—not convoy duty.

The USAF recognized that predeployment training had to improve and provide more realistic scenarios, and until there was a centrally focused

training campus, bases offered ad hoc training to their deploying Airmen that varied wildly in emphasis from weapons safety to field training exercises. Airmen arriving in the AOR from different bases, even within the same major command, had different predeployment training in "ability to survive and operate" skills. In early 2005, Gen Donald Cook, the AETC commander, sought assistance from the DOD to provide a generalized combat skills campus. He proposed training "our Airmen on expeditionary minimum-essential tasks they will need outside the fence line—be they negotiating contracts, driving fuel trucks, or conducting security patrols." He specified that "this will be a combat-focused environment, schooling both officer and enlisted Airmen in ECA skills needed to survive and complete their missions in a hostile, fast-paced environment.[23] It was not until 2007 that a site survey and proposed way ahead for expeditionary skills training was formalized. After that, expeditionary skills training and joint expeditionary training were fast-tracked, coinciding with the surge in troop levels taking place in Iraq and, later, in Afghanistan.[24]

Analysis of Change Impact: Battlefield Airmen and Realistic, Timely Counterinsurgency Training

Across the military, 2007 proved to be a watershed year for turning the tide in SSTR operations. As the USAF formalized what it termed "Battlefield Airmen" skills and lessons learned, the other services also began to shift doctrine, training, and planning to a more realistic approach to COIN requirements. There was also finally support from the DOD for sufficient forces to secure Iraq and later Afghanistan. The IED war of attrition, which punctuated the dismal days after major combat operations halted in Iraq in May 2003, was indicative of having an enemy with too much freedom of movement and indigenous support. As the RAND study on how insurgencies conclude stipulates, insurgencies—when successful—are rarely self-supporting.[25] In Iraq, IEDs and insurgent operators had significant international monetary and logistical support. Coalition forces were not adequately postured to ensure safety and security outside of narrowly defined zones of operations. This led to an intimidated local populace that could earn more from placing IEDs or conducting kidnappings than from trying to operate a business that could be characterized as "collaborating" with Western occupiers. The surge of troops allowed operational breathing space to pacify and secure broader swaths of Iraq while reassuring the local populace that there would be

safety in tending to business as usual rather than abetting guerrilla operations.[26]

There was a doctrinal shift away from some of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's precepts—in particular, the utter reliance on lightly equipped special operations units. In Afghanistan in 2002, almost the entire occupation was under control of special forces or retailored airborne and ranger units leading small joint task forces. Their primary mission was to root out arms caches and former al-Qaeda terror cells, and they were ill-equipped for long-term peacekeeping duty and SSTR operations. They were air mobile and designed for lightning-quick operations and not long-haul garrison work. Not surprisingly, Afghanistan remained a troubled area of resurgent chaos throughout the decade as the United States pulled capability out of that country to support operations in Iraq. Poorly provisioned for long-haul SSTR, the veterans of the conflicts developed the expertise and skills that no predecessor American military units had ever dreamt of—hard-won lessons during an entire decade that transformed doctrine, tactics, and equipment. By the time of the Iraq surge, the synergy of this training, experience, and new equipment had a telling impact.[27]

Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle

In particular, the MRAP personnel carrier vehicles; new intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) tactics and platforms—especially better fusion between intelligence collection and action on the battlefield; and the novel use of in-theater airlift made a huge contribution to ongoing operations. The MRAP was emblematic of a rapid procurement program hatched through hard lessons learned and doctrinal shifts. The program itself, adapted while still in development as tactics and weaponry in Iraq changed with the addition of more armor, greater engine performance, and enhanced suspension and as the insurgents began fielding higher-power penetrating devices. Most of the MRAP vehicles' developmental testing took place at the Aberdeen Test Center in Maryland under the command of Col John Rooney, US Army. Rooney had extensive experience in the improvisational bolt-on, up-armor packages for vehicles in Iraq in 2005 and was a combat veteran who had learned difficult lessons especially useful in the rapid development and fielding of the MRAP program. The program included concurrent test development and training, including the rapid initiation of maintenance and operations training at "MRAP University" at Red River Army Depot, Texarkana, Texas. While there were many variants and subvariants of the MRAP, the concept itself was unified around a common standard for personnel protec-

tion, and it was successfully fielded in less than two years. The V-shaped basic hull, optimized for blast protection, originated from COIN operations during Rhodesia's civil war in the 1970s. From a nascent concept in 2004, the first-production MRAP "Cougars" were ready for DOD orders by January 2007. A year later, 1,000 had been delivered.[28]

By 2009 MRAP vehicles began to sport Common Remotely Operated Weapon Stations (CROWS), further reducing personnel vulnerability; gunners now could fire their weapons from within the vehicle using cameras and other systems to direct fire. By the time of their closure in fiscal year 2013, MRAP production lines had manufactured more than 12,000 units. Initial estimates were that adoption of the rapidly developed MRAP program would reduce casualties in IED attacks by about 80 percent, and subsequent operations bore that out (fig. 1). MRAP vehicles were not invulnerable to rollover or outright destruction, but their presence on the battlefield complicated insurgent actions and required greater precision for lethality on the part of the enemy. Again, MRAP development and implementation were part of a pragmatic strategy to counteract the asymmetric advantage of attacking convoy and logistical traffic, and the program's massive introduction was an important technological milestone and achievement in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom to moderate an insurgent advantage.[29]

Figure 1. Personal testament to improved personnel protection. A member of the special forces wrote a note on the door of an MRAP that reads, "This truck saved my life as well as 5 others on 02 Apr 08 at 2300 in Basrah, IZ [International Zone]." (Photo courtesy of US Army, "MRAPs on the Move," *Army Times*, 13 June 2008, http://wwwarmy.mil/article/9979/mraps-on-the-move/.)

M1A1/2 Upgrade/Tank Urban Survivability Kit

One of the more surprising aspects of the war in Iraq was the vulnerability of main battle tanks to insurgent forces using penetrating-type IEDs. In Operation Desert Storm, the M1A1 Abrams tank in particular had developed a reputation as nigh invulnerable to small weapons. In the intervening years, insurgents and peer enemies had developed countermeasures, including the use of shaped thermal and shaped penetrating devices and large-caliber artillery rounds as remotely triggered antiarmor devices. The typical array of reactive armor, designed for armor piercing standoff weapons, proved insufficient for crew safety. The DOD contracted the M1A1/2's manufacturer, General Dynamics Land Systems, to develop countermeasures to the new reality. Again, 2006–2007 would prove to be a critical year for the heaviest weaponry as well. Eventually the DOD procured 505 Tank Urban Survivability Kits (TUSK) for the main battle tanks used by Army and Marine operators in urban settings. The TUSKs included add-on reactive armor tiles that looked oddly curved, like slate roofing tiles; an armored shield for gun loaders; enhanced communication equipment for better mobile contact with troops outside the sealed vehicles, with what was called the tank-infantry phone; a thermal weapon sight; and a new thermal driver's rearview camera. TUSK entered service on M1A1/M1A2 tanks in late 2007 and was deployed to Iraq as soon as it became available. In consonance with the MRAP, the TUSK M1A1/2s and the surge in troops again staunched a glaring vulnerability for COIN warfare.[30]

Doctrinal and Field Manual Emphasis Shifts

Along with enhanced joint training and technological innovation, the Army revised its field manuals (FM) for stability operations, coalition training, and COIN and incorporated these shifts into its leadership development courses. Many of the precepts of Gen David Petraeus's earlier work on insurgent operations were formalized by the end of 2006 and implemented along with surge operations in 2007 and beyond.[31] There was not universal praise for the surge and Petraeus's strategy. Dr. Edward Luttwack made a very public attack against such a strategy in his article "Dead End: Counterinsurgency Operations as Military Malpractice."[32] Luttwack's point of view was that of the majority opinion in early 2007 as war fatigue and frustration permeated American society. Some experts counseled patience and recommended waiting for the truly structural changes that would spring from the official version of the Army's FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*.[33] Leading COIN expert Col David Kilcullen argued that Dr. Luttwack possessed an incomplete idea of what contemporary

operations entailed and indeed presented a very narrow and harsh view of the populations in Southwest Asia. Luttwack had inflammatorily stated, "Better government . . . is certainly wanted in France, Norway, and the United States but obviously not in Afghanistan or Iraq, where many people prefer indigenous and religious oppression."[34] Kilcullen's own experience had been different. He described a population that was yearning for stability and security—far afield from a Western, almost jingoistic view of Islam. In one of his meetings with a tribal chieftain on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, Kilcullen recounted the leader telling him, "you want to bring us 'democracy' at the national level, but we already have democracy within the *khel*. What we want from the government is security, honor, justice, and prosperity. If anyone offers us those things, we will fight for him to the death. If democracy only brings elections, what use is it?"[35] To Afghan tribes, security was something that was eagerly greeted but parochially instituted. The larger whole was a collection of such tribes, each with unique requirements and challenges.

Planning and Organizational Enhancements

In 2004, in the midst of the mayhem into which the Iraqi insurgency had devolved, the DOD urged Congress to fund a "Manhattan Project–like" effort to help defeat the IEDs proliferating throughout the AOR—especially in Iraq. By 2008 the emergent Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization (JIEDDO) had spent approximately $14 billion studying the problem and implementing new operational concepts to defeat/counter IEDs. The organization was chartered to conduct strategic planning, rapidly acquire counter-IED technology, fuse operations and intelligence data for rapid strikes against IEDs (and insurgent groups who placed them), and, finally, adequately train and provide trainers to operational personnel combatting the IED menace.[36]

The JIEDDO was taken to task by the Government Accountability Office for not providing ready metrics or having definable goals through which to justify its large budget and personnel. Over time, the JIEDDO became another part of an enhanced planning and operational cycle with regard to the SSTR operations in OIF and OEF. Since insurgents used IEDs as an army would use artillery and these weapons caused more than 70 percent of coalition casualties by 2007, it was important that military leaders confront the hard reality presented by that weapon and create an entity that emphasized its ultimate defeat. Secondly, having a JIEDDO-type organization allowed the services to concentrate on core missions and survival training, while allowing a dedicated cadre to parse out solutions to the IED challenge. Training and planning paid dividends in that

experience and allowed the military experts to understand trends in IED attacks. After all, the IEDs did not plant themselves but were instead part of an elaborate subculture within the end state—almost more accurately, a weapon of economics as much as asymmetrical warfare. As Capt Stephen Capeheart, US Army, an intelligence officer who worked in Baghdad, explained to journalist Greg Grant,

> When [insurgents are] low on money, they start kidnapping . . . They ask for ransoms typically in the $15,000 to $20,000 range for an average Iraqi citizen, more for the wealthy and foreigners. Money in hand, it takes the bombers about a week to buy explosives and assemble bombs in factories hidden in rural areas. Once built, the bombs are moved to safe houses inside Baghdad, then quickly used before they can be discovered. While bomb-makers assemble the devices, reconnaissance cells chart the behavior of American patrols, looking for the best place to attack to cause maximum casualties. Ten days of heavy roadside bomb attacks begin, then the insurgents run out of money and the cycle starts anew.[37]

In Afghanistan, the overarching funding source for the insurgency was the opium crop. Again, as with surges in kidnapping, inflow of money after the opium harvest was a leading indicator of insurgent movement. What to do about that "cash crop" vexes leadership to the present moment. Unlike Iraq, Afghanistan had tremendously rugged and remote terrain, making some of the lessons learned in Iraq irrelevant for the insurgents in OEF. No matter what, technology would have to play a larger role in Afghanistan. Stemming the tide of opium money had proved nearly impossible. Destroying the opium crops had deprived the world of additional drugs but bred new insurgents, while local Afghanis withstood economic deprivation and insurgent intimidation. Trying to relieve the pressure by paying farmers for the production of less profitable crops had increased pressure from the Taliban. Short of economic solutions to pacify the countryside, the United States was forced to rely more upon technology and remotely piloted vehicles (RPV). Over the course of the organization's brief existence, the planning, training, and continuous lessons learned—conducted under the auspices of the JIEDDO—brought about numerous innovations that helped stem the tide of IED lethality in Iraq. While the random nature of violence in insurgencies made absolute safety impossible to ensure, the JIEDDO did implement several novel technological innovations. These included the self-protective adaptive roller kit; IED/weapons vest recognition devices at the entry control point; Weapons Technical Intelligence (WTI) Afghanistan Support Plan (WASP); and trained, expert search and destroy counter-IED teams. Additionally, at 55 DOD locations, vehicle optics sensor systems were fielded; a route clearance optics system was developed; and station training in counter-IED warfare was provided. From almost no capability in 2001, train-

ing and planning had allowed amplified counter-IED theory and practice into a practical discipline within the DOD by 2012. Various biometric data had also been accumulated on members of the Afghan National Security Forces, making entry by insurgent fighters much harder in secured areas.[38]

Leveraging RPVs and ISR. Aviation technology also leapt ahead for COIN warfare. Though drones and ISR had been integral for operational success from the start of OEF, by 2007 ISR platforms began to do analytical "before and after" high-speed comparisons of highly trafficked areas vulnerable to IEDs and ambush. More robust Predator drones roamed the battlefield awaiting quick-turn instructions to intervene, even as insurgents were burying or otherwise hiding explosive devices. While ISR and RPV platforms could not be everywhere, the continuous sorties by ISR platforms offered commanders a much better battle picture by 2007 and beyond and allowed the combined force air component commander (CFACC) in the combined air operations center a means to engage in COIN like never before. From the early days of OEF and Operation Anaconda, where A-10 Warthogs hastily entered the battlespace with little or no prior planning (the USAF had been omitted from much of the planning and operational dynamics of that key early battle), the CFACC now was positioned to intervene positively and on demand throughout most of the theater of battle.[39]

Joint Expeditionary Training Implemented. While they had taken a circuitous route to the desired end, the armed forces began to implement a realistic predeployment training requirement and syllabus for all of their "battlefield" personnel by 2008. The USAF activated the 602nd Training Group (provisional) on 3 May 2007 to formalize USAF instruction and present a cohesive chain of command for the "in lieu of" taskings.[40] Detachments for the 602nd included Fort Bliss, Texas; Fort Polk, Louisiana; and—the stalwart since 2004—Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey. The training piece with regard to countering the innate insurgent advantage cannot be overstressed. In consonance with the 602nd Training Group, Air Force Central Command activated air expeditionary groups and air expeditionary squadrons within the AOR to provide command and control for battlefield Airmen. By 2008 expeditionary training and command and control had finally been formalized within the Air Force—in some respects catching up with the other services that, with doctrinal changes and realistic training syllabi (such as vehicle rollover training) began to earnestly reflect an emphasis on expeditionary and COIN skills for its personnel moving into dangerous areas. Training had suffered from an emphasis on large group actions and the possible introduction of weapons of mass destruction. Planners used doomsday training scenarios to limit expenditures on generalized COIN/SSTR training for the

bulk of military and DOD personnel. The end result was that many military and some select contract and civilian personnel had insufficient survival training and personnel protection equipment (PPE) to be loosed into the midst of a guerrilla war such as OEF and OIF. As those wars widened beyond the capacity for special forces, it was essential that some remedial forms of COIN and SSTR training be implemented as soon as was practicable. But again, the wish for a smaller force, quick extraction from the AOR, and a reliance on remote airpower stifled introduction of comprehensive COIN training for a vulnerable population. It supported the more comprehensively trained maneuver units and manned essential SSTR outpost and reconstruction teams or had work "outside the wire."[41]

Bridging that training gap, for example getting personnel adequately armed and equipped with appropriate PPE and leveraging combat experience and survival techniques, took time—too much time, frankly. However, it did have an impact on the battlefield at roughly the same time the surge and doctrinal and technological changes began to flow freely into the AOR. Personnel returned to their units and the training and doctrinal branches of their respective services as combat veterans—sometimes with less than a year of actual service. Tapping that expertise and hard-won experience was truly a point of emphasis within the American military and over time had the cumulative effect of better preparing the force for an AOR in insurgency. By 2011 the Air Force had adopted a policy that would "synchronize, standardize and integrate" all joint expeditionary training (JET) training roughly 10 years after the 9/11 attacks. The new Air Force JET continuum would be four-tiered (fig. 2).[42]

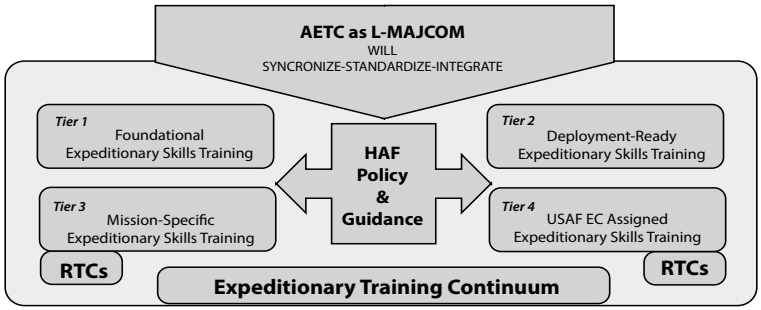

Figure 2. Continuum of USAF JET as developed in 2011. (Reproduced from Brig Gen Richard Devereaux, briefing, to Gen Stephen Lorenz, AETC commander, subject: Expeditionary Skills Training, 4 May 2011, AETC Historical Archives, AETC/A2/3/10, Randolph AFB, TX.)

By 2005 the Army, with arguably the greatest need to develop better expeditionary skills and SSTR training, had developed a novel approach

to the process. The Army had been wed to the concept of "whole-unit" readiness training at its battlefield training ranges, but that type of training was better suited for large-force maneuver training than for individuals operating in an insurgent environment. The Army and USAF attempted to find alternatives to extended field training and together experimented with a novel technological approach in partnership with the University of Texas and Texas A&M University on a computer-based simulation that could be used for training anywhere in the world at any time: the Joint Expeditionary Force Learning Environment–Virtual (JEFLE-V). The services hoped that JEFLE-V would "address a Joint Service issue related to lack of expeditionary skill sets and joint interoperability opportunities that are not trained in formal training or education programs among the services. These skill sets are typically trained either locally or on the job and mainly learned from real-time experiences, which may include failures as well as successes. This knowledge currently depends on real-world experiences or exercises."[43]

The Army and Marine Corps invested heavily in intense irregular warfare (IW) training under the auspices of General Petraeus as commander of the Combined Arms Center (CAC), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and opened the Counterinsurgency Training and Doctrinal Center in 2006. The JEFLE-V concept proved to be nothing more than a proof of concept, and, in the end, the services moved toward comprehensive field training as a better means of preparing personnel. Doctrinal changes to develop better and more realistic IW and COIN training environments meant that half measures such as JEFLE-V were out of the question by 2008. In fact, the DOD issued Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare*, in December 2008, stipulating that the services must "improve proficiency for IW and to maintain capabilities and capacity" and directing each service to assign a lead agency for IW. Furthermore, the directive required services to develop "collaborative policies, plans, and procedures, including collaborative training and exercises that promote interoperability, for steady-state and surge activities."[44] The Army created the Irregular Warfare Fusion Cell at the CAC, and other agencies followed suit: the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Light Intensity Conflict, the Joint Staff J7 IW Office, United States Special Operations Command J7/9 (IW), the Marine Corps Center for Irregular Warfare Integration, the Navy Irregular Warfare Office, and the Air Force Irregular Warfare Integration Office.[45]

The move to make IW and COIN training and planning an integral part of the DOD's approach to combat readiness had been gradual until the issuance of FM 3-24 in December 2006. After that date, the services regularly released doctrinal updates on COIN and IW operations and formalized training, preparation processes, and planning. Thus, the period

after that date was a watershed as the study and preparation for COIN expanded and formalized like no other time in recent history. As articulated in FM 3-24,

> They must ensure that their Soldiers and Marines are ready to be greeted with either a handshake or a hand grenade while taking on missions only infrequently practiced until recently at our combat training centers. Soldiers and Marines are expected to be nation builders as well as warriors. They must be prepared to help reestablish institutions and local security forces and assist in rebuilding infrastructure and basic services. They must be able to facilitate establishing local governance and the rule of law. The list of such tasks is long; performing them involves extensive coordination and cooperation with many intergovernmental, host-nation, and international agencies. Indeed, the responsibilities of leaders in a counterinsurgency campaign are daunting; however, the discussions in this manual alert leaders to the challenges of such campaigns and suggest general approaches for grappling with those challenges.[46]

Examining the Data

The enhanced training and planning under way by 2007 had yielded numerous structural and technological changes as SSTR operations began their culmination phase in Iraq. The United States entered both OEF and OIF with insufficient planning and COIN resources save for special forces. It took almost five years and several important leadership changes to confront the actual challenges of the battlefield, to begin yielding results positive enough for extrication of most personnel from Iraq, and to develop plans for similar disengagement in Afghanistan by 2014. Critics assailed the efficacy of the surge in both OIF and OEF and often failed to appreciate the doctrinal, training, and technological pieces that accompanied the fielded forces after 2007. Safer ground personnel theoretically enhanced the value and utility of remotely piloted vehicles and ground-support sorties by military aviation of all types. Better targeting from less vulnerable aerial assets would be expected to have resulted from such battlefield enhancements, and the data support that conclusion.[47]

For IEDs and related insurgent-caused deaths, the results had been getting steadily better over the past several years. By March 2013, the data showed great improvement in many areas:

> The Pentagon has filled the skies over Afghanistan with high-tech sensors, and the effect has been measurable. From March through May, troops in vehicles found 64 percent of improvised explosive devices before they blew up, an 11 percentage-point increase over the previous quarter. Troops on foot patrol discovered 81 percent, a 4 percentage-point increase, according to the Pentagon's Joint IED Defeat Organization (JIEDDO).
>
> The rate of discovery before bombs exploded hovered around 50 percent for years. The most important measure of progress: IEDs caused less than half of troop deaths for the first time in five years.

> "We are, in terms of detection of all types of IEDs, vastly better than we were a year ago," Deputy Defense Secretary Ashton Carter told USA TODAY in an interview. He credited airborne surveillance with driving progress against IEDs.[48]

The data looked positive but must be understood as a fusion between technology, training, and experience. Personnel had to be competent at finding and dealing with insurgent attacks no matter how excellent the technology, and such competence was manifested through an experienced training cadre and veteran force that offered competent instruction and mentorship.[49]

The war logs of OIF from 2007 to 2011 have been extensively studied to examine the efficacy of American COIN/SSTR strategies—especially those of the surge and related buildups. By 2009 US and coalition forces were winning most encounters with insurgents, fatalities were down across the board, and many measures of host-nation security had improved substantially. Kidnapping rates and civilian-on-civilian violence diminished markedly. Some counterindicators showed unusual spikes, such as "first-to-fire" and "escalation-to-firefight" gross numbers, but in Iraq, the trends were positive—especially diminishing support for insurgents. The positive gains in stability and security set the stage for a generalized withdrawal. Thus, it can be argued that the COIN strategy in Iraq allowed the Iraqis space for self-determination. Old issues such as whether Winston Churchill should have drawn three nations rather than one remained but were beyond the capacity of a nation intent on withdrawing and not dominating the long-term future of Iraq.[50]

The election of Pres. Barack Obama effected a change in emphasis from OIF to OEF as the new president was anxious to implement some of the successful Iraq strategies in Afghanistan—with the hope to withdraw from active conflict in the latter within a few years. Thus, while a troop surge occurred in Afghanistan in 2009–2010, US military leaders in OEF also took full advantage of experiential improvements as well as training, planning, and technology—as had their peers in Iraq. While conditions were different, the United States appeared to be on track for withdrawal of most forces by 2014.[51] As strategist David Kilkullen put it,

> We need to do four things—what we might call "essential strategic tasks"—to succeed in Afghanistan. We need to *prevent* the re-emergence of an Al Qaeda sanctuary that could lead to another 9/11. We need to *protect* Afghanistan from a range of security threats including the Taliban insurgency, terrorism, narcotics, misrule and corruption. We need to *build* sustainable and accountable state institutions (at the central, provincial and local level) and a resilient civil society. Then we can begin a phased *hand-off* to Afghan institutions that can survive without permanent international assistance. We might summarize this approach as "Prevent, Protect, Build, Hand-Off" (emphasis in original).[52]

Kilcullen thought that truly working this option would require at least 10 years and perhaps a commitment in excess of two billion dollars a month to stabilize Afghanistan in the best case. The money and political will was not conducive to such a long-term commitment, but again, some of the leading indicators for success of operations in Afghanistan had improved. Moreover, if the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces leave Afghanistan, it will be on their own terms and for reasons of economic interests. Combat fatalities spiked initially after the Afghan surge but diminished sharply to just more than 30 for the first half of 2013. By most important measures, SSTR operations in Afghanistan have been enhanced by training, planning, and equipment upgrades—again years late, but measurably better than they were. The late start to better training, planning, and equipping for Afghanistan was exacerbated by the emphasis on Iraq. The start was deferred so long that political will to stay the course in Afghanistan—now 11 years into SSTR—was virtually nonexistent.[53]

The ostensible reasons for conducting OEF—the destruction of al-Qaeda safe havens and capacities as well as leadership targets including Osama bin Laden—have been accomplished. Nation-building goals in Afghanistan were never very realistic given the long history of tribal and religious strife there, but neither could such goals be artfully "hoped" out of existence. While not completely ignored in military doctrinal centers, the "dangers of nation building" seemed nonetheless to confound a whole generation of American military scholars.[54] The losses in Afghanistan, such as they were in 2013, remained less than those citizens lost on 11 September 2001 in the United States. The goals and forces in Afghanistan shifted like sands on a windy and decaying beach, but the essential truth was that OEF was a punitive endeavor that had exacted much in the way of retribution on America's erstwhile enemies in al-Qaeda and the Taliban. For all of the unrealistic optimism that followed the toppling of the Taliban in 2001, by 2009 there had developed an equally unrealistic negativity and fatalism about COIN and SSTR in OEF. While 2009 brought unprecedented levels of violence and instability to the region, such developments did not mean all was lost either. The book *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* was particularly evocative of that side of the information war. Its author, Ahmed Rashid, recounted terrible event after terrible event and did not see the coming changes to COIN; he was pessimistic about almost every future prospect in Afghanistan. Despite the tone, after 400 pages of dire recollections and predictions, he recommended that the United States embark on aggressive nation building and "develop a long-lasting peace and stabilization program in the area."[55] As hard as it was to stabilize nations

amid a generalized insurgency, it was harder to satisfy the political imperatives of the domestic media audience intent on having it both ways—withdrawal and SSTR. There was only so much the United States could achieve in a region driven by centuries of war and tribal power struggles.

By 2010 COIN goals were codified and some new doctrinal values were institutionally imposed—especially the escalation of force. The United States and NATO had moved significantly toward better planning, training, and doctrine. Events, while still dire in the sense that any war is dire, began to progress toward a more stable and permissive end state in Afghanistan. NATO personnel had strict guidance on permissible actions with the intentions of limiting the cultivation of new insurgents and building true relationships and bridges to the civil population.[56] After a period of apprenticeship in SSTR, Afghanistan too had yielded some great successes, including the eradication of bin Laden.[57]

Gen Stanley McChrystal set about to construct a continuous COIN learning campaign in Afghanistan, which was given to International Security Assistance Force members as they came into the country:

> We must think of offensive operations not simply as those that target militants, but ones that earn the trust and support of the people while denying influence and access to the insurgent. Holding routine jirgas with community leaders that build trust and solve problems is an offensive operation. So is using projects and work programs to bring communities together and meet their needs. Missions designed primarily to "disrupt" militants are not.[58]

As OEF began to wind down, personnel had an impressive training, doctrinal, and planning wellspring from which to draw.

Conclusion

> *But* [Gen George C.] *Marshall's outward calm and his kind words to his chief subordinate veiled the blood-draining certainty that American boys, farm boys from Iowa and Wisconsin and Illinois, had died in North Africa in great numbers when a little more preparation and better leadership might have saved their lives.*
>
> —Mark Perry
> *Partners in Command: George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower in War and Peace*

British prime minister Winston Churchill created a perpetually tenuous security condition when he arbitrarily forced three disparate religious sectors/sects together into modern Iraq in mapping that country's post–World War I borders. Afghanistan, another legacy of the British Empire,

had endured centuries of imperial violence dating back to before the days of Alexander the Great, making the long-term political stability for that nation dubious at best—no matter how long the United States or NATO stayed there. In both cases, the best strategy for COIN was to stabilize, secure, and withdraw at such a time as the nascent political entities of those nations had a fighting chance of self-rule. Both were mired in civil war among competing versions of Islam as well as with secular/nonsecular and modern/conservative factions. Rebuilding was part of a noble strategy, but insurgents tend to target progress in any form. Such an intense insurgency made it unrealistic to think of a harmonious postwar phase in either country. Imposing Western democracy was never a viable option for the foreseeable future. In the case of Afghanistan, the United States ousted the sponsors of al-Qaeda; hunted down the leaders of that terrorist group, including Osama bin Laden; and ultimately stabilized the country significantly enough to give it at least a chance for survival. That was as far as any surge or COIN warfare could take NATO and the United States, but again, much had been learned and implemented since 2001, giving some reason for optimism.[59]

In Iraq, even after 20 years of peacekeeping and no-fly zones, the post-invasion stabilization and reconstruction was badly conceived and executed and was only salvaged years later by the gradual changes in training, tactics, and troop levels that leadership allowed. Iraq was a costly endeavor, but by 2007 and beyond, the innate insurgent advantage had been largely bridged by the United States. The US military finally yielded to pragmatism, changing its doctrine, training, and technology to match the real enemy—not the ghosts of a former superpower but the actual insurgency operations under way. Once this realism in planning and training was carried out, concomitant doctrinal changes, new leadership, enhanced force levels, and better equipment allowed the United States to set favorable conditions for withdrawal. The data reveals a steady improvement in security, casualties, and effectiveness of SSTR/COIN activities.[60]

Recommendations

For military scholars, the key lessons of the past several years should inform ongoing doctrine and are to be recommended. First, insurgencies and asymmetrical terror attacks were neither aberrations nor possessed of unbeatable attributes. The insurgencies retained weaknesses, and most had outside supporters and money that allowed them to operate. Kilcullen observes that "far from being a one-off challenge, we may look back on Al Qaeda as the harbinger of a new era of conflict."[61]

Second, COIN was not a rare phenomenon in the US military tradition; rather, large wars were the anomalies. Further, nothing a military does to prepare for COIN/SSTR engagements hurts preparedness at other levels. Indeed, training all personnel to survive asymmetrical wars helps them in all contingencies—which often break down into small unit actions—and should be the norm that pays dividends forever.

Third, technology must be leveraged at all times to consider asymmetrical weaknesses an insurgent or terrorist group could exploit, not merely while engaged in such a conflict. It remained important to keep the work of the last decade moving forward to meet the next insurgency or wave of attacks.

Fourth, planning for SSTR requires awareness that all successful international military interventions lead to some form of occupation—permissive or otherwise. The default position should have been that SSTR planning included adequate training for insurgent possibilities, energized technological enhancements, protection of extended lines of communications, and provision of realistic options for commanders to save lives and resources.

Fifth, planning can never conveniently omit COIN and SSTR in end-state operations. Nor can such planning delegate major or all responsibility to nongovernmental organizations or diplomatic entities. Security was required for success, and that meant that military involvement had to be readily on hand. Recent contingencies were planned like a Shakespearean fight scene in which actors fight unscripted random actions with suggested outcomes, resulting in only the dimmest allusions to actual choreography.

On the one hand, insurgents have many advantages, including their ability to do great harm by striking at random intervals and in small numbers. They can easily manipulate the information war with outsized coverage and hand-wringing, even in a failed campaign such as the Tet offensive. Insurgents can blend in with their environment and often inflame local passions against invaders or nonadherents to conservative religious precepts. Finally, they require only stoic patience and a modicum of support to outlast great nations' wills or electoral processes. On the other hand, they have vulnerabilities. They can be watched and eradicated from great distances. A prepared and trained force can recognize dangers and attacks and avoid or overwhelm such obstacles. Finally, planning and innovative technology can leapfrog the tactics and strategies of insurgents at various levels.[62]

The joint force had begun to really institutionalize some of these tenets of modern SSTR operations by 2009. As Col John M. Spiszer, US Army, notes, "Counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan are different from those in Iraq. In fact, they are even different from one Afghan province to

another." "Nevertheless," he adds, "Army doctrine provides an excellent baseline for operations. Task Force Duke used doctrine, the lessons of prior units, guidance from Regional Command-East and ISAF, and a dose of common sense to get its ten yards in N2KL [Nangarhar, Nuristan, Konar, and Laghman provinces] by the summer of 2009.[63] At the tactical level, a tremendous summation of recommendations and lessons learned accompanied Spiszer's study:

- a focus on the populace in the context of hope and faith instead of hearts and minds;
- ANSF [Afghan National Security Force] development;
- Soldier restraint;
- leader focus on unity of effort;
- continuity with previous good units; and
- continuous, planned battlefield circulation.[64]

According to Spiszer, "Task Force Duke had 39 of its personnel pay the ultimate sacrifice during our operations there. Over 280 received the Purple Heart, and over 300 received medals for valor. We owe it to them to get it right."[6]

Summation

The data from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom confirm that adequate training and planning can bridge the innate insurgent advantage to buy the time needed for peacekeeping and SSTR. Planning and training in this context mean adequate preparation. Bridging insurgent advantages as an occupation force requires taking COIN seriously enough among the hierarchy of military preparations to adequately confront challenges by making realistic planning and training a high priority. In the past, COIN was studied but never as part of a comprehensive revisitation of training, planning, and doctrinal transformation. In the present conflict, a paradigm shift took place from late 2006 to the present, and that had a telling, if belated, impact in that the United States was able to extract the bulk of its forces from Iraq while that nation's new government functioned. In Afghanistan the situation had certainly moved toward greater security and fewer casualties as the United States prepared to withdraw in 2014—this after finally bringing significant portions of al-Qaeda, including its leader, to justice. While nothing can force a nation to adopt positive governance, a prepared, sufficiently manned and equipped COIN force can buy the space needed for next-iteration

governments to succeed or fail of their own accord. The great insurgencies of the past have sometimes yielded powerful and humane nations but often result in despotic dictatorships in another guise, depending largely on outside support. The arc of history may indeed bend toward justice, but only if populations are given breathing space from cruel violence and genocide. Therefore, commitments to SSTR and COIN warfare should not be taken lightly in the future. British general Rupert Smith likened the small conflicts proliferating throughout the world today as vanguards of a generational shift in warfare; "war amongst the peoples" had supplanted state-on-state violence in the main.[66]

COIN warfare was not merely a laboratory to test the efficacy of some new technology or implement some shifting tertiary military doctrine to be borrowed for larger conflict. Rather, small wars were now ubiquitous enterprises of no small danger—with complexities and corresponding challenges that were uniquely their own. Yet they stood as vulnerable to scholarship and preparation as any other campaign or enemy. Planning, training, and innovation were the essential means to a reasonable end for SSTR. There were no shortcuts or sleight-of-hand doctrines that trumped those factors. It took US forces and leadership several years to set in motion procedures and training that might have saved countless lives if implemented prior to 2001. The data pointed to the need for adequate preparation for a type of war seen frequently within US history. COIN and SSTR training and planning should not require the emergency incipient within fast-moving operations to receive adequate support and funding. Perhaps the largest lesson of the contemporary conflicts was to not abandon the new emphasis on SSTR training, doctrine, procedures, and equipment after the end of US and NATO involvement in Southwest Asia. The need to prepare for irregular warfare will not dissipate for the foreseeable future, and the US military must remain prepared to execute it.[67]

While insurgents had many advantages, they also had exploitable weaknesses. They were often aided from the outside and frequently technologically challenged, especially at night. They embodied the face of repression and terror and depended utterly on a nation such as the United States to not take them seriously with dedicated planning, training, and technological deficits. Insurgents depended on shiftless apathy and the dictates of larger missions to allow them freedom to conduct depredations in extended wars of attrition. They also counted on the information war and media to instill a sense of hopelessness on their larger enemy. Throughout history, insurgents were often their own worst enemy if allowed to percolate. Vietnam lost a million citizens and ruined its economy, but its leaders declared their generational warfare successful—even when

a strategy of engagement with the United States would likely have yielded the same results with a fraction of the suffering and at a much quicker pace.

A central lesson to be learned in the contemporary way of war remained relevant: to not embolden insurgencies through incompetence and lethargy. Since the days of Pyrrhus, military engagement should be measured against its true costs and fractionalized further still with a cold-eyed estimation of its likely human toll—no matter how seemingly worthwhile the goal. History compels us to take COIN/SSTR deadly seriously—train for it, plan for it, and secure the battlefield. Most insurgencies draw from outside sources not invested in reasonable and painless solutions but rather focused on national interests dictating that their likely major adversary be bled dry over a long period of time—as long as possible. Even "small wars" were a manyfold tragedy for all concerned when a powerful nation goes unprepared into COIN scenarios. Knowing this, the United States must embrace the lessons learned after 2007 in Iraq and Afghanistan and continue to prepare and equip for extended fighting in nonpermissive urban and regional settings against ensconced ideological and foreign-supported fighters. Insurgencies define the worst traits resident within warfare and mankind, from atrocity to terrorism, and a military member must be trained and prepared to handle their bitter and personal horrors.

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Abbreviations

AEF	air expeditionary force
AETC	Air Education and Training Command
AOR	area of responsibility
CAC	Combined Arms Center
CFACC	combined force air component commander
CJCS	chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
COIN	counterinsurgency operation
CROWS	Common Remotely Operated Weapon Station
DOD	Department of Defense
EAGLE	expeditionary and global learning environment
FM	field manual
FY	fiscal year
IED	improvised explosive device
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
IW	irregular warfare
JEFLE-V	Joint Expeditionary Force Learning Environment–Virtual
JEIDDO	Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization
JET	joint expeditionary training
MRAP	mine-resistant ambush protected
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Association
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PPE	personnel protection equipment
RPV	remotely piloted vehicle
SSTR	stabilization, security, transition, and reconstruction
TUSK	Tank Urban Survivability Kit
USCENTCOM	United States Central Command
WASP	Weapons Technical Intelligence (WTI) Afghanistan Support Plan

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