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**THESIS**

**WHY THE WEAK WIN WARS: A STUDY OF THE  
FACTORS THAT DRIVE STRATEGY IN ASYMMETRIC  
CONFLICT**

by

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December 2009

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STRATEGY IN ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis builds on the research and ideas of the school of thought that believes strategy is the most important factor in predicting war outcomes. One shortcoming of that school is the inability to explain why strong actors would implement a strategy that does not provide the highest probability of victory. This project uses a game theoretic model to illustrate how a seemingly non-optimal strategy may be rational for initial phases of the conflict. However, this rationale does not apply beyond initial stages of conflict. To explain non-optimal strategy selection in prolonged conflicts, this project analyzes strategy drivers—factors that influence strategy selection and implementation. Probability of victory is only one of the factors found to influence strategy implementation. Other than probability of victory, this study finds that the institutional predisposition of a military is the most important because it is the most consistent and the most controllable by the military. With this conceptual basis, the project analyzes U.S. involvement in Afghanistan since 2001. It also takes a cursory look at U.S. operations in Iraq since 2003, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, and the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The model and case studies illustrate a U.S. military institutional predisposition with an excessive disposition towards direct attack. As such, this thesis recommends taking action to provide the U.S. military with a more neutral institutional predisposition.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*Force is all-conquering, but its victories are short-lived.*  
— Abraham Lincoln

### A. AVOIDANCE IS NOT AN OPTION

The United States military has been a powerhouse fighting machine with victories against strong opponents in the Revolutionary War, World War I, World War II, and the Cold War. However, the inability of the U.S. military to secure victory against the much weaker forces of North Vietnam greatly rattled the confidence of the U.S. political and military forces. From this uncertainty of how to use military power came the Weinberger doctrine, which called for the involvement of the U.S. military only as a last resort in conflicts over vital interests that necessitate the use of overwhelming conventional military force against an identifiable foe.<sup>1</sup> This type of warfare is well suited to the American way of war, and thus gave the U.S. a marked advantage. In his book *Beating Goliath*, Jeffrey Record reiterated the basic premises of the Weinberger doctrine when he recommended the U.S. avoid counterinsurgency warfare.<sup>2</sup> However, his recommendation is more suited as a business strategy for a company that has the luxury of selecting its operating environment; it is not realistic for a military expected to succeed in any environment along the entire spectrum of war in which the nation orders the military into action.

The collapse of the USSR and the increasingly networked and interrelated global order that has developed in the wake of the bipolar world has led to frequent justification for U.S. military intervention in conflicts that do not conform to the tenets of the Weinberger doctrine or Record's recommendations. In these conflicts, the U.S. is likely to face enemies with capabilities and interests asymmetrical to those of the U.S., as

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<sup>1</sup> Caspar W. Weinberger, The Uses of Military Power (address to the National Press Club, Washington, D. C., November 28, 1984) (accessed November 15, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Record, *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2007), 137.

evidenced by involvement in Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, as well as against various non-state actors. Like the U.S. intervention in Vietnam, the U.S. has experienced difficulty in securing victory against these weaker foes.

## **B. NEED FOR A THEORY**

If the U.S. intends to remain the global hegemon, it needs to understand asymmetric conflicts as thoroughly as possible because future conflicts will likely be against significantly weaker enemies. Over the last 200 years of asymmetric conflicts<sup>3</sup> such as those the U.S. is likely to face, the weak actors have been victorious in almost 41% of the wars.<sup>4</sup> The high probability of the U.S. military engaging in future asymmetric conflicts, coupled with the relatively low probability of victory, underscores the need to understand the variables leading to victory or defeat more fully.

## **C. THESIS**

The question this thesis intends to answer is: Why are strong actors, who are theoretically free to select any strategy in war, frequently driven to employ a strategy that does not maximize the probability of victory? In answering this question, this paper uses game theory to show that strong actors often employ strategies that are not optimal for achieving victory. It then explores the factors that are used in determining a military strategy to explore reasons a sub-optimal strategy would be employed.

The purpose of this thesis is to bolster the “employment” school of thought of predicting war outcomes. This school views strategy as the most significant determinant of war outcomes. Presently, the most convincing shortfall of this school is the failure to explain sub-optimal strategies; this project offers a rational explanation for sub-optimal strategies and builds upon the existing strategy literature.

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper, an asymmetric conflict is one in which one actor is significantly stronger than the other. Addressed in more detail later, this paper uses “the halved product of one actor’s armed forces and population exceeded the simple product of its adversary’s armed forces and population by > 5:1” to establish asymmetry. Ivan Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001), 110.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *Principles of International Politics: People’s Power, Preferences, and Perceptions*, Third Edition ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2006), 266.

## II. REVIEW OF WAR OUTCOME EXPLANATIONS

*War is of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied.*  
– Sun Tzu

Various theories have been posited in order to explain war outcomes. According to Napoleon, “God is on the side of the big battalions.”<sup>5</sup> This statement summarizes well the theory that the actor with the most power will win the war. Power can be defined many different ways but, in the most comprehensive measures, it involves material and numerical strength corrected for technological advancement. While some studies support the theory of power as the primary determinant of success, Bueno de Mesquita showed that weak states won 41% of the wars in the last 200 years.<sup>6</sup> Forty-one percent is quite close to a coin flip, and therefore probably not the best predictor of outcomes. Although arguments can be made about the definitions and measurements of power that result in differing percentages of conflicts that favor the weaker side, the fact remains that the weak win quite regularly, making power a poor predictor of war outcomes. Two precipitous shortcomings of the power school of thought are the failure to address relative stake and the omittance of how military power is employed.

To fill the first void, the relative stake school of thought was born, of which Andrew Mack may be the leading proponent.<sup>7</sup> This camp looks at the importance of what each side risks and uses terms such as “interest” and “resolve” to explain victory and defeat.<sup>8</sup> The causal mechanism linking stake, interest and resolve to victory in these theories generally centers around political vulnerability. These theories argue that weak actors are fighting for survival and therefore the weak actor population is willing to

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Stephen D. Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Bueno de Mesquita, *Principles of International Politics: People’s Power, Preferences, and Perceptions*.

<sup>7</sup> To review his relative interest argument, see Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (1975), 175–200.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Anthony Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 4.

accept a bloody, drawn-out conflict in order to survive. Thus, weak actors have more at stake, which leads to higher interest, higher resolve, and lower political vulnerability. Conversely, the survival of strong actors is almost never threatened by the weak. With less at stake, the strong have lower interests and resolve. They expect quick, decisive wins. When strong actors experience battlefield failures or even just fail to attain victory quickly, the public becomes war-weary and unwilling to commit the resources required for victory.<sup>9</sup> Arreguín-Toft argues that relative stake arguments are quite convincing in explaining strong actor failure as a consequence of political vulnerability but leave much to be desired when attempting to explain interest solely as a function of power.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, these theories fail to explain why weak actors, with more at stake, greater resolve, and less political vulnerability, are not always able to attain victory against the strong.

Another school of thought that has emerged attributes war outcomes less to power and relative stake and more to the manner in which the military is employed—meaning doctrine, strategy, and tactics. This camp has many proponents, including Gartner, Biddle, and Arreguín-Toft. Gartner avoids the direct analysis of strategy and instead investigates information used to decide to continue with or change a generic strategy choice once adopted.<sup>11</sup> Biddle makes his case at the tactical level and restricts his scope to “explain the outcomes of operations to control territory” so it has limited use at a strategic level across different types of conflict.<sup>12</sup> Arreguín-Toft gives a very useful approach for a broad framework of analyzing military strategy. In order to adequately capture the strategic interaction typology of Arreguín-Toft and expound upon his ideas, we need to look closely at his theory of asymmetric conflict, which he terms “strategic interaction.”

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<sup>9</sup> Mack, *Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict*, 175–200.

<sup>10</sup> Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, 99.

<sup>11</sup> Scott Sigmund Gartner, *Strategic Assessment in War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*, 6.

Before delving directly into strategic interaction, we first need to look at Arreguín-Toft's strategy differentiation between direct and indirect, which he uses to create a typology. Arreguín-Toft distinguishes between strategy types based upon the intended target. By and large, he views direct as related to targeting *capacity* and indirect as related to targeting *will*.<sup>13</sup> These two approaches are aimed at destroying the enemy either materially or morally.

This distinction is similar to other categorizations, such as that made by the German historian Hans Delbrück. Delbrück viewed strategies as one of two types: either a strategy of annihilation, which was to overthrow an enemy rapidly by sheer power; or a strategy of attrition, which was intended to defeat the enemy slowly by erosion or exhaustion.<sup>14</sup> The Soviet strategist Major General Aleksandr Svechin termed these same basic concepts as destruction and attrition.<sup>15</sup> French strategist Général d'Armée André Beaufre used the same descriptors as Arreguín-Toft of direct and indirect, but in definition his categorizations were almost identical to those of Delbrück and Svechin.<sup>16</sup>

Where the aforementioned thinkers divided strategy types based mostly on time and force elements, Edward Luttwak viewed the essential characteristic of strategy as their focus of effectiveness—either internal or external.<sup>17</sup> The internally focused army attempts to maximize internal efficiency in order to bring maximum firepower to bear upon the enemy. Luttwak terms this the strategy of attrition. This strategy is ideally suited to conventional wars since it views all conflicts as essentially the same. This strategy is generally how highly industrialized societies fight wars. The opposite strategy, relational-maneuver, looks outward and focuses on the enemy. This strategy looks for efficiency in exploiting the weaknesses specific to the particular enemy in one

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<sup>13</sup> Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, 93–128.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War within the Framework of Political History*, trans. W. J. Renfro Jr. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975. Original work published in 1908), 293–315.

<sup>15</sup> Aleksandr A. Svechin, *Strategy*, ed. Kent D. Lee, trans. Kent D. Lee (Minneapolis, MN: East View Publications, 1992. Original work published in 1927), 94–99.

<sup>16</sup> André Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy, with Particular Reference to Problems of Defense, Politics, Economics, and Diplomacy in the Nuclear Age*, trans. R. H. Barry (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1965), 107–110.

<sup>17</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," *Parameters* 13, no. 4 (1983), 11–18.

specific conflict. In order to use this strategy, the army forfeits internal efficiency by adapting and reorganizing and is generally used when military has limited options.

David Tucker and Christopher Lamb, both with extensive backgrounds studying Special Operations and Special Operations Forces, also divided employment methods into direct and indirect. Their categorization is based largely on Luttwak's ideas of attrition and relational-maneuver. However, the Tucker and Lamb categorizations divide employment strategies by who does the actual work; direct strategies are accomplished by the forces themselves while indirect strategies use "influence on indigenous forces and populations" to do the work.<sup>18</sup>

The English military historian and theorist Sir B. H. Liddell Hart also divided strategies as either direct or indirect. Through a broad study of military history as an editor of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Liddell Hart noticed a recurring trend: "[T]hroughout the ages, effective results in war have rarely been attained unless the approach has had such indirectness as to ensure the opponent's unreadiness to meet it. The indirectness has usually been physical, and always psychological. In strategy, the longest way round is often the shortest way home."<sup>19</sup> From this core observation, Liddell Hart's triage seems to be based upon enemy expectations. Although this distinction may be very salient for theoretical purposes, it is not very useful for practical study: How can enemy expectations be accurately assessed?

Despite the same terms and many conceptual similarities to other strategists' definitions, the Arreguín-Toft typology has a slightly different view and cuts to the most fundamental concept of military strategy. His typology focuses directly on disabling the enemy by one of two distinct ways, whereas the other categorizations approach enemy engagement more circuitously. Arreguín-Toft's framework for determining strategy is the most comprehensive and thereby offers the greatest applicability across time and operating environments.

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<sup>18</sup> David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 153.

<sup>19</sup> B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2d rev ed. (New York: Praeger, 1967), 25.

The choice between strategies is extremely salient—even when opposite strategies are able to achieve the same outcomes. As Colin Gray points out, “different means to identical strategic ends may have distinctive consequences.”<sup>20</sup> Consider a man who requires money to buy a car. One approach would be to go to the bank and obtain a loan. Another approach would be to rob the bank. If successful, both approaches achieve the same end: the man gets the money to buy a car; however, the follow-on situation associated with each approach is drastically different—in both success and failure.

Strategic interaction is the interplay that results from an attacking military choosing either a direct or indirect strategy matched against a defending military that chooses either a direct or indirect strategy. In Arreguín-Toft’s analysis, the cases studied were narrowed to include only strong actors attacking weak actors. He hypothesized and supported the theory that symmetric strategic interactions favor strong actors while asymmetric strategic interactions favor weak actors.<sup>21</sup>

		<b>Weak Actor Strategic Approach</b>	
		<i>Direct</i>	<i>Indirect</i>
<b>Strong Actor Strategic Approach</b>	<i>Direct</i>	Favors Strong Actor	Favors Weak Actor
	<i>Indirect</i>	Favors Weak Actor	Favors Strong Actor

Figure 1. Strategic Interaction Typology, from Arreguín-Toft, 2001, p. 108

<sup>20</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Explorations in Strategy*, Vol. 164 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 150 (accessed 3/18/2009).

<sup>21</sup> Ivan Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001), 93–128.

The largest shortcoming of Arreguín-Toft, as well as the rest of the school of researchers that view strategy as the most important determinant of war outcomes, is their lack of explanatory power in *why* strong actors select employment methods that are not optimal for victory. Patricia Sullivan has a very succinct critique: “Although the weak may not have the war-fighting capacity to choose an optimal strategic response to their adversary’s military strategy, strong states do have that capacity.”<sup>22</sup> Some researchers, such as Sullivan, view this explanatory weakness as a fundamental flaw of employment models because they do not accurately explain behavior; as a result, they begin looking for other explanations. This paper takes a closer look at this phenomenon. Why do strong actors, who are theoretically free to select either strategy, frequently employ a strategy that does not result in the optimal strategic interaction?

This paper enters the fray to build upon the military employment school of thought and answer *why* strong actors employ strategies that are not optimized for victory. Using the Arreguín-Toft framework as a starting point upon which to build, this paper first creates a game theoretic model of strategic interactions to show how a non-optimal strategy can be a rational choice—at least for initial stages of conflict. However, since wars are usually waged over multiple interactions, sub-optimal strategies should not be employed beyond initial interactions. This paper then compiles a group of factors that influence an actor selecting between a direct or indirect military strategy. These factors are then used to explain the implementation of a non-optimal strategy. This paper then applies the derived framework to recent U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan to examine how well it fits recent empirical data. Finally, this thesis draws attention to the laborious and difficult process of adjusting U.S. strategy and the substantial, sometimes irreversible, strategic costs incurred without a deliberate change mechanism to an indirect attack strategy.

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<sup>22</sup> Patricia L. Sullivan, “War Aims and War Outcomes: Why Powerful States Lose Limited Wars,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 3 (2007), 497.

### III. A CLOSER LOOK AT ARREGUÍN-TOFT

*The history of the last ten years has shown what fatal errors result from trying to deal with these problems empirically and by guesswork when faced with enemies fully conversant with the rules of the game. We must now learn to use these rules as they do . . . We must master the art of indirect strategy.*

— *Général d'Armée André Beaufre*

Arreguín-Toft offers a unique approach upon which to build. He proposes the idea of strategic interaction as a superior theory to explaining how weak actors win wars against stronger opponents. In order to expand upon Arreguín-Toft's findings it is useful to first review and refine his definitions. This will help to define the types of conflicts in which findings are applicable as well as categorize strategies.

It should also be noted here that some definitions are by design rather broad since the level of analysis is the strategic level of military involvement. There are many different denotations and connotations of the term "strategy." As used here, the concept of strategy is the *way* that *means* are employed to achieve desired *ends*. The level of strategy discussed here is the national military level, which concerns the approach for using the military to obtain political goals. Strategy is therefore at a lower level than grand strategy, which encompasses all instruments of national power, such as diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments. On the other side, strategy is at a higher level than tactics, which refers to the specific techniques and procedures for employing military units.<sup>23</sup>

It is also beneficial to draw attention to the assumption that there are only two strategy choices at this level of strategy. It is assumed that any option to not participate in conflict would be made at a level above that of the military. Or, poetically summed up in the words of Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Theirs not to make reply/Theirs not to reason

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<sup>23</sup> Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, 99–100.

why/Theirs but to do and die.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, once the nation decides upon armed conflict as the path of choice, the military will try to select the best path to victory.

In addition to the assumption that the military will be expected to seek victory whenever it is ordered into conflict is the assumption that the military will be expected to be able to win across the entire spectrum of warfare. Militaries can be used to provide humanitarian assistance on one end of the spectrum all the way up to total war with nuclear weapons on the other end. Regardless of where along the spectrum the particular conflict lies, national leadership expects the military to be victorious.

Another worthwhile point is that it is usually impossible to completely separate direct and indirect strategies; attacking capacity will degrade will and targeting will usually reduces capacity. With very few exceptions, neither one can be completely separated from the other. Much of the distinction between the two strategy types in this paper therefore rests on intent. An example of this entanglement is provided by Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Arthur Travers Harris—more commonly referred to as “Bomber” Harris. Harris was a staunch proponent of strategic area bombing of Germany. Main targets were those that would affect enemy capacity. However, high altitude bombing was not very precise and the bombs usually missed their targets. Harris did not view those bombs as wasted because even when they missed their intended target they produced a desirable result—erosion of enemy will. Because the lines between direct and indirect strategies are not absolutely distinct, nor are the tactics employed by either strategy mutually exclusive, the preponderance of available information is enough to categorize a strategy. This simplification of viewing the two strategies as completely separate entities is required for theoretical analysis even though it is understood that the two strategies cannot be cleanly separated.

#### **A. STRONG AND WEAK**

There are many different measures for strong and weak. Arreguín-Toft followed a recognized practice of quantifying power using the size of the population and armed

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<sup>24</sup> Alfred Tennyson Lord, “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” In *The Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, Vol. II. Miscellaneous Poems II (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1892), 57.

forces. He defined the strong and weak relationship as follows: “A strong actor is one whose material power exceeds that of its adversary or adversaries by at least ten to one. Material power is the product of a given state’s population and armed forces. ‘Strong’ and ‘weak’ therefore have meaning only in a particular dyadic context.”<sup>25</sup> This paper used the same definition of “strong” and “weak” followed by Arreguín-Toft. In addition, it continued with the construct of the strong actor as the attacker. This assumed adversarial position of the strong as the attacker and the weak as the defender was quite appropriate based on resources available to the “strong” and “weak” by definition. Major General Svechin bolsters this assumption quite nicely.

In general, the pursuit of negative goals, that is, fighting for the complete or partial maintenance of the status quo, requires less expenditure of forces or resources than the pursuit of positive goals, namely fighting for conquest and forward movement. It is easier to keep what you have than get something new. The weaker side will naturally go on the defensive.”<sup>26</sup>

Another point worth clarifying here is the supporting relationship often present in asymmetrical wars. For example, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and quickly toppled the existing Taliban regime. The U.S. was then actively involved with standing up a new regime in Afghanistan that was indigenous. Additionally, the U.S. has kept troops in Afghanistan to suppress anti-government action and to assist the new regime until it is capable of governing without external intervention. Much of the violence today consists of members of the Afghan population attacking the new Afghan government personnel and institutions. However, the U.S. has a strong presence in Afghanistan, is squarely behind the new Afghan regime, and is actively fighting anti-government forces. As such, it is easy to continue to consider the U.S. as the strong attacker and the anti-government forces the weak defender.

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<sup>25</sup> Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, 94.

<sup>26</sup> Aleksandr A. Svechin, *Strategy*, ed. Kent D. Lee, trans. Kent D. Lee (Minneapolis, MN: East View Publications, 1992. Original work published in 1927), 250. The relatively recent 9/11 al Qaeda attacks on the U.S. could be viewed as an anomaly to this relationship. However, it is not likely that al Qaeda anticipated the resulting actions. It is more likely that the attack was designed as a forward defense against the U.S.

The distinction becomes more difficult when an external supporter does not stand up a regime nor commit combat troops. One such instance occurred in the 1980s when the U.S. supported the government of El Salvador against the left wing revolutionary guerrilla forces of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). The U.S. sent in a team of military advisors to prevent the collapse of the government of El Salvador. After the government was stabilized, U.S. advisors assisted the government of El Salvador with military advice on defeating the FMLN as well as political reform to decrease the recruiting base from which the anti-government FMLN could draw. Although the U.S. was not directly involved in fighting and all actions were ultimately at the discretion of the government of El Salvador, this conflict can also be conceptualized with the U.S. as the strong attacker engaging the FMLN as the weak defender; the U.S. used military resources with the purpose of pursuing U.S. interests. The only difference is the people that were involved in actual combat fighting for those interests were not U.S. citizens.

## **B. DIRECT ATTACK**

Direct attack is the use of the military to target the enemy's capacity to wage war. Targets of this strategy include enemy armed forces, production factories, defensive positions, communications, and other infrastructure. This includes strategies of attrition and maneuver. The enemy may still have the will to resist, but following a successful direct attack strategy, will no longer have the capability to resist.

## **C. INDIRECT ATTACK**

Conversely, indirect attack is the targeting of the enemy's will to wage war. Many of the targets of an indirect attack may be the same as those of a direct attack but the difference lies in the means and intentions. An example of an indirect attack is the U.S. firebombing of Japan in 1945. Although many viable military targets were destroyed and the Japanese capacity to wage war was decreased by the death of 900,000

Japanese civilians using this tactic, the main target of the widespread destruction was the will of the Japanese people to continue the war.<sup>27</sup>

Arreguín-Toft strays from an absolute distinction in his definition of indirect attack. He labels indirect attack “barbarism” and says it is the “systematic violation of the laws of war in pursuit of a military or political objective.”<sup>28</sup> His definition can be improved upon in two ways. First, the “barbarism” definition allows for an attack on both will and capacity. However, using the indirect strategy, enemy will is the primary target and any degradation of capacity is secondary. In application, this difference in definition has very little effect other than making it more parsimonious and keeping the distinction between the two strategies as clear as possible based upon primary objective. It may, however, change the placement category of concentration camp usage, which Arreguín-Toft includes in “barbarism” because they are a violation of laws that reduces enemy capacity to resist. Under the starker definition of this paper, concentration camps would most likely be labeled as a form of direct attack since they reduce the capacity of the enemy to wage war by placing personnel in the camps; but if their use was to erode the will of the enemy they would be a form of indirect attack.

Second, it should be pointed out that the will of the enemy can be attacked using means other than coercion. Cooption is a viable way to destroy enemy will to resist. Abraham Lincoln clearly understood this with his quote, “I destroy my enemies when I make them my friends.” The British also demonstrated this understanding with their handling of the Malaya emergency; one of the main factors inspiring the population to join the insurgency was the desire for independence from British rule. When the British announced that Malaya would receive national independence once the insurgency was quelled, the desire for much of the population to revolt against the British fizzled.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*, 129.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>29</sup> Komer, Robert W. with United States Advanced Research Projects Agency, *The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of a Successful Counterinsurgency Effort* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1972).

#### **D. DIRECT DEFENSE**

Direct defense refers to the use of military forces to destroy the attacker's capacity to attack. The ultimate goal of this strategy is to destroy the attacking force so it is physically unable to continue the assault. This can be accomplished by defending strategic positions. Almost counter intuitively, direct defense can also be accomplished using preemptive, or even preventive, attacks on enemy forces if the goal is defensive. This corollary is captured by the saying that "the best defense is a good offense." The Israeli attacks during the 1967 Six Day War are a prime example of this defensive strategy. Facing mounting Arab forces on three fronts, the Israelis surprised the gathering forces and attacked preemptively. Although the action was an attack, the purpose was defensive in nature, depriving the Arabs of the initiative.

#### **E. INDIRECT DEFENSE**

Indirect defense is the targeting of the enemy's will to continue the attack. Again, although many of the targets will be the same as in direct defense, the strategic purpose is different. The goal of an indirect defense is to convince the attacker to stop attacking even though he still has the capacity to attack. The classic indirect defense is a guerrilla warfare strategy. Guerrilla warfare inflicts damage upon the attacker whenever able to safely do so and then retreat to sanctuary. Even though guerrilla warfare decreases the capacity of the attacker, this effect is secondary to the impact on enemy will. Guerrillas try to draw the conflict out for as long as possible with the intent of depleting the enemy's will to continue the fight. Beaufre describes guerrilla warfare, "as old as the hills but which each generation has nevertheless forgotten and had to learn afresh."<sup>30</sup> In addition to guerrilla warfare, psychological operations fit very well in this category.

#### **F. SHORTCOMINGS**

A potential problem of the Arreguín-Toft piece is that his quantitative data is based on strategic interactions that are viewed independently from previous interactions.

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<sup>30</sup> Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy, with Particular Reference to Problems of Defense, Politics, Economics, and Diplomacy in the Nuclear Age*.

He analyzed conflicts by reducing them down to a single, characteristic strategic interaction and also by looking at progressive strategic interactions that occurred throughout the conflict; both approaches supported his hypothesis. He did not analyze the effect that previous strategic interactions had on subsequent ones. Initial strategic interactions could place an actor in an unrecoverable position, making subsequent interactions irrelevant. Clausewitz and others would probably support the notion that victories in war are built upon accumulated victories in strategic interactions but this is not always the case. One illustrative example where this was not the case was encapsulated in conversation between U.S. Colonel Harry Summers and one of his North Vietnamese counterparts, Colonel Tu, after the Vietnam war. Col Summers boasted, “You know, you never defeated us on the battlefield.” The North Vietnamese officer considered this comment and replied, “That may be so. But it is also irrelevant.”<sup>31</sup> Obviously, Col Tu’s point was that North Vietnamese victory was not built on accumulated battlefield victories.

Another shortcoming may be the fact that the definition of “victory” is not a clearly defined, nor mutually agreed upon concept, until the actual termination of war. Simply stated, war is an ill-defined problem that cannot be precisely analyzed or solved using quantitative analyses.

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<sup>31</sup> Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), 1.

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## IV. GAME THEORETIC MODEL

*War! that mad game the world so loves to play.*  
— Jonathan Swift

The Arreguín-Toft typology is a great beginning for a game theoretic model to discover insights into strategy selection for both actors.<sup>32</sup> The game theoretic model is in no way intended to encompass all of the complexities and nuances that are part of a conflict; it is intended to create a heuristic device to capture the predominant strategies of each. The game theoretic model introduced here is useful to analyze strategy choices available to both sides and implications that each strategy choice incurs. Additionally, the game-theoretic model does a particularly good job of illustrating a reason why sub-optimal strategies may be selected. It also shows the necessity of both strategies to be equally viable options and points out keenly the gains that can be made from changing strategies.

In order to build the game theoretic model, it is first necessary to rank order the possible outcomes by order of preference to each of the actors. These preferences are based upon two overarching concepts; first is the Arreguín-Toft hypothesis that symmetric interactions favor the strong actor while asymmetric interactions favor the weak actor. Second is the realization that the forces and equipment to implement a direct strategy are expensive. Intuitively, it would seem that the order of preferences for the weak actor would be the exact opposite of the strong actor's. However, this is not the case. Strong actors, with more resources available to devote to a conflict, favor

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<sup>32</sup> Game theory was originally introduced by John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern in 1944 as a way of using mathematics to capture strategic behavior. It now is considered an entire branch of applied mathematics and has been used extensively in political and social sciences. For their original work, see *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944).

probability of victory over economy. Conversely, resource-constrained weak actors are more likely to employ a strategy due to economic reasons as the primary driver and probability of victory second.<sup>33</sup>

#### **A. ORDINAL VALUES FOR STRONG ACTORS**

The optimal quadrant for strong actors is a direct attack against a direct defense. This outcome maximizes the inherent advantages of the strong attacker while minimizing those of the weak defender. Most strong militaries are organized to effectively counter other strong militaries that are built along similar lines for similar purposes using similar philosophies. This is what van Creveld calls “mirror-imaging” and is a very common phenomenon amongst opponent dyads.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, when a weak actor tries to defend against a strong actor using the same strategy, the results should favor the strong actor as a result of the military strength the attacker can bring to bear. There are many conflicts that fit this interaction; a prime example is the U.S. actions in Kuwait and Iraq during the first Gulf War. The Iraqi forces defended with a direct strategy while the U.S. used a direct attack. The result favored the U.S. to a degree that astonished the world and even the U.S. military: U.S. casualties were unprecedentedly low.<sup>35</sup>

The next best outcome for strong actors is indirect attack against indirect defense. This is because of the relatively low costs required to carry out this type of strategy while still maintaining a favorable probability of victory. Some examples of this interaction include the successful British suppression of the Malaya emergency and U.S. assistance to the El Salvador government during the El Salvador Civil War from 1980–1992.

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<sup>33</sup> The game theory model introduced in this paper does not go beyond ordinal values—that is rank ordering of strategic interactions. In game theory, it is common to apply cardinal values to outcomes as well. Cardinal values represent utility values and allow for optimal combinations of possible strategies to achieve a maximized outcome. However, it would be extremely difficult to assign meaningful utility values to any strategic interaction outcome. Additionally, since both direct and indirect strategies available to each actor already contain inseparable combinations of targeting enemy capacity and will, any computations derived from cardinal values would be essentially meaningless.

<sup>34</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*.

<sup>35</sup> Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*, 133.

The second worst outcome results from a direct attack against an indirect defense. Arreguín-Toft showed that this interaction favored the weak actor but it is still possible for the strong actor to emerge victorious. Classic examples of this strategic interaction are the USSR in Afghanistan and the U.S. in Vietnam.

The absolute worst strategic interaction for strong attackers is indirect attack against direct defense. This interaction sidelines the strength advantage of the strong attacker and does little, if anything, to reduce the advantages of the defender. It is like bringing a knife to a gunfight. Defeat in these situations can be disastrous and embarrassing. A representative example is the U.S. plan to infiltrate Cuba that resulted in the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

<b>Strategic Interaction</b>	<b>Direct Attack vs. Direct Defense</b>	<b>Indirect Attack vs. Indirect Defense</b>	<b>Direct Attack vs. Indirect Defense</b>	<b>Indirect Attack vs. Direct Defense</b>
<b>Rank</b>	Best	Next Best	Next Worst	Worst
<b>Ordinal Value</b>	4	3	2	1

Table 1. Summary of Ordinal Values for Strong Actors.

## **B. ORDINAL VALUES FOR WEAK ACTORS**

The best outcome weak actors could achieve would result from a direct attack against an indirect defense because this is an inexpensive strategy that gives the defender the higher probability of victory. This interaction maximizes the advantages of the defender and exploits the weaknesses of the attacker. With resource requirements kept low, the defender is able to prolong the engagement with the goal of drawing out the conflict for a length of time that is unacceptable to the attacker. This strategic interaction pairing proved effective for the mujahedeen against the Soviets in Afghanistan and the Vietcong guerrillas against the U.S. in Vietnam.

The second most desirable interaction for the weak actor is an indirect attack against an indirect defense. Although the weak actor still has the lower win percentage, this interaction still keeps resource requirements low and has a possibility of victory. Since it seems most strong attackers are more prone to favor a direct attack than indirect attack, the defender may be able to capitalize on errors made by an attacker not completely adept in this strategy.

The second worst strategic interaction for the defender is the indirect attack against direct defense. To begin with, the defender will spend a lot of resources for a force capable of direct attack. The quantity and quality of direct action forces are not likely to be up to the same level as those of the strong attacker. Therefore, a victory for the defender in this strategic interaction is likely to be fleeting. The strong actor will likely attack again with a larger force using a direct attack, which will have a marked advantage over the weak actor direct defense forces.

The last interaction, direct attack against direct defense, is the least desirable for the weak actor. This interaction does not capitalize on any of the advantages the weak enjoy and allows the strong to leverage their advantages. It is expensive for the weak actor to resort to a direct defense, which will then compete in a strategic interaction pairing as the underdog. The weak actor competes head-on with a larger, more advanced, and better-trained force. This interaction provides the worst possible outcome for the weak actors. As pointed out earlier from the perspective of the strong actor, the first Gulf War was a recent example of this pairing. Saddam attempted to confront the U.S. attackers by playing the same type of game as the U.S. The Iraqi conventional troops and tanks proved to be no match for the U.S. forces. A less obvious example is Che Guevara in Bolivia.

<b>Strategic Interaction</b>	<b>Direct Attack</b> vs. <b>Indirect Defense</b>	<b>Indirect Attack</b> vs. <b>Indirect Defense</b>	<b>Indirect Attack</b> vs. <b>Direct Defense</b>	<b>Direct Attack</b> vs. <b>Direct Defense</b>
<b>Rank</b>	Best	Next Best	Next Worst	Worst
<b>Ordinal Value</b>	4	3	2	1

Table 2. Summary of Ordinal Values for Weak Actors.

### C. THE RESULTING GAME

Combining the ordinal value preferences of both actors together in a two-by-two matrix yields a simple game theoretic model that can be used for insight into strategy options. In this model, each actor tries to maximize their value of strategic interaction outcomes. The goal of this model is to determine optimal strategies for both the strong and weak actors. The game theoretic model retains the basic character of the original Arreguín-Toft typology: symmetric interactions tend to favor the strong actors while asymmetric interactions favor the weak.<sup>36</sup>

		<b>Weak Actor</b>	
		<i>Direct Defense</i>	<i>Indirect Defense</i>
<b>Strong Actor</b>	<i>Direct Attack</i>	<b>(4, 1)</b>	<b>(2, 4)</b>
	<i>Indirect Attack</i>	<b>(1, 2)</b>	<b>(3, 3)</b>

Figure 2. Game Theoretic Model of Strategic Interaction.

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<sup>36</sup> This game is analyzed as a static game in which both actors simultaneously select their strategy without any communication with the other actor. Future research using more advanced formal models of game theory may provide additional insight; however, the static game theory model provided here achieves the purpose of providing an adequate heuristic for available strategy choices and provides insight into how actors should be expected to behave over time.

Using this model, the first question is: What is the optimal strategy for the weak actor? The result shows a weak actor has a strictly dominant strategy of indirect defense. This means that no matter which strategy the strong actor attacks with, the defender achieves a more desirable strategic interaction by employing an indirect defense. There is never a situation where the weak actor could achieve a more desirable strategic interaction by using a direct defense.

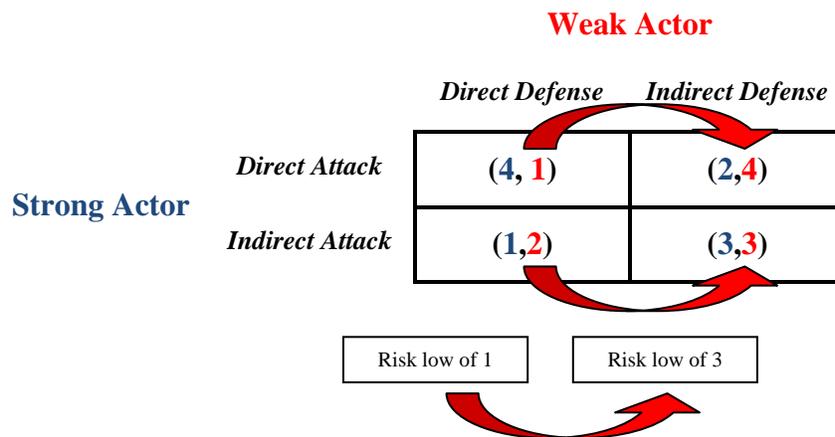


Figure 3. Optimal Strategy for Weak Actor.

The next question is: What is the optimal strategy for the strong actor? This question is a little more complicated than it was for the weak actor because there is not a dominant strategy. Two possible solutions are found using the “maximin” approach and the Nash Equilibrium.

The first possible solution for an optimal strong actor strategy can be found by conceptualizing a conflict as a single iteration match between attacker and defender. When viewed in this manner, a strong actor may decide to employ a conservative strategy—meaning more concerned with minimizing “worst case” possibilities than maximizing best or most likely case scenarios. This is called the “maximin” strategy. With this approach, a strong actor may opt for a direct attack strategy because the lowest possible result is more preferable than that of an indirect attack strategy. This is an

extremely conservative approach for the strong actor since the weak actor has a dominant strategy of indirect defense; however, it does preclude the strong actor from ending up with his worst possible outcome.

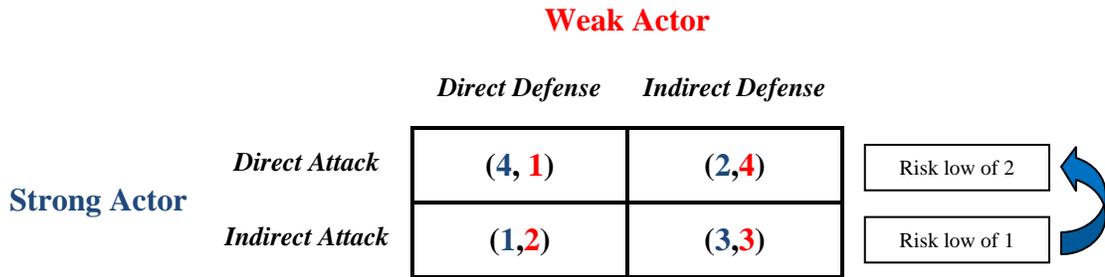


Figure 4. Conservative Strategy for Strong Actor.

When the strong actor conservative strategy of direct attack is combined with the weak actor dominant strategy of indirect defense, the result is an asymmetric strategic interaction that therefore favors the weak actor.

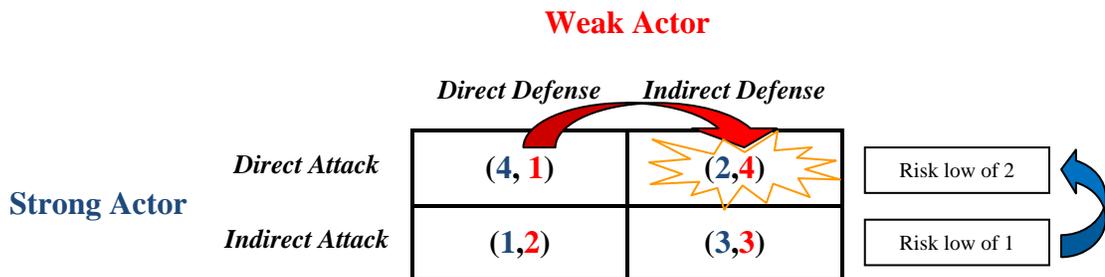


Figure 5. Resulting Game with Conservative Strategy.

The strategic interaction that results from a direct attack is not *optimal* for the strong actor; however, it is still a completely rational and justifiable strategy choice if the strong actor approaches the conflict conservatively and views the interaction as a single iteration. This outcome is only likely if viewing war as a single iteration of the game since the strong actor can unilaterally achieve a more desirable outcome by switching to an indirect attack strategy.

The Nash Equilibrium is another solution concept that can be applied as a probable outcome of this game. A Nash Equilibrium is an outcome that is considered

stable because no player can improve his or her outcome by a unilateral change of strategy.<sup>37</sup> This game has one pure strategy Nash Equilibrium located at {indirect attack, indirect defense}. It is easy to justify the Nash Equilibrium as a likely outcome to this game due to the strictly dominant strategy of the weak actor, which is indirect defense. Since the strong actor knows that a rational weak actor should never select a direct defense strategy, the strong actor should simply select his most preferable outcome against the weak actor indirect defense—which is indirect attack.

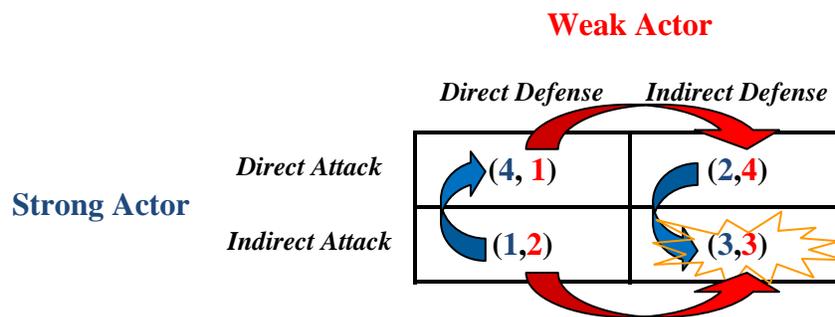


Figure 6. Resulting Game with Nash Equilibrium.

#### D. PREDICTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS FROM THE GAME

From the game, it can be expected that weak actors would prefer indirect defense over direct defense. More interestingly, strong actors can justify either a direct or indirect attack strategy for early strategic interactions depending upon whether they prefer to minimize risk or maximize gain. Regardless of initial strategies, though, in prolonged conflicts it would be expected that strong actors would adjust strategy to maximize probability of victory. The failure of strong actors to select “optimal” strategies is the reason many dismiss the employment school of thought for predicting war outcomes. However, this dismissal overlooks the possibility that strategy selection may be driven by more than just probability of victory.

<sup>37</sup> John Nash, “Equilibrium Points in n-Person Games,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 36, no. 2 (1950), 48–49.

## V. STRATEGY DRIVERS

*I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me.*

— Abraham Lincoln

There is a very interesting phenomenon associated with strategy selection. Although it should theoretically be the probability of victory that most influences strong actors to adopt a strategy, this does not usually appear to be the case. Hy Rothstein's *Less is More* article draws attention to instances in which the U.S. was successful only *because* limits were placed on the U.S. as a strong attacker that necessitated an indirect approach.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, British actions in the Malaya Emergency highlight this phenomenon very well. The British were having a terrible time attempting to put down the predominantly Chinese insurgency using a conventional, direct approach. Because of financial straits back in England, the British did not have the option to increase troop strengths to counteract the insurgency. As a result, they switched to an indirect attack strategy. Through active efforts combined with a small troop presence, the British were able to wage a successful counterinsurgency campaign.<sup>39</sup> These examples point out that some strong militaries may have a propensity for direct attack that can only be overcome when other factors prevent a direct strategy. As a result, the indirect strategy is selected by necessity instead of for its utility. Therefore, strategy selection is likely based on more than just probability of victory. This section constructs a theory of factors that go into a military's pursuit of an either direct or indirect strategy. These factors can be conceptualized almost as constraints that influence strategy selection.

The game theoretic model showed that strategy selection should be influenced by the probability of victory. In addition to this factor, Beaufre argued that the choice

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<sup>38</sup> Hy S. Rothstein, "Less is More: The Problematic Future of Irregular Warfare in an Era of Collapsing States," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2007), 275–294.

<sup>39</sup> Komer, Robert W. with United States Advanced Research Projects Agency, *The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of a Successful Counterinsurgency Effort* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1972).

between direct and indirect strategy is a function of a case-specific factor, force size, psychological effect, and time.<sup>40</sup> Hy Rothstein distilled Beaufre's concepts into 1) Freedom of action, 2) Resources available to the military, and 3) Importance of what is at stake.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, any strategic decision will likely be influenced by time available and an expectation of victory. Therefore, this study finds the following factors as driving forces in strategy employment:

$$S = f(p * k * F * T * I * R * E)^{42}$$

where:

S = strategy choice of either direct or indirect  
 p = probability of victory  
 k = institutional predisposition  
 F = freedom of action  
 T = time  
 I = importance of stake  
 R = resources available to military  
 E = expectation of victory

The manner in which all of these factors are combined and weighted is unique to each military. Many authors have looked at the different characteristics of war that have emerged from the manner in which the U.S. has combined these various elements. Thus, the American way of war has a particular character. Russell Weigley's book, *The American Way of War*, basically described the evolving changes in American military strategy since the formation of the country. Although he touched on many different factors that led to strategy implementation, his belief seemed to be that the American way of war is based predominantly on plentiful resources.<sup>43</sup> Other authors, reaching all the

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<sup>40</sup> Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy, with Particular Reference to Problems of Defense, Politics, Economics, and Diplomacy in the Nuclear Age*, 129.

<sup>41</sup> History of Special Operations lecture, January 27th, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> This equation is for heuristic purposes only; it is not intended to mathematically explore the potential interactions between all of the factors that drive strategy. Rather, the equation is intended to provide a condensed list of factors that this paper views as drivers that affect strategy in warfare.

<sup>43</sup> Russell Frank Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*, Indiana University Press paperback ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

way back to Thucydides, have examined how other countries have unique styles that result from their combinations of these variables as well.

## **A. DESCRIPTION OF FACTORS THAT DRIVE STRATEGY**

The indirect and direct approaches to strategy have already been discussed. Now we will turn to the factors that influence strategy. It should be noted that none of the factors are completely independent; changing one will undoubtedly influence variation in at least one of the others. In the paragraphs that follow, this paper attempted to examine the effects of holding all other factors constant while changing only one term at a time in order to examine the influence on strategy choice.

The first factor to discuss is the probability of victory from the Arreguín-Toft research. Ideally, this factor should be the principle focus—at least for strong actors since they should theoretically have more latitude in strategy implementation. The probability of victory does not appear to favor either a direct or indirect strategy since it is an interactive element that depends on the strategy selected by the opponent.

The “k” factor, which is here labeled as institutional predisposition, was a very astute observation of Beaufre.<sup>44</sup> It is treated almost as a “parameter”; it can change, but at any given time it has a fixed value. Although the definition presented here is slightly different from the one Beaufre had in mind, the concept comes from his writings. All things being equal, every organization has a tendency to select one type of strategy over the other. Arreguín-Toft also recognized this predisposition when he observed that strong actors are not completely free to select any strategy for a given conflict. This inflexibility is based on certain characteristics of the military, which are determined by the culture and history of the society as well as the traditions, training, organization, and equipment of the military designed to meet a prioritized threat.<sup>45</sup> All of these factors will feed into an institutional predisposition.

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<sup>44</sup> Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy, with Particular Reference to Problems of Defense, Politics, Economics, and Diplomacy in the Nuclear Age*.

<sup>45</sup> Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, 106–107.

Which direction the institutional predisposition favors will largely be influenced by threat analyses. Military organizations are based largely on the goal of countering perceived threats—both actual current threats as well as predicted future threats. Compounding the difficulty of these analyses is the fact that worst-case and most-likely threats may have completely different natures—such as nuclear war and guerrilla warfare. From these threat analyses and a logical methodology, a military is organized and equipped to effectively counter a certain threat. However, a military organized to be the perfect counter to one threat will not be ideally suited to another type of threat. In fact, in preparing for one type of threat, a military may be *least* prepared for another type. As a result, there may be some sections of the military that will be more suited to counteract the threats that the bulk of the force is unprepared for, but these are hedge bets and still largely subordinate to the main force; the bulk of the military is organized for one particular threat type. This organizational factor alone may lead a military to fight wars in a manner for which they are more prepared—regardless of the actual threat.

The U.S. military gives a great illustration of this organizational phenomenon. As the global hegemon with interests in every corner of the world, the U.S. military prepares for responses ranging on the peaceful end from humanitarian assistance all the way on the destructive end to nuclear annihilation without omitting anything in between. Whenever feasible, the military tries to apply a single weapon system to counter as many threats as possible. Immediately following WWII, the U.S. thought a robust nuclear arsenal would be able to respond to any threat along the continuum, a doctrine labeled Massive Retaliation. As the flaws of that assumption became more visible and the credibility of using nuclear weapons for conflicts along the entire spectrum of conflict diminished, President Kennedy ushered in the era of Flexible Response. The logic behind this doctrine was that the U.S. needed to be more adept at war short of nuclear war—especially guerrilla warfare. However, it was still believed, in the words of Army Chief of Staff General George Decker, that “Any good soldier can handle guerrillas.”<sup>46</sup> As a result, the bulk of the military was organized to effectively combat the nuclear and

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<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 37.

conventional communist threats with the belief that this would also be effective against a guerrilla-based insurgency. Only small pockets of the military, such as Special Forces, were on hand specifically for guerrilla-type enemies but they were the exception and not the rule. When the U.S. increased involvement in Vietnam, it was not well prepared to counter the guerrilla-styled Vietcong in southern Vietnam. Luttwak sharply scolded the U.S. Army for having an institutional predisposition clearly favoring a direct strategy by saying the Army “subordinates the sharp choices which strategy unfailingly requires to the convenience of bureaucratic harmony.”<sup>47</sup> The resulting strategy in Vietnam was then more “suited for a landing and front-opening campaign on the scale of Normandy in June 1944” than for what was required in Vietnam and thus “dysfunctional.”<sup>48</sup>

Another interesting organizational aspect of the institutional predisposition is the mirror-imaging effect, or “exogenous change” as Luttwak referred to it.<sup>49</sup> Martin van Creveld attributed this phenomenon to the “the paradoxical logic of strategy.”<sup>50</sup> He set up the concept well:

In ordinary life, an action that has succeeded once can be expected to succeed twice—provided circumstances remain the same. If I drop an object once and find that it hits the ground after such and such a time, I can reasonably expect the same thing to happen again, however often the action is repeated. But this elementary fact—on which are based the whole of science and technology—does not apply to war, football, chess, or any other activity that is governed by strategy. Here, an action that has succeeded once will likely fail when it is tried for the second time. It will fail, not *in spite* of having succeeded once but *because* its very success will probably put an intelligent opponent on his guard. The same reasoning also works in reverse. An operation having failed once, the opponent may conclude that it will not be repeated. Once he believes it

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<sup>47</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, “Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare,” *Parameters* 13, no. 4 (1983), 12.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987).

<sup>50</sup> Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 116–123.

will not be repeated, the best way to ensure success is precisely to repeat it. A continuous dynamic interaction ensues, capable of turning victory into disaster and disaster into victory.<sup>51</sup>

Van Creveld used this backdrop to argue that the very act of deducing the opponent's strategy while concealing your own in order to employ the most effective counterstrategy inevitably leads to adapting reciprocally to a form that more closely resembles the enemy. Given enough iterations, both opponents will end up at the same solution as the best combination to defeat one another.<sup>52</sup> This mirror imaging negates the advantage one side may exploit by using a different strategy, tactic, or organizational method.

In addition to organization, cultural factors may preclude the use of one type of strategy. General Robert E. Lee provided a very clear example of this cultural disdain during the Civil War when he referred to guerrilla warfare as an "unmixed evil" and thus viewed it as an unacceptable way of war.<sup>53</sup> As a result, the overwhelming majority of the Confederate Army completely disregarded the potential benefits of an indirect strategy. The result was a direct strategy that failed to capitalize on many advantages of the Confederacy that could have been leveraged with an indirect strategy. Unfortunately, it is not usually so easy to identify cultural aversions to a particular strategy. It is possible, however, that it may be gauged by doctrine, practiced tactics, and training.

Although the institutional predisposition can theoretically favor either direct or indirect strategies, it appears that most national militaries are presently organized to engage in warfare using direct strategies against other national militaries.

Freedom of action was one of the principles of war analyzed by Foch and became a cornerstone concept of Beaufre's thoughts on strategy. Although Beaufre usually discussed freedom of action in terms of room left for military action without fear of nuclear annihilation, the concept can be applied to other delimiters as well. One is to

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<sup>51</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 120.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> John Arquilla, "The Confederacy could have Won—Unconventionally: A Thought Experiment for Special Warriors," *Special Warfare* 14, no. 1 (2001), 11.

conduct war in a manner that precludes unwanted escalation or the involvement of additional parties. Additionally, while Beaufre looked exclusively at external limits on freedom of action, this study incorporates internal limits as well. Russian strategist General Aleksandr Svechin expressed his agreement with the importance of these internal, domestic factors in waging war when he described war as “a very serious test of the health of domestic politics.”<sup>54</sup>

One very important internal dimension of freedom of action is domestic tolerance. For example, the crux of Gil Merom’s argument in *How Democracies Lose Small Wars* is that they “find it extremely difficult to escalate the level of violence and brutality to that which can secure victory” because they are *restricted* by their “domestic structure” and “institutional makeup.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, it is the restricted freedom of action, in Merom’s mind, which is the “unambiguous” reason democracies lose small wars.<sup>56</sup> By this logic, democracies may be able to support a direct strategy with a high degree of freedom of action through widespread public support by minimizing the time of the conflict, demonstrating a vital interest, or by keeping real and perceived costs low. If these options to increase the freedom of action are not available, an indirect strategy that minimizes exposure of efforts is much more likely to be effective.

Freedom of action does not seem to consistently favor either type of strategy. It could be argued that a wide-open freedom of action allows for the application of more troops and thus a more direct strategy. On the other side of the coin, though, it appears the international opinion against the Axis powers in WWII allowed the U.S. to break the will of the Japanese using an indirect strategy with the atom bomb.

The factor of time is quite important in the strategy algorithm. Shorter conflict durations are more often associated with a direct strategy while indirect strategies are more often with prolonged conflicts. The importance of time can be critical when

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<sup>54</sup> Svechin, *Strategy*, 92.

<sup>55</sup> Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

coupled with shortcomings in other variables or merely a nicety if other variables are strong. However, because of the interaction with all of the other variables, normal relationships and shortcomings can be overcome. For example, the importance of freedom of action and relative stake may be marginalized if the time an operation requires is very short. These adjustments will require more resources in order to overcome time limits, though. On the other hand, if there are no time pressures then resources can be kept low with freedom of action, vital interests, or high expectations of victory.

Importance of stake captures many of the non-material factors that are carried into battle. These aspects are what the relative interest school views as determining factors in predicting war outcomes. Interest, resolve, and moral legitimacy should all be considered aspects of the stake variable. These factors have long been considered essential to the art of war. Napoleon gave them a three to one advantage over physical power.<sup>57</sup> His opinion was bolstered by another French general, General Foch, who noted in WWI, “The present-day army is therefore bigger and better trained, but it is also more nervous and more easily affected. The human side of the problem which already had a greater importance than the material factor at the beginning of the 19th century must now be more important still.”<sup>58</sup> General Foch’s observation is no less pertinent today than it was when he wrote it. The importance of stake is intended to incorporate all of the psychological factors to which General Foch refers.

As a rule, larger stakes do not appear to be associated with either strategy. Although, for strong actors, there does appear to be a correlation between larger stakes, or what the Weinberger doctrine terms “vital interests,” and a direct strategy. More peripheral interests are usually associated with the indirect strategy. This relationship does not hold true for weak actors, though, who are associated with having more at stake

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<sup>57</sup> Following Napoleon’s dictum that in war “the moral is to the physical as three to one,” quoted in Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 24.

<sup>58</sup> Foch, *The Principles of War*, 39.

yet often employ an indirect strategy. For example, the mujahedeen in Afghanistan, fighting for at least independence from the Soviets if not for survival, resorted to an indirect strategy.

Resources available to the military is the factor that the “preponderance of force” school of thought views as the best predictor of victory. Military resources are factors that directly allow the application of power. This variable includes people, with their associated skills and training, as well as equipment and financing. In order to account for Joseph Stalin’s maxim, “Quantity has a quality all its own,” this definition is basically quantity corrected for quality. This view of resources subsumes the standard “preponderance of force” school of thought as well as the technological and training arguments advocated by authors such as Stephen Biddle. Economic health of a nation will greatly affect the quantity and quality of military resources that can be provided for a fight—so there will be a correlation of economic health to military resources, but the operative factor in contributing to war outcomes directly is military resources. Holding all other factors constant, an abundance of resources appears to be more likely associated with a direct strategy while limited resources will likely be associated with an indirect strategy.

Some authors, such as Jeffrey Record, attribute external assistance as a critical component of successful insurgencies.<sup>59</sup> This paper does not dispute the importance of external assistance; however, that assistance must be employed using either a direct or indirect strategy. Therefore, external assistance is another source of resources available to the military that must be employed in a manner consistent with an overall strategy. From this perspective, external assistance does not constitute an additional strategy driver.

The expectation of victory must also be taken into account for strategy selection. The largest variance in strategy due to expectation of victory stems from what “victory” looks like for each side of the conflict. For the strong actor to achieve true victory, he must thoroughly defeat the weak. For the weak actor to achieve victory, he merely needs

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<sup>59</sup> Record, *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win*, 23–66.

to not lose and hold out until the aggressor is exhausted. From the lopsided definitions of victory stems a tendency for the strong attacker to use a direct attack while the weak defender maintains the survivability of his forces using an indirect defense.

Once any strategy has been implemented, the expectation of victory plays a large role in decisions to continue with the initial strategy or to exchange it for the opposite one. Lower expectations of victory should lead to higher probabilities of strategy change. This phenomenon is addressed in detail throughout Gartner's *Strategic Assessment in War*.<sup>60</sup>

## B. RELATIVE SIGNIFICANCE OF STRATEGY FACTORS

In this study, the two factors viewed as the most important in determining strategy are the probability of victory and the institutional predisposition. The probability of victory is important because it ultimately what each actor attempts to maximize in any given conflict. The institutional predisposition is important for a couple of reasons. The first reason is that it can be directly and deliberately controlled whereas many constraints on F, T, I, R, and E may be out of the hands of the military. As a result, they will probably only be able to be altered at the margin, so should be viewed more as parameters than as variables. Additionally, the institutional predisposition will have a more consistent effect across conflicts than any of the other factors, which will vary in each conflict due to the surrounding issues of each unique conflict.

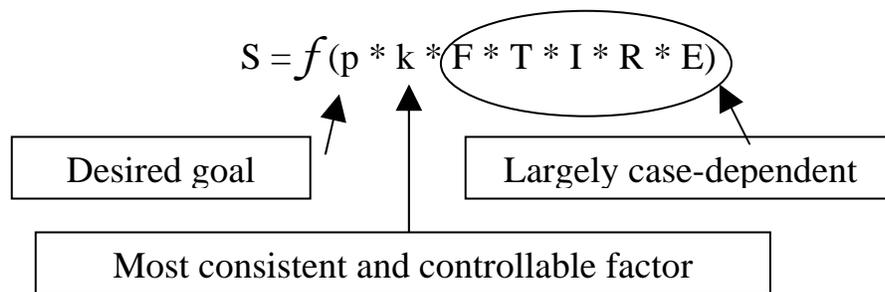


Figure 7. Relative Importance of Strategy Factors.

<sup>60</sup> Gartner, *Strategic Assessment in War*.

As such, a theoretically ideal institutional predisposition should favor neither a direct nor an indirect strategy. However, as previously discussed, by preparing the military to be ideally suited for a particular threat it may be ill suited to meet a different threat. Therefore, an institutional predisposition that favors one type of strategy in order to prepare for “worst case” or “most likely” threat scenarios may be acceptable as long as the favoring is not to the extent that it precludes the opposite strategy when appropriate.

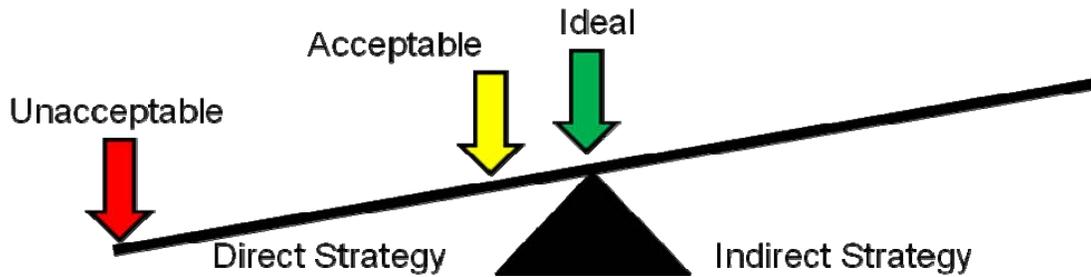


Figure 8. Location of Institutional Predisposition.

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## VI. AFGHANISTAN CASE STUDY

*What's the use of running if you are not on the right road?*  
— German proverb

The U.S. involvement in Afghanistan throughout Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) is an important case to study asymmetric warfare for at least two reasons. First, the case is a classically representative instance of asymmetric warfare. This paper used the same criteria to assess strong and weak actors that Arreguín-Toft used.<sup>61</sup> By this formula, the U.S. dominated Afghanistan by a margin of over 640 to 1—far exceeding the established criteria of 5 to 1.<sup>62</sup> Additionally consistent with the Arreguín-Toft data set, the strong actor was the attacker and the weak actor the defender. The U.S. attacked the Taliban regime and the al Qaeda members they harbored with the goal of establishing a more U.S.-friendly government that would not provide terrorists a sanctuary.

The other reason OEF is such an important case study is because the conflict continues to this day. Not only has the war continued for over seven years, but the U.S. has recently increased commitment to Afghanistan by adding an additional 17,000 troops to the existing 47,000 allied forces already in country.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Arreguín-Toft used a commonly accepted, yet recognized imperfect, estimate of military strength to show asymmetry. A conflict was considered asymmetric if “the halved product of one actor’s armed forces and population exceeded the simple product of its adversary’s armed forces and population by > 5:1.” Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, 110.

<sup>62</sup>This ratio had to be estimated because Afghanistan had no official military in 2001. Since a Taliban force of approximately 50,000 controlled most of the country, that figure was used as the Afghanistan military strength. Although not exact, the differences are disparate enough to negate any errors of estimation. *The Military Balance 2001–2002*, ed. Christopher Langton (London: Oxford University Press for The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2001), 160. In fact, even if using the entire Afghanistan population fit for military service, the U.S. strength still overshadowed Afghanistan by almost 9 to 1. *The World Factbook 2001* (Washington, DC: The Central Intelligence Agency, 2001), 3. As stated previously, measuring power using only sizes of populations and militaries is not a perfect measure of power, however, these figures still reflect the asymmetric amount of force the U.S. was able to bring to bear against the Taliban and al Qaeda, even when the U.S. had relatively few personnel in Afghanistan.

<sup>63</sup> Jack Kelly, “Obama’s Vietnam? Pouring More Troops into Afghanistan Isn’t Going to Help,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, sec. Editorial, H. 3, February 1, 2009.

Overall, the initial strategy of the U.S. was one of direct attack. This worked very well for the U.S. because the Taliban and al Qaeda forces met the attacking forces head on with a direct defense strategy. When the Taliban and al Qaeda forces discovered they were not going to be able to win using this strategy, they headed for the hills of Tora Bora and across the border into Pakistan. From the relative safety of Pakistan, the remnants of the Taliban forces were able to build an insurgency within Afghanistan, a classic indirect defense strategy. The U.S. has continued a predominantly direct attack strategy against the indirect defense. Even when the need for an indirect attack strategy was recognized and attempted, the preponderance of the actions indicate that a direct attack strategy was still employed.

#### **A. STRATEGIC INTERACTION #1**

As soon as the American public learned about the Islamist perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist acts, the majority of the public wanted military action against the Afghan government that harbored them.<sup>64</sup> The perils of fighting a campaign in this area were well known. Many experts advised decision makers to look at the Soviet defeat of the 1980s and the failure of the British to control this region a century earlier to see clearly the complications that could come with a large military response. Afghanistan expert Barnett Rubin wrote in the *New York Times*, “Historically, those who have invaded Afghanistan have met ignominious ends. Mr. bin Laden and his allies may hope that they can draw the United States into the same trap that devoured the Soviet Union. If we lash out militarily without a political plan for Afghanistan, they could achieve this.”<sup>65</sup> Rubin feared a large-scale military response was the goal of the al Qaeda 9/11 attacks in order to draw the U.S. into a war that would economically bleed the U.S. dry.

Taking note of the warnings, the U.S. decided to begin a military campaign to replace the Taliban government. The U.S. did pay at least partial heed to the risks of invading Afghanistan by trimming down the size of the occupational force. One of the

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<sup>64</sup> Amy Pagnozzi, “War Feels Like a Good Idea, But Wait. Please Wait.” *Hartford Courant*, sec. Northeast, September 23, 2001 (accessed May 21, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, “Afghans can be our Allies,” *The New York Times*, September 22, 2001 (accessed May 22, 2009).

“lessons” from the Soviet failure in Afghanistan was that the Afghans would resist a large military force.<sup>66</sup> General Franks, who was the main author of the U.S. operational concept, argued that after major combat operations were complete, “our footprint had to be small, for both military and geopolitical reasons. I envisioned a total of about 10,000 American soldiers, airmen, special operators, and helicopter assault crews, along with robust in-country close air support.”<sup>67</sup> This understanding, coupled with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s recent “Revolution of Military Affairs” (RMA), which decreased troop levels while leveraging advanced technology, led to an incomplete U.S. operational concept for Afghanistan.

Despite conceptual flaws, after the military operational concept was crafted, the next step was implementing the plan. To meet public expectations of timely redress, the armed response was required to begin quickly. However, the problem with initiating war in a very short time period was that the U.S. had virtually zero military presence in Afghanistan. This shortcoming was exacerbated by the geography of Afghanistan as a landlocked country. These conditions required military forces and materiel to be either airlifted into country or transported over long land routes. The solution to opening up Afghanistan for the proposed 10,000 troops given these constraints was quite clever; the U.S. infiltrated Afghanistan covertly to lead indigenous anti-Taliban and al Qaeda groups while leveraging U.S. air power, a solution that was consistent with the RMA conception of war.

The first U.S. ground force to enter Afghanistan was code-named “Jawbreaker.” Jawbreaker was a group of eight covert Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) paramilitary operatives that flew into country aboard a Russian-built Mi-17 helicopter.<sup>68</sup> Their mission was to analyze the situation on the ground in Afghanistan and shore up support for the upcoming military forces by distributing substantial financial support to the anti-

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<sup>66</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, Vol. 4 (Santa Monica: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2008), 89.

<sup>67</sup> Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, 1st ed. (New York: Regan Books, 2004), 324.

<sup>68</sup> Leigh Neville, *Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan*, ed. Martin Windrow (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2008), 6.

Taliban forces.<sup>69</sup> They made contact with leaders of what would come to be known as the Northern Alliance, a “confederation of tribal, religious, and other groups, many of which organized to fight the Soviet invasion in the 1980s.”<sup>70</sup>

Following Jawbreaker, the opening salvos of U.S. Operation ENDURING FREEDOM took place on October 6, 2001, with aircraft from the U.S. and coalition countries neutralizing the Taliban’s anti-aircraft defenses of missiles and fighter aircraft within two weeks.<sup>71</sup>

With the air relatively secure, the ground was next. U.S. Special Forces from 5th Special Forces Group (SFG) were airlifted into Afghanistan on October 19, 2001, from Uzbekistan.<sup>72</sup> Their objective was to capture Kabul by any means available.<sup>73</sup> These individuals were able to join forces with the CIA Jawbreaker teams and leaders of the Northern Alliance. Although the Northern Alliance was not overwhelmingly strong, controlling only 5% of Afghanistan with approximately 10,000 fighters, they were well seasoned; they had plenty of experience from fighting the Soviet invasion as well as an armed resistance to the Taliban.<sup>74</sup> The Special Forces members put their specialized skills in raising, training, and advising indigenous forces to fast use with their Northern Alliance allies and quickly moved to capture the cities of Mazar-e-Sharif, Konduz, and Kabul.

Other than the obviously direct strategy of aerial bombardment, many people perceive these early operations against the Taliban and al Qaeda as a demonstration of an indirect strategy. That categorization of strategy is correct if it is based on a definition of “indirect” similar to that presented by Tucker and Lamb. To recount, Tucker and Lamb argued indirect strategies use “influence on indigenous forces and populations” to do the

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<sup>69</sup> Neville, *Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan*, 6.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, “Beef Up the Taliban’s Enemy,” *Los Angeles Times*, sec. Commentary, September 20, 2001 (accessed May 22, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> Neville, *Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan*, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Linda Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 156.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>74</sup> Byman and Pollack, *Beef Up the Taliban’s Enemy*, B 15.

actual fighting.<sup>75</sup> This is the “by, with, and through” philosophy commonly advocated by Special Forces. With approximately 10,000 Afghans and initially less than 100 American soldiers on the ground engaged in combat, the indigenous population was clearly the bulk of the fighters involved in waging war on al Qaeda and the Taliban.<sup>76</sup> However, regardless of the U.S. leveraging indigenous forces, by the Arreguín-Toft definitions of strategy, the actions taken by those forces were almost exclusively direct attack. That is, the strategy was to destroy the capacity of the Taliban to remain in control of Afghanistan and to either capture or kill the al Qaeda militants.

As long as the Taliban and al Qaeda forces possessed the means to wage a conventional war, this strategy made sense for the U.S. The Taliban reacted with a direct defense strategy and was quickly routed. Stephen Biddle described the outcome of this strategic interaction succinctly; “The result was a slaughter.”<sup>77</sup> One illustrative battle in this strategic interaction phase occurred on the push towards Kabul at Bagram airfield. Bagram is about 35 miles outside of Kabul. It was built as the initial staging area for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and was a key logistical base throughout that conflict. It was here that members of 5th SFG and their Northern Alliance partners confronted an estimated 7,000 Taliban soldiers armed with Soviet-era tanks and artillery. For two days, the Special Forces directed Air Force aircraft and bombs onto the Taliban troops. After that, those that were left alive scattered and the airbase was cleared.<sup>78</sup>

From Bagram, the U.S. and Northern Alliance forces continued their drive to Kabul. By November 13, the Taliban had been forced from the capital. By the end of 2001, other Special Forces teams, coupled with Rangers, Navy SEALs, CIA operatives,

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<sup>75</sup> David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 153.

<sup>76</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, “Think Global, Fight Local,” *Wall Street Journal*, sec. A, 14, December 19, 2003, <http://proquest.umi.com.libproxy.nps.edu/pqdweb?index=9&did=502264761&SrchMode=2&sid=2&Fmt=3&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1243027777&clientId=11969> (accessed May 22, 2009).

<sup>77</sup> Stephen Biddle, “Special Forces and the Future of Warfare; Assessing OEF and OIF Combat Experience,” *Military Technology* 30, no. 3 (2006), 14 (accessed February 9, 2009).

<sup>78</sup> Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces*, 157.

coalition Special Forces, and their indigenous militias, had routed the Taliban from strongholds in the cities of Mazar-e-Sharif, Konduz, and Kandahar.

As the Taliban fled Kabul, they headed towards Pakistan through the Spin Ghar mountain range near Tora Bora.<sup>79</sup> This region was a refuge for the mujahedeen fighters against the Soviets. The many caves, jagged terrain, and harsh climate offered the mujahedeen a safe place to hide and regroup from the Soviets.<sup>80</sup> Although this region was not an impenetrable fortress that the American forces could not enter, it did slow them down considerably and diminished some of the advantages of airpower and reconnaissance. The caves, which offered shelter from the allied bombs, had to be searched one by one. It is commonly believed that this Taliban tactic was successful enough to allow many Taliban fighters, including Osama bin Laden, to escape to Pakistan.<sup>81</sup>

The last confrontation of this strategic interaction pairing occurred in early 2002 with Operation ANACONDA. Operation ANACONDA was an attempt to flush out insurgents that were massing in the mountains around Shah-e-Kot valley, in the Paktia region not far from Tora Bora. The idea behind the operation was a classic hammer and anvil approach, using one force to dislodge the insurgents out of the mountains and drive them directly into the waiting guns of another force.<sup>82</sup> When the U.S. began this operation, they estimated somewhere between 150–00 Taliban and al Qaeda forces hiding in the mountains; by the time the operation was over that number was increased to 750–000.<sup>83</sup> The U.S. suffered eight dead Special Forces soldiers and an estimated 50 wounded from this Operation.<sup>84</sup> The estimated number of enemy combatants killed is somewhere between 50 and 500.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces*, 162.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>81</sup> Peter Finn, "Bin Laden used Ruse to Flee; Moroccans Say Guard Took Phone at Tora Bora," *The Washington Post*, sec. A. 1, January 21, 2003 (accessed May 23, 2009).

<sup>82</sup> Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces*, 177.

<sup>83</sup> Neville, *Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan*, 22.

<sup>84</sup> Richard L. Kugler, Michael Baranick and Hans Binnendijk, *Operation Anaconda: Lessons for Joint Operations* (National Defense University: Center for Technology and National Security Policy, 2009), 7, [http://www.ndu.edu/ctnsp/Def\\_Tech/DTP%2060%20Operation%20Anaconda.pdf](http://www.ndu.edu/ctnsp/Def_Tech/DTP%2060%20Operation%20Anaconda.pdf) (accessed May 23, 2009).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Although this may be considered relatively successful, it was not able to eliminate the Taliban and al Qaeda forces. The surviving members were able to sow the seeds of a long-term insurgency.

## **B. STRATEGIC INTERACTION #2**

By the end of Operation ANACONDA, the conflict changed. After the conventional tanks and artillery of the Taliban were destroyed and the attempt to regroup around Tora Bora was quashed, the scattered remnants of the Taliban and al Qaeda forces ran for cover. Author Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani journalist with decades of experience in Afghanistan, described the Taliban's mass exodus to Pakistan for refuge:

The Taliban did not just slip back across the border in the winter of 2001/2002; they arrived in droves, by bus, taxi, and tractor, on camels and horses, and on foot. . . For many, it was not an escape but a return home—back to the refugee camps in Balochistan where they had been brought up and where their families still lived; back to the madrassas where they had once studied; back to the hospitality of the mosques where they had once prayed.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to finding geographical sanctuary, the Taliban and al Qaeda forces found security in numbers by joining efforts with other groups interested in undermining the new Afghan government, including Hezb-i-Islami, the Haqqani network, disenfranchised local militants, foreign jihadis, and criminal organizations.<sup>87</sup>

With a relatively safe operational base in Pakistan and newfound networking contacts, the Taliban forces began a guerilla-style war. This is a classic indirect defensive strategy—draw out the war and inflict casualties whenever able until the attacker gives up. In *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, Antonio Giustozzi described the “post-2001 Taliban insurgency” as a “typical case of asymmetric conflict, defined as ‘a weaker adversary using unconventional means, stratagems, or niche capabilities to

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<sup>86</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008), 240.

<sup>87</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 1.

overcome a stronger power.”<sup>88</sup> The niche capabilities used by the Taliban were an intimate knowledge of the rugged Afghanistan terrain, an ability to blend in with the local population, and freedom to cross back and forth from Pakistan.

Even though the Taliban and al Qaeda forces switched to an indirect defense strategy, the U.S. continued a direct attack. This is especially puzzling when considering the fact that there were troops in country that could have taken the lead on an indirect strategy. Special Forces units have traditionally been the U.S. military’s experts in indirect attack. Some of the core roles of Special Forces include counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. Additionally, these forces encourage unorthodox approaches and unconventional thinking while paying particular attention to political context and implications. In short, they would have been well suited to lead an indirect attack strategy against the remaining scattered remnants of the Taliban and they were already in theater.

However, by this time, the U.S. was able to increase the conventional troop levels in Afghanistan. Like the Soviets, the U.S. used Bagram as a key staging area. The allied headquarters was moved from Kuwait to Bagram, bringing in a conventional forces three-star general to command all aspects of combat operations in Afghanistan, “from air attacks to Special Forces raids.”<sup>89</sup> With the arrival of the conventional forces, Special Forces were relegated to a support role. With all of the extra troops and amenities, Bagram began to resemble a base in the U.S. more than a forward staging area. One soldier described the transformation of the base by saying, “The grown-ups are taking over.”<sup>90</sup> This transformation of force type and command and control structures had a profound impact on the execution of the conflict. Perhaps most significantly, Special Forces, the group with the training and experience most conducive to lead an indirect strategy, were incorporated into the overall direct attack strategy of the conventional

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<sup>88</sup> Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 97.

<sup>89</sup> Mary Beth Sheridan, “Afghan Base Evolves with “Open-Ended” Commitment by U.S.; Bagram Becomes HQ for Allied Troops,” *The Washington Post*, sec. A. 12, June 1, 2002 (accessed May 22, 2009).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

forces. As such, they engaged in mostly hunter-killer missions of high-value targets while the conventional military took the lead on all other aspects of the war.

Throughout 2002, the Taliban spent much of its effort avoiding direct confrontation with coalition forces while trying to establish bases of control over local populations and areas. According to Giustozzi, they used “small teams of ten to twenty insurgents” to infiltrate the Afghan countryside from Pakistan “with the purpose of identifying villages that could provide hospitality and support.”<sup>91</sup> The Taliban also moved supplies, including weapons, ammunition, and food, from Pakistan into Afghanistan to support the insurgency.<sup>92</sup> These combined efforts laid the foundation upon which to build an insurgency by spreading pro-Taliban propaganda and threatening elements of the population that were hostile to the Taliban. Even as early as April 2002, the insurgents began offensive attacks aimed at overthrowing the Afghan government and coercing U.S. and coalition withdrawal.<sup>93</sup>

By and large, the U.S. and Afghan governments ignored the budding Taliban insurgency. Initially, the U.S. was opposed to expanding operations to include nation building outside of a centralized government in Kabul, which would have been a necessary part of an effective counterinsurgency campaign.<sup>94</sup> Even if the U.S. had not been opposed to nation building, there were not enough U.S. forces to stabilize the country since General Franks’ operational concept for the war was an intentionally small U.S. footprint.<sup>95</sup> There were not enough well-trained Afghans to make up for the shortfall. Additionally, the U.S. had already turned much of its attention towards Iraq and the Afghan government relied on the seemingly overwhelming power of the U.S. to destroy the insurgents, even in the remote areas along the Pakistan border.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, 100.

<sup>92</sup> Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*, 244.

<sup>93</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 30.

<sup>94</sup> Lieutenant Andrew Wegener, *A Complex and Changing Dynamic: Afghan Responses to Foreign Intervention, 1878–2006* (Canberra: Land Warfare Studies Centre, 2007), 43.

<sup>95</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 89–90.

<sup>96</sup> Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, 161.

Despite the overwhelmingly conventional leadership, there were some promising beginnings of an indirect attack counterinsurgency effort at this time—mostly through militias. However, these militias were not incorporated into a theater-wide indirect strategy. Additionally, without an understanding of the critical role the militias could play in stabilizing Afghanistan, little attention was given to ensuring proper oversight and direction, which led to mismanagement and corruption.

The first of the militias was the Afghan Security Forces (ASF). The ASF were various groups of anti-Taliban forces, including members of the Northern Alliance that helped bring down the Taliban. They provided U.S. Special Forces with invaluable insight on local knowledge, cultural understanding, and communication as well as provided security for many fire bases.<sup>97</sup> They were demobilized in 2006 over “concerns held by the Afghan government and coalition command about non-government militias, sovereignty and legitimacy” and questions about their “loyalty, brutality, cost and effectiveness.”<sup>98</sup>

Another promising beginning to a counterinsurgency force was the formation of the Afghan Militia Forces (AMF), which were private militias under the Ministry of Defense (MoD) that provided approximately 75,000 personnel for security in 2002. However, due largely to mismanagement by the MoD, by 2003 their numbers were only 45,000. Continued lack of funding, poor discipline, and an ill-defined chain of command eroded the AMF forces’ effectiveness. The bulk of the AMF units were unable to mount any effective resistance by 2003 and were disbanded by 2005.<sup>99</sup>

Members of disbanded ASF and AMF units were encouraged to join the Afghan National Police (ANP). The ANP was initially created from local militias to maintain order. The ANP was organized under the oversight of the Ministry of the Interior (MoI). However, the MoI was not able to manage the salaries of its forces any better than the

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<sup>97</sup> Campbell, Lieutenant Colonel James D., “*Making Riflemen from Mud*”: *Restoring the Army’s Culture of Irregular Warfare*, Vol. S01-07, 2007), 18–19, [http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usacsl/Publications/S01-07%20-%20Riflemen%20from%20Mud%20\(Campbell\).pdf](http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usacsl/Publications/S01-07%20-%20Riflemen%20from%20Mud%20(Campbell).pdf) (accessed May 24, 2009).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>99</sup> Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, 167–170.

MoD: sometimes payments to the ANP policemen were up to a year late.<sup>100</sup> Perhaps due to these salary problems, the ANP developed a reputation for corruption. Numerous counts of ANP bribes, unlawful taxes, involvement with narcotics trade, smuggling, looting, etc., led to the widespread distrust of the ANP by the local populations.<sup>101</sup> A study by Seth Jones of the RAND Corporation described the ANP as both corrupt and incompetent, “often unable to perform basic patrolling, conduct counterinsurgency operations, protect reconstruction projects, prevent border incursions, or conduct counternarcotics operations.”<sup>102</sup> The ANP was largely ineffective in combating the insurgency and in many cases even aided the insurgency more than countered it.

The last group to address here is the Afghan National Army (ANA), organized under the auspices of the MoD. Ignoring the many problems associated with the ANA, including recruiting, training, equipping, funding, desertion, and accusations of corruption, the strategic employment of the ANA is most important.<sup>103</sup> The ANA was formed in the image of and mentored largely by U.S. conventional forces. Additionally, the ANA was used almost as an auxiliary force to increase the number of soldiers U.S. forces could field and were thus part of the overall strategy of the U.S. and coalition forces. As a result, the under-funded ANA is just as reliant on logistics and air power as its U.S. counterparts and used as part of the overall direct attack strategy.<sup>104</sup>

It seems the longer the asymmetric nature of the Afghanistan conflict continued the deeper the Taliban forces were able to embed themselves in the local population and the stronger they became. This was achieved largely through the support system initially employed by the Taliban vanguard teams throughout 2002. This is the classic “ink spot” insurgency technique; initially establish small areas of control. From these areas, expand control outward, like ink on blotting paper. As the support network developed and matured, it enabled a stronger military resistance to the Afghan and coalition

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<sup>100</sup> Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, 175.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 173–181.

<sup>102</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 69.

<sup>103</sup> Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, 181–189.

<sup>104</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 75.

governments. This, in turn, allowed the Taliban to set up a popularly accepted shadow government of their own in areas that the Afghan government in Kabul could not control.<sup>105</sup> The goal was to create a Taliban stronghold with greater control over the population than was possible from Kabul.

Increasing their own strength was only half of the ink spot technique used by the Taliban. The other half was decreasing the strength of their enemy. As part of their indirect defense campaign, the Taliban embarked on a demoralization campaign. They specifically targeted foreign troops and “collaborationists”—those Afghans who worked as interpreters for the coalition forces or as part of the newly formed Afghan government, including pro-government militia and even the Afghan National Army.<sup>106</sup>

In the absence of an effective theater-wide counterinsurgency force, the Taliban was able to build support and extend its reach into Afghanistan. By the spring of 2003, the Taliban insurgents were able to begin an offensive in earnest with guerrilla attacks on provinces that had little U.S. presence.<sup>107</sup> The Taliban began an assassination campaign aimed at killing those collaborating with U.S. and coalition forces. Governors, police chiefs, clerics, non-governmental organization workers, and even village informers were killed during this stage. At about the same time, the Taliban began targeting schools, as perhaps the only state-provided service that reached all the way down to the village level. Teachers, parents, and students—especially schoolgirls—were threatened.<sup>108</sup>

Even by 2003, the sustained asymmetric strategic interaction frustrated many who could see the big picture. Robert Kaplan is a reporter who spent time covering the Afghan conflict embedded with Special Forces. He also had previous experience in Afghanistan covering the mujahedeen’s battle against the Soviets in the 1980s. Kaplan hinted at his dismay in 2003, two years into U.S. involvement, when he wrote, “Of the roughly 10,000 American troops in Afghanistan, only a fraction of them are doing

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<sup>105</sup> Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, 110–113.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 107–110.

<sup>107</sup> Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*, 245.

<sup>108</sup> Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, 104.

anything directly pivotal to the stabilization of the country. The rest are either part of a long support tail or part of newly-created layers of command at Bagram Air Base . . . which micro-manage and complicate the work of a relatively small number of Army SF (Green Berets) located at various ‘fire bases.’”<sup>109</sup> Kaplan’s displeasure became even more apparent when he continued by saying, “Instead of powering-down to a flattened hierarchy of small, autonomous units dispersed over a wide area—what the 1940 Marine ‘Small Wars Manual’ recommends for fighting a guerrilla insurgency—we have barricaded ourselves into a mammoth, Cold War-style base at Bagram that drains resources from the fire bases.”<sup>110</sup>

Much to the consternation of people such as Kaplan, the asymmetric strategic interaction continued and the imbalance began to pay dividends for the Taliban, who attempted to control the country. The targeting of teachers and schools caused the closure of many schools. The Taliban then offered to replace the state-sponsored schools and support ones that would teach the “Islamic” curriculum, open to both boys and veiled girls.<sup>111</sup> They also targeted non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as “vehicles of moral corruption.”<sup>112</sup> That tactic was quite effective, causing a drastic reduction in the number and reach of NGOs operating in Afghanistan. Some of those that did continue providing services were forced to bribe the Taliban in order to be allowed to operate.<sup>113</sup>

Reporter Tim McGirk described the Taliban in 2005 as a movement in its final throes and as “a busted flush.”<sup>114</sup> He cited the failure of the Taliban to mount a coordinated offensive as a signal of the weakness of the Taliban. He further offered empirical evidence of the U.S. success in winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan

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<sup>109</sup> Kaplan, *Think Global, Fight Local*, A 14.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, 104–105.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 104–105.

<sup>114</sup> Tim McGirk, “The Taliban on the Run; the U.S. is Winning Hearts and Minds in Afghanistan, and its Adversaries are Losing Support,” *Time International*, April 4, 2005, 42.

population through multiple Civil Affairs projects, including digging wells, providing medical care, and building schools. As a result, the locals alerted NATO forces to a Taliban-placed roadside bomb.<sup>115</sup>

Unfortunately, McGirk's description of the Taliban does not seem to capture the general trend across the country at this time. Other evidence suggests the success story described by McGirk was an isolated incident and not a general trend. Anthony Cordesman, from the Strategy Centre for Strategic and International Studies, described the exponential increase in Taliban strength by almost every metric available. From 2005 to 2006, the Taliban areas of de facto government increased by more than 400%, direct fire attacks by almost 300%, suicide attacks by more than 600%, attacks on Afghan forces by 300%, and attacks on NATO forces more than 270%.<sup>116</sup>

By 2006, the ink spot expansion strategy of the Taliban produced undeniable results—they were able to pursue a coordinated offensive. This was the first time since Operation ANACONDA that the Taliban “openly challenged the foreign contingents in a large battle.”<sup>117</sup> The Taliban assembled a large group of fighters in Pashmul, approximately 12 miles outside of Kandahar. They chose this area for a few reasons. First, it was close enough to Kandahar to pose a significant threat to the regional capital. Second, because of its unique geography consisting of high walled compounds, grape vineyards, escape tunnels, trenches, and many drainage ditches, the Taliban believed it would be very difficult for the U.S. and coalition forces to mount an effective attack on the area. This belief was supported by the Soviet's failure to control the area during their invasion of Afghanistan. Third, the Taliban believed the large civilian presence would prevent coalition forces from bombing the area, thus marginalizing their advantage of air power. An estimated 1,500–2,000 Taliban concentrated in Pashmul for the attack. The U.S. responded by evacuating much of the local population from the area and then raining down 2,000 lb bombs. These actions were combined with a large scale offensive

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<sup>115</sup> McGirk, “The Taliban on the Run,” 42.

<sup>116</sup> Anthony Cordesman, “Stop Denying the Seriousness of the Afghan Threat,” *Financial Times*, sec. Comment, January 22, 2007 (accessed May 24, 2009).

<sup>117</sup> Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, 124.

using both conventional troops and Special Forces. The result was an estimated 1,100 Taliban killed as well as “significant civilian losses” of those noncombatants that did not evacuate the area.<sup>118</sup> The Taliban’s actions at Pashmul represent a single battle that pitted the U.S. direct attack against a Taliban direct defense. The Taliban’s tactical failure at Pashmul resulted in a return to their overall indirect defense strategy; they focused on small group guerrilla tactics to rebuild and strengthen while prolonging the conflict.

By 2006, it was apparent to almost all involved that the insurgency was a deeply rooted problem and counterinsurgency efforts needed to be increased. This sentiment was captured well in a *Small Wars Journal* article:

Our military has a predisposition to focus on enemy forces and capabilities and the confrontation between friendly and enemy forces, with little emphasis on the social or political context within which the confrontation takes place. The change to seeing the population as the center of gravity is a major shift for conventional forces. It is a serious adjustment from our current and predominantly conventional military thinking about warfare.<sup>119</sup>

### C. ATTEMPTED STRATEGIC INTERACTION #3

Under a new Secretary of Defense and as part of a growing recognition for a need to adapt, the military began to reshape itself. Pressure was applied from troops in the field in order to adjust doctrine to address the situations they were confronted with on the ground. As a result, the Army and Marine Corps released a new counterinsurgency manual.<sup>120</sup> Some were quite impressed with the progress the U.S. military made in changing itself into a force for counterinsurgency operations. One paper called the military transformation “the most comprehensive retooling of a force while in the midst

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<sup>118</sup> Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, 123–129.

<sup>119</sup> James A. Gavrilis, “A Model for Population-Centered Warfare: A Conceptual Framework for Analyzing and Understanding the Theory and Practice of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency,” *Small Wars Journal* (May 10, 2009), 1, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/mag/2009/05/a-model-for-populationcentered.php> (accessed May 26, 2009).

<sup>120</sup> Kimberly Johnson, “New Counterinsurgency Manual Released to Marines,” *Marine Corps Times*, sec. Newlines, 8, December 25, 2006.

of an active war since the German Army in 1917.”<sup>121</sup> Even if this assertion was correct, it still might not have been enough: the classic story of too little too late.

When indirect strategy methods were implemented under conventional leadership and executed by conventional troops, even proven tactics were “implemented in a mechanical and ultimately ineffective way.”<sup>122</sup> Without a comprehensive understanding of the concepts of a true counterinsurgency campaign, the U.S. military continued focusing primarily on the capturing and killing aspects of counterinsurgency. One prime example was the introduction of TF ODIN, which stands for Task Force Observe, Detect, Identify, Neutralize. TF ODIN introduced “unmanned aerial vehicles and unconventional aircraft to find and kill thousands of roadside-bomb emplacers.”<sup>123</sup> The Task Force aircraft use state of the art technology to find insurgents and then high caliber machine guns and laser guided Hellfire missiles to kill them—a decidedly direct strategy approach. In theory the military may be pursuing counterinsurgency, but it is done with a direct attack flavor and not using an indirect attack strategy usually associated with counterinsurgency.

At the high-dollar cost of initiatives like TF ODIN, it is uncertain how long the U.S. will be able to continue this tack. A direct attack strategy to counterinsurgency tries to capture or kill all insurgents. An indirect attack method would focus more on the forces driving people towards insurgency and removing sanctuaries. Without that focus, the Taliban have the strategic advantage. One reporter described that advantage well, “The Taliban have a seemingly inexhaustible supply of recruits, enjoy sanctuary in Pakistan and almost certainly have greater staying power than the foreign troops.”<sup>124</sup>

To recount, the U.S. military actions in Afghanistan were initially very direct—aiming to destroy the capacity of the Taliban to remain in control of the country and

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<sup>121</sup> Philipp Rotmann, David Tohn and Jaron Wharton, *Learning Under Fire: The U.S. Military, Dissent and Organizational Learning Post-9/11*, #09-04 ed. (Cambridge: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 2009), 3.

<sup>122</sup> Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, 191.

<sup>123</sup> Kris Osborn, “Army Sends ODIN to Afghanistan,” *Army Times* December 15, 2008, [http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/12/web\\_defense\\_121508\\_army\\_ODIN/](http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/12/web_defense_121508_army_ODIN/) (accessed June 3, 2009).

capture or kill as many al Qaeda members as possible. The Taliban responded with a direct defense and was thoroughly routed; Kabul was overthrown in a month. The U.S. military was ideally suited to this kind of interaction and excelled at it. Unfortunately, it was not well prepared for the next phase. After being forced to find sanctuary, mostly across the border into Pakistan, the Taliban regrouped and began an insurgency, a classically indirect defense. The U.S. and coalition forces did not have enough troops or the mindset to fight an effective counterinsurgency campaign and continued with a direct attack strategy. This asymmetric strategic interaction allowed the Taliban to build strength and draw out the conflict, with the intent of eroding U.S. resolve and resources. Even though a counterinsurgency campaign is almost universally accepted as required, it is prosecuted using decidedly direct means.

The election of U.S. President Barack Obama may usher in a new strategic interaction. President Obama has dispatched 17,000 new troops to Afghanistan in addition to a surge of civilian development experts to help stabilize the country.<sup>125</sup> However, any increase in troops is likely to fail if part of a continued direct attack strategy—as clearly demonstrated by the Soviets. The naming of Lt General McChrystal as the new commander of Afghanistan was a more promising development. General McChrystal, as a graduated commander of the Joint Special Operations Command, should be extremely familiar with the theoretical knowledge and practical application of an indirect strategy.<sup>126</sup> This assumption was bolstered by a very population-centric counterinsurgency strategy put forth by General McChrystal.<sup>127</sup> However, General McChrystal is not known for his effectiveness in counterinsurgency; rather, he has a

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<sup>124</sup> “A Double Spring Offensive in Afghanistan,” *The Economist*, February 24, 2007, 2007 (accessed May 4, 2009).

<sup>125</sup> Anna Mulrine, “In Afghanistan, It’s Obama’s War Now: His New Strategy Includes More Troops, But It’s Still Unclear what Success Would Look Like,” *U.S. News and World Report*, June 1, 2009, 58 (accessed May 23, 2009).

<sup>126</sup> “Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal: Director Joint Staff,” Joint Chiefs of Staff, <http://www.jcs.mil/biography.aspx?ID=15> (accessed May 23, 2009).

<sup>127</sup> Stanley McChrystal, *Commander’s Initial Assessment* (Afghanistan: NATO International Security Force Assistance Force, 2009), [http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment\\_Redacted\\_092109.pdf?hpid=topnews](http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf?hpid=topnews).

“reputation for killing.”<sup>128</sup> As such, he may apply a very direct approach to counterinsurgency. It is still too early to judge how his strategy will be implemented. Even if it is implemented in a truly indirect attack fashion, he still has his work cut out for him as the Taliban have a seven-year head start.

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<sup>128</sup> Joshua Foust, "McChrystal's "Existential Choice." Registan.net. June 22, 2009. <http://www.registan.net/index.php/2009/06/22/mcchrystals-existential-choice/> (accessed November 11, 2009).

## VII. OTHER CONFLICTS AT A GLANCE

*However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.*

— Winston Churchill

This section is not intended to provide in-depth analysis of other conflicts. It aims to capture the highlights of other wars using the framework presented in this thesis. As such, this section does not contain the same detail that was provided in the Operation ENDURING FREEDOM case study. Even without that level of detail, the characteristics of each war are broadly identifiable.

### A. OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

U.S. involvement in Iraq during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) is another useful case study for studying asymmetric warfare because it fits classical asymmetric patterns with the U.S. as the strong attacker against Iraq as the weak defender. Additionally, the conflict is not completely over yet, though the U.S. appears to be winning.

The U.S. invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003.<sup>129</sup> The plan was to first target the Iraqi government leadership and capture the capital of Baghdad. The belief was that after this was accomplished, a stable, democratic government would replace the existing authoritarian regime led by Saddam Hussein. As such, invading U.S. troops made a lightning-quick dash to Baghdad, largely bypassing cities and towns along the way. The relatively small and extremely agile elements of the U.S. Army were aided by the precision-guided munitions of the U.S. Air Force. The strategy of the U.S. was predominantly aimed at destroying Iraqi capacity to resist—therefore, it was a direct attack. By and large, the Iraqi military “did little if any fighting.”<sup>130</sup> Those elements that

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<sup>129</sup> “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” *GlobalSecurity.Org* (accessed September 10, 2009).

<sup>130</sup> Stephen T. Hosmer, *Why the Iraqi Resistance to the Coalition Invasion was so Weak* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007), 2 (accessed November 11, 2009).

confronted U.S. forces did so head-on using a direct defense. This interaction played to the advantages of the U.S. and the Iraqi conventional defense capacity was quickly crushed.<sup>131</sup> Baghdad fell on April 9, 2003, less than a month after the U.S. invaded. Events went so well, that on May 1, 2003, with a large “Mission Accomplished” banner in the background, President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq were complete, the U.S. was victorious, and now was the time to start securing and reconstructing Iraq.<sup>132</sup>

Unfortunately, the bulk of OIF planning was focused on combat operations; very little attention had been given to developing a post-Saddam Iraq.<sup>133</sup> The predominant feeling in the U.S. prior to the war was captured by Kenneth Adelman, who wrote, “I believe demolishing Hussein’s military power and liberating Iraq would be a cakewalk.”<sup>134</sup> Adelman was correct: but demolishing Saddam Hussein’s military power was not all that was required to achieve U.S. goals in Iraq and establish a stable, democratic nation-state. The belief of the Bush administration seemed to be that a stable democracy would spring up as soon as Saddam was removed. However, in the words of Steven Metz, “Those insisting that democratization would come easily—Iraqi exiles, scholars such as Ajami and Bernard Lewis, conservative pundits, and, for that matter, administration officials—had either been out of Iraq for a long time or never been there at all.”<sup>135</sup> Despite the phenomenal success of the U.S. in major combat operations, the war in Iraq was nowhere near as complete as the “Mission Accomplished” banner heralded. Disorder began almost immediately after the fall of Saddam. “Even before [General]

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<sup>131</sup> The fact that the main units of the Iraqi Army Regular, the Republican Guard, and the Special Republican Guard offered little resistance could indicate that the Iraqi strategy was not intended to be a direct defense at all. However, since at least some elements of these units, as well as those of the Fedayeen Saddam, did directly confront the U.S. forces, this can be considered a brief symmetric interaction.

<sup>132</sup> George W. Bush, in a speech given aboard the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln, May 1, 2003 (accessed September 10, 2009).

<sup>133</sup> Steven Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008), 130.

<sup>134</sup> Ken Adelman, “Cakewalk in Iraq,” *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2002 (accessed September 9, 2009).

<sup>135</sup> Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy*, 123.

Franks began his victory lap, Iraq collapsed into a spasm of looting and street crime. . . Anarchy sparked public anger, which gathered energy with each passing week.”<sup>136</sup>

The most important reason the war was not over was probably the failure of the U.S. to establish security. Without order and security, public anger was quickly directed towards the U.S., who had deposed the Saddam regime, which had at least provided the Iraqi citizens with order. They viewed the failure of the U.S. to restore order and services as a personal affront.<sup>137</sup> The reason for this failing was a lack of personnel. The number of U.S. troops required to win in Iraq had been a point of contention in the planning phase. Before entry into the war, Army chief of staff General Shinseki testified in front of Congress that ““several hundred thousand’ troops would be needed for occupation duty in Iraq after an American intervention.”<sup>138</sup> Shortly after General Shinseki’s estimated troop requirement was given, both Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz stated that General Shinseki’s number was much higher than would actually be required and they quickly named the general’s replacement.<sup>139</sup>

Rumsfeld had spent his tenure as SecDef leading the transformation of the U.S. military into an agile, high-tech force that leveraged the benefits of superior technology in short, high-intensity, conventional conflicts. In short, his vision for the U.S. military was an efficient killing machine. The number of personnel in the military was reduced under this vision. He was against using large numbers of troops in Iraq to help support his vision of military transformation.

It is possible that Rumsfeld’s vision may have worked in Iraq had security personnel been obtained from somewhere, even if not from the U.S. military. One source of such personnel was the Iraqi military. Apparently, the initial plan had been to keep the Iraqi army intact, which would have provided an additional 400,000 security

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<sup>136</sup> Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy*, 145.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

personnel.<sup>140</sup> However, that plan was not followed through as the army was quickly dissolved. Not only did that decision reduce the number of security personnel available, it also increased the pool of potential insurgents.

Without adequate personnel in Iraq to maintain security, the level of violence steadily escalated. Targets included Iraqi infrastructure, Americans, U.S. military convoys, and even Iraqis who worked with the Americans—particularly translators.<sup>141</sup> For months, military leaders refused to call the violence an insurgency. However, on July 16, 2003, the newly appointed commander of U.S. Central Command, General Abizaid, finally acknowledged in a Pentagon briefing that the U.S. was fighting a “classical guerrilla-type war.”<sup>142</sup> He further characterized the insurgency as getting more organized and learning, advising that in order for the U.S. to win, “we’ve got to adapt to their tactics, techniques and procedures.”<sup>143</sup> It was clear that the Iraqis had switched to an indirect defense.

As previously discussed, Rumsfeld had transformed the U.S. military into a small, very efficient killing force. It is understandable, then, why the U.S. approach to counterinsurgency was focused on capturing and killing its way to victory. This strategy was epitomized by a deck of playing cards featuring the 52 most wanted Iraqi leaders. The deck represented a capture/kill list to victory. President Bush confirmed this strategy in a speech given on June 28 at Fort Bragg, NC when he stated, “Our mission in Iraq is clear. We’re hunting down the terrorists.”<sup>144</sup> Even though the enemy in Iraq was clearly (and successfully) employing an indirect defense, the U.S. continued with a predominantly direct attack.

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<sup>140</sup> Hennessy-Fiske and Molly, “Bush is Foggy on Iraq Army; He can’t Recall Why the Force was Disbanded, According to Biography Excerpts. the Decision is seen as Pivotal,” *Los Angeles Times*, sec. The Nation, September 3, 2007 (accessed September 25, 2009).

<sup>141</sup> Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy*, 147.

<sup>142</sup> Vernon Loeb, “‘Guerrilla’ War Acknowledged: New Commander Cites Problems,” *The Washington Post* (July 17, 2003), A01 (accessed September 10, 2009).

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> George W. Bush, President Addresses Nation, Discusses Iraq, War on Terror, , in a speech given at Fort Bragg, NC, June 28, 2005 (accessed September 10, 2009).

In 2004, much of the violence that had previously been aimed at the U.S. was redirected between Sunni-Shia rivals.<sup>145</sup> This added another complication to the violence of Iraq and placed the U.S. in the middle of a civil war. Additionally, it promoted the spread of violence to areas that had previously been quiet. By the autumn of 2004, Iraqi insurgents had “near control over important parts of central Iraq, especially the cities of Fallujah, Ramadi, Samarra, and Baqubah.”<sup>146</sup>

There were some successful applications of effective counterinsurgency at this time: notably, in Tal Afar. Here, the Army established continuous presence while clearing the area of insurgents. Great care was taken not to incite further hatred from the insurgents or the local population. The results were very good and were even noted in a speech by President Bush.<sup>147</sup> However, the results achieved required a lot of manpower, which was not available to replicate the Tal Afar model across all of Iraq.

As a result, the counterinsurgency efforts were woefully inadequate since they “concentrated their efforts on hunting down and killing insurgents.”<sup>148</sup> The insurgents continued to inflict serious losses on the U.S. By late 2006, many in the U.S. began to view Iraq as “unwinnable.” In a Hail Mary effort, the U.S. implemented a “surge”—an increase in troop levels by approximately 20,000—in an attempt to turn the war around. The surge is often recognized as the turning point for the U.S. in Iraq. However, it is unlikely that just placing an additional 20,000 troops in Iraq doing more of what wasn’t working before would turn the tide of the war. If the surge was the reason the U.S. turned Iraq around, it is most likely because it was introduced under the leadership of General Petraeus as the new Commanding General in Iraq. General Petraeus, a predominantly conventional forces leader, had learned indirect strategy lessons from studying the Vietnam War and by practicing it during his own experience in Mosul, Iraq

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<sup>145</sup> Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy*, 164.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>147</sup> Joe Hallett and Jonathan Riskind, “Bush: We’re Staying in Iraq; President Uses Cleveland Speech to Assure Nation He has Clear Plan for Iraq’s Future,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, March 21, 2006 (accessed September 10, 2009).

<sup>148</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., “How to Win in Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2005) (accessed September 10, 2009).

where he coined the phrase “money is ammunition.” After leaving Mosul, General Petraeus, along with Marine General James Amos, wrote the Army’s field manual on counterinsurgency—replacing the previous version that was over 20 years old.<sup>149</sup> The manual was a document focused on indirect warfare. General Petraeus understood the need for an indirect strategy in Iraq and when he returned there as the theater commander.

The leadership of General Petraeus could be called “well-timed” since he is largely credited with turning the tide in Iraq. However, he was the fourth commander of the Multi-National Force in Iraq to deal with an insurgency that had been continuing for as many years. Additionally, he was a “conventional guy” who happened to be interested in, study, and understand counterinsurgency. It is very fortuitous that he came along when he did. If the U.S. had deliberately planned to get a counterinsurgency expert in charge of Iraq, it would have made sense to have that happen three to four years earlier than it actually occurred.

Another reason the war in Iraq turned around about this time is due to a change in attitudes by the local Sunni population. This change has been called the “Anbar awakening,” in which Sunni militias agreed to help the U.S. fight al Qaeda. The awakening actually began before the surge and before General Petraeus took command. Sheik Abdul Sattar approached the U.S. Army saying, “I swear to God, if we have good weapons, if we have good vehicles, if we have good support, I can fight al Qaeda all the way to Afghanistan.”<sup>150</sup> The U.S. then supported Sheik Sattan and his militia.

The awakening is most interesting because this approach of arming militia groups had been proposed in 2004, when the expectation of victory was much higher. However, Ambassador Bremer was against armed militias and attempted to disarm them. Only after the expectation of victory was had dropped to a level that U.S. leadership was willing to try more unconventional methods were militias incorporated into an overarching strategy. By working with the Sunni population, the U.S. significantly eroded their will to fight.

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<sup>149</sup> *Field Manual 3–24, Counterinsurgency* (Washington D. C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2006), Foreword.

<sup>150</sup> Quoted in Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy*, 185.

Another key in reducing violence was a ceasefire agreement with Shi'ite leaders—particularly Muqtada al Sadr, leader of the Jaysh al-Mahdi Army. This ceasefire agreement appeared only after “Sadr’s control over his militia was diminishing and the movement was beginning to splinter.”<sup>151</sup> These events did not occur because of direct actions of the U.S. military. Rather, they were effects of the militia’s “corruption, intimidation and extortion of the Shi’a population to enhance their power and wealth.”<sup>152</sup>

The U.S. did eventually adopt a much more indirect strategy in Iraq—largely because of an extremely low expectation of victory and a willingness to try just about anything to turn the tide of the war. It is important to note that this change was not actively initiated by the U.S. military. Instead, it was the result of a change in attitudes by the local population that had previously fought a guerrilla-style war *against* the U.S. Fortunately, the U.S. military was open enough to accept the proposed alliance. The resulting indirect attack strategy and symmetric strategic interaction, coupled with ceasefire agreements with Shi'ite militias, reversed the direction of the war. By November 2007, the U.S. military drawdown in Iraq began.

## **B. USSR IN AFGHANISTAN**

Involvement of the USSR in Afghanistan demonstrates the interactions of a strong actor other than the U.S. attacking a weak actor. With Afghanistan as the same weak actor as the OEF case study, the only variable changed (other than a minimal thirty year time difference) is the strong actor.

The USSR military initially entered Afghanistan in 1979, ostensibly at the behest of the Marxist-friendly Afghan government, led by the communist People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA).<sup>153</sup> The Afghan government tried to “revolutionize Afghan society almost overnight.”<sup>154</sup> The abrupt changes, including land, social, and economic

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<sup>151</sup> *Fact Sheet on Shi’a Militia Actors* Institute for the Study of War, 2008) (accessed November 11, 2009).

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Thomas Taylor Hammond, *Red Flag Over Afghanistan: The Communist Coup, the Soviet Invasion, and the Consequences* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 99.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

reforms, were implemented using force when necessary.<sup>155</sup> When the population provided resistance to these changes, they did so in the historically classic Afghan fashion—armed revolt.<sup>156</sup> The Soviets provided combat troops to aid the PDPA in quelling the rebellion against the communist regime. However, the direct attack strategy employed further incited the population and galvanized resistance under a “blood for blood” mentality.<sup>157</sup> As Soviet involvement continued and deepened, the PDPA became more and more of a puppet government and was delegitimized in the eyes of the Afghan population as such.

The conflict was stereotypical of asymmetric warfare; the Soviet military controlled the major population centers while focusing on killing the enemy. The mujahedeen guerrilla fighters controlled the rural areas and tried to blend in with the local population. From the safety provided by the protection of the local population, the mujahedeen would inflict casualties on the Soviet military predominantly through acts of sabotage and terrorism. This asymmetric strategic interaction characterized the initial years of the war.

After initial efforts of the Soviet army focusing on killing the enemy proved ineffective, they changed approaches. Instead of killing their enemies they started killing everyone! The Soviet method of counterinsurgency consisted of “depopulating areas of tough resistance.”<sup>158</sup> As such, the Soviet approach to counterinsurgency—kill everyone and destroy everything—was still very direct.

For this conflict, the mujahedeen were driven to an indirect defense strategy largely out of necessity. Even though the mujahedeen were supported by fighters from around the Muslim community and military aid from the U.S., Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, China, and others, they still did not have anywhere near the military resources available

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<sup>155</sup> Thomas Taylor Hammond, *Red Flag Over Afghanistan: The Communist Coup, the Soviet Invasion, and the Consequences* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 69–72.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>158</sup> Rasul Bux Rais, *War without Winners: Afghanistan's Uncertain Transition After the Cold War*, 1st ed. (Karachi, Pakistan; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 103.

to them that the Soviet army possessed.<sup>159</sup> Since they were fighting to dislodge the “infidel” invaders from their homeland, the mujahedeen also had much more at stake than the Soviets. As such, they were permitted as much time and freedom of action as it would take to achieve their goal of purging the Soviets.

Conversely, the institutional predisposition of the Soviet military was probably the most powerful driver towards a direct attack strategy. The Soviet army that invaded Afghanistan was described as “structured and trained for large-scale conventional warfare” that resulted from its evolutionary history.<sup>160</sup> The words of one author very clearly capture the direct-oriented institutional predisposition of the USSR:

Afghanistan confirmed what was already suspected about the general fighting capacity of the Soviet Army—it relied more on a concentration (quantity) of forces and artillery preparation than on flexibility and maneuver. However, there is a more puzzling paradox—Soviet military experts knew what to do to win in Afghanistan but did not do it because of a cultural reluctance, in other words, cultural inertia. There was no desire to change the doctrine, training, and organization of an Army that was well adapted for a European war against its principal adversary.<sup>161</sup>

The fact that the Soviets maintained a direct attack strategy throughout nine years of losses supports the theory that the institutional predisposition was the overriding factor pushing towards a direct strategy. Additionally, the size and resource advantage of the Soviets probably led to a high expectation of victory that would reduce the likelihood of changing strategies. After almost a decade of conflict, the USSR decided that even if Afghanistan was “winnable,” it was not worth the resources that would be required. The USSR decided to cut its losses and left Afghanistan in 1989.

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<sup>159</sup> J. Bruce Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation* (Washington, D.C.: NDU Press, 1986), 199.

<sup>160</sup> Robert M. Cassidy, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya: Military Strategic Culture and the Paradoxes of Asymmetric Conflict* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2003), 11 (accessed November 12, 2009).

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–12.

### C. U.S. INTERACTIONS IN VIETNAM

U.S. involvement in Vietnam was a landmark defeat that always ends up as a test bed for any U.S. military theory. Arreguín-Toft's case study analysis of U.S. involvement in Vietnam using strategic interaction was not entirely convincing. Therefore, this paper applied the strategic interaction model with strategy drivers to U.S. intervention in Vietnam. Interestingly, the application of U.S. power in Vietnam aligns closely with the previous example of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan; the U.S. entered the war in an advisory role to assist the government of the Republic of Vietnam and gradually escalated involvement and taking control of the conflict.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of the Vietnam War is the fact that the North Vietnamese essentially fielded two different armies: the conventional North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the guerrilla-styled units that infiltrated South Vietnam, the Viet Cong (VC). Therefore, in order to apply the strategic interaction theory to the conflict in an organized manner, it makes sense to look at U.S. interaction against the NVA and VC individually first and then combine the results into an overall result.

Initial U.S. involvement in Vietnam was through an advisory role.<sup>162</sup> Because most of the advisors were from the conventional army, they advocated a decidedly direct strategy for South Vietnam. This direct strategy was applied against both the NVA and VC forces. When this strategic interaction did not achieve the results that the U.S. (and South Vietnam) had hoped for, U.S. decision makers attributed failure to ineptitude on the part of the South Vietnamese army. The fix was to introduce U.S. forces to do the fighting for the South Vietnamese—to change the war into a “war for which Americans would be responsible.”<sup>163</sup> This led to the large-scale introduction of U.S. troops into the war.

On the ground, those U.S. troops pursued a direct attack. This was most likely due to the fact that the bulk of the leadership was trained in and more comfortable with

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<sup>162</sup> John Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive, 1965–1968* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, U.S. Air Force, 1988), 1, <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS49304>.

<sup>163</sup> Loren Baritz, *Backfire: A History of how American Culture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 175.

these conventional tactics. Additionally, this strategy was also very conducive to quantifiable measurements, such as body counts. Employment of this strategy proved tactically adequate against the NVA and VC. Against the NVA, this was a symmetric strategic interaction that was rather effective for the U.S. However, against the guerrilla units of the VC, this was an asymmetric strategic interaction. The U.S. succeeded in capturing and killing many VC forces while enduring relatively few casualties. Despite many U.S. tactical successes, the VC forces were able to regroup, recruit, and rearm. Because of this tactical success and the fact that the U.S. never lost a major battle, the U.S. continuously believed that progress was being made and that they could see “the light at the end of the tunnel.”<sup>164</sup> This slowly increased the U.S. casualties and dragged out the conflict—a result not favorable for the U.S.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military also executed Operation ROLLING THUNDER, an air campaign against the North Vietnamese designed to “coerce North Vietnam into refraining from support of the southern insurgency.”<sup>165</sup> The NVA used a highly sophisticated, multi-layered anti-aircraft defense system that resulted in heavy U.S. losses.<sup>166</sup> Although there are many arguments about the specific reasons ROLLING THUNDER failed (including too many restrictions on targets, over control by civilians, devolvement into an interdiction campaign, and an ill-conceived gradual increase in punishment design), the end result was an indirect attack strategy against the direct defense strategy of the NVA and North Vietnam. This interaction favored the North Vietnamese and the operation was halted due to its failure to produce the desired strategic results and mounting losses.<sup>167</sup>

As the war progressed, U.S. strategy matured. To combat the VC threat in the south, the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) united many

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<sup>164</sup> Baritz, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did*, 179.

<sup>165</sup> Earl H. Tilford, *Setup: What the Air Force did in Vietnam and Why* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1991), 89.

<sup>166</sup> Dave Richard Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet: U.S.–Vietnam in Perspective* (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1978), 74–76.

<sup>167</sup> Tilford, *Setup: What the Air Force did in Vietnam and Why*, 154.

smaller programs under a unifying umbrella with the intended goal of pacifying the South Vietnamese population.<sup>168</sup> Many of the strategies used to pacify the population were quite indirect. Perhaps the most direct operation under the CORDS program was Operation PHOENIX, which was aimed at dismantling the VC infrastructure.<sup>169</sup> However, this direct strategy was performed in support of a larger, indirect strategy goal of severing the South Vietnamese population from the insurgency. This change towards a more indirect strategy was more effective than the previous attempts using exclusively direct means. By 1971, the bulk of South Vietnam was reasonably safe, as most of the VC had been routed and local armed forces had been established to finish the job and prevent their return.<sup>170</sup>

Just like the ground attack strategy changed, the air attack strategy changed as well. Operation LINEBACKER “was designed to cripple North Vietnam’s ability to conduct offensive operations inside South Vietnam.”<sup>171</sup> The military was given more latitude to select targets, most of which were aimed at degrading the North’s capacity and war related resources. The timing of this operation was crucial since the North was mounting a large-scale offensive against the South. The result of this strategic interaction was effective, bringing North Vietnam to the negotiating table.<sup>172</sup>

When put together, the U.S. entered Vietnam with asymmetric strategic interactions that favored the NVA and VC. However, changes in the war and U.S. military employment led to strategic interactions that favored the U.S. Unfortunately, this still did not result in a U.S. victory. This paper takes the stance that the fundamental reason for the loss of Vietnam was the fact that the U.S., as a democratic regime, could

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<sup>168</sup> Al Hemingway, “CORDS: Winning Hearts and Minds in Vietnam,” HistoryNet.com, (accessed November 14, 2009).

<sup>169</sup> Dale Andrade, “Three Lessons from Vietnam,” *The Washington Post*, December 29, 2005 (accessed November 14, 2009).

<sup>170</sup> John T. Smith, *The Linebacker Raids: The Bombing of North Vietnam, 1972* (London: Arms & Armour Press, 1998), 49.

<sup>171</sup> Tilford, *Setup: What the Air Force did in Vietnam and Why*, 234.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

not “indefinitely sustain an inconclusive, unpopular war.”<sup>173</sup> From that vantage point, the prolonged asymmetric strategic interactions at the beginning of the war were the major contributors to the war’s character taking on adjectives such as “inconclusive” and “unpopular.” Those asymmetric strategic interactions eroded the military’s freedom of action by draining domestic support. Although the institutional predisposition of the U.S. military was not insurmountable, it did not exactly turn on a dime, either. By the time a new strategy was employed it proved to be too little too late; the American public had had decided to remove the U.S. military from the fight.

#### **D. INSIGHTS FROM CASE STUDIES**

All of the case studies addressed in this paper show a common pattern; strong actors begin asymmetric conflicts with a direct attack strategy. Even when it is clear that weak actors resort to an indirect defense, there is a significant delay before a strong actor implements an indirect attack strategy if one is even implemented at all. This phenomenon suggests that factors other than strictly probability of victory drive strategy implementation in asymmetric conflicts.

The reason for this direct-oriented bias appears to be most attributable to the institutional predisposition. The institutional predisposition is most likely tooled for symmetric, state-on-state conflict rather than asymmetric conflict. Unfortunately, the effect of preparing a military for symmetric conflict appears to actually inhibit its ability to effectively wage asymmetric warfare. The strong actor focus on symmetrical warfare is justifiable when considering that the viability of strong states could be threatened by other strong states while weak actors are not likely to pose much threat to the continued existence of strong states. However, given the dominant position of the U.S. today and the small number of strong actor competitors, the “worst case” scenario of symmetric conflict should be balanced against the “most likely case” scenario of asymmetric conflict.

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<sup>173</sup> Andrew P. N. Erdmann, “The U.S. Presumption of Quick, Costless Wars” In *America the Vulnerable: Our Military Problems and how to Fix them*, eds. John F. Lehman and Harvey Sicherman (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2002), 50.

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## VIII. DISCUSSION

*Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy.*  
— *Sun Tzu*

Richard Betts published an article titled, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” He answered that question with, “Strategy is not always an illusion, but often it is.”<sup>174</sup> The response this paper gives to the same question has an equal amount of skepticism. Strategy selection does not appear to be as simple as a “choice” debated and then selected. Neither can it easily be altered after the conflict has begun. Rather, strategy appears to be driven towards either direct or indirect by a variety of factors other than probability of victory. These factors have quite a bit of momentum in determining strategy that is difficult to overcome. The most important of these strategy drivers is the institutional predisposition because it is the most consistent across time and is the factor that the military has the most control over.

Some instances appear to be more amenable to strategy changes. One such situation is by sheer necessity when there is an asymmetry of risk and a way of life is on the line—as is often the case for weak actors. Even if they have an institutional predisposition that favors direct strategies, this can be overcome predominantly through a large stake, which allows for a drawn out conflict and wide freedom of action. This situation was demonstrated when the Taliban switched strategies against the U.S. and the Northern Alliance in 2002 and when the Iraqis changed strategies against the U.S. in 2003.

Conversely, strong actors appear much more likely to enact a strategy that does not align with their institutional predisposition only when external constraints are placed upon them, such as Rothstein highlighted as the case for U.S. involvement in the Philippines and El Salvador.<sup>175</sup> Even when it is widely recognized that a different

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<sup>174</sup> Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” *International Security* 25, no. 2 (2000), 46.

<sup>175</sup> Hy S. Rothstein, “Less is More: The Problematic Future of Irregular Warfare in an Era of Collapsing States,” *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2007), 275–294.

strategy would be more beneficial, the adjustment is slow and awkward at best. This has been demonstrated by the relatively stagnant U.S. strategy in Afghanistan since 2001. It was also playing out that way in Iraq until the low expectation of victory led the U.S. military to simply accept an Iraqi solution to population security.

Each empirical conflict that the U.S. enters provides different aspects funneling the military towards either a direct or indirect strategy. Within that framework, both strategies must be viable options; indirect attack cannot be excluded due to the single driving factor of institutional predisposition.

Some may argue that if you have to choose between the two types of attack, direct attack is the statistically better of the two options, since the strong attacker has a 77% chance of winning symmetric strategic interactions and still a 36% chance of winning asymmetric strategic interactions. This argument is unacceptable for a couple of reasons. First, it is a false dilemma; there is no reason that a military should keep only one strategy in its repertoire. At least when given restrictions, the U.S. military has proven that it can succeed with both types of strategies. Second, by taking the indirect attack option completely off the table, enemies are certain to adapt accordingly. The U.S. would probably be extremely efficient with direct attack but would likely find that every defender would then focus exclusively on indirect defense and the statistical advantage of a U.S. direct attack would vanish. Edward Luttwak supported this logic when he pointed out that strategies can fail by being performed *too well*.<sup>176</sup> His example was the French Maginot Line. The Maginot Line was a superb defense. In fact, it was so good that the Germans avoided it completely in WWII by going around it and making it irrelevant. Perhaps if the Maginot Line were *less effective*, the Germans would have invaded directly across the border and been slowed down enough for French forces to mass an effective resistance. This paradoxical logic can be applied to the U.S., who is already very competent at conventional warfare. If this became the sole strategy in the U.S. tool kit, challengers would avoid direct confrontation with the U.S. and instead, by necessity, choose an indirect strategy of defense.

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<sup>176</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, *The Paradoxical Logic of Strategy*, Departments of Military Education, Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1987), 8.

## IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

*Unless a variety of opinions are laid before us, we have no opportunity of selection, but are bound of necessity to adopt the particular view which may have been brought forward.*  
— Herodotus

The recommendation of this paper is that the U.S. military should make changes in its institutional predisposition so it does not favor direct attack almost to the point of excluding indirect attack as a viable option. This recommendation is very timely since it is in fundamental agreement with the “balance” philosophy of Secretary of Defense Gates’ National Defense Strategy.<sup>177</sup> Now may be the perfect time to make changes to the U.S. military’s institutional predisposition to strike a more equitable balance between direct and indirect.

There are a number of requirements that changes to the existing institutional predisposition will need to satisfy. These requirements are built upon the concepts explored in this paper. First and foremost, any changes need to ensure a deliberate strategy selection. There needs to be a mechanism in place to control strategy selection more than just a happenstance confluence of existing factors. This selection mechanism will ensure strategy selections are appropriate to the environment and associated probability of victory. It will also remove much of the “illusion” of strategy, as it will ensure strategy implementation is a result of deliberate choices. From the case studies of this paper, strategy selection currently does not appear as deliberate as would be expected.

Second, because of path dependence, the outcomes desired at the end of a conflict need to be analyzed *before* any strategy is implemented. Inappropriate initial strategy execution could actually preclude the desired end; therefore, the desired goal should be analyzed before conflicts to ensure applied means have a logical and reasonable

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<sup>177</sup> Robert M. Gates, “A Balanced Strategy; Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February, 2009 (accessed August 26, 2009).

expectation of achieving desired goals. This process should explore the multiple linkages between cause and effect on the way to desired ends.

Third, there needs to be a designated champion for the indirect strategy. Indirect strategy options need to be presented to the highest level of military decision makers for evaluation. If decision makers are only presented with direct strategy options, it follows that only direct strategies will be implemented.

The institutional predisposition of the military has shown a drift towards direct strategies. The unique skill sets required for indirect warfare have been given short shrift through education, training, and experience in favor of those necessary for direct warfare. This phenomenon is consistent with organizational design theory; it is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to have one organization that is adept at dichotomous strategies—one of the strategies will dominate over the other. One manner in which this happens is through the rewards system in which desired behaviors, such as number of enemy killed or number of bombs dropped, are measures of success. These measures may be appropriate for direct strategies, but fail to measure anything meaningful for indirect strategies. Yet if personnel who post large numbers are continuously rewarded through awards and promotions, it will encourage direct strategies at the cost of effective indirect strategies.

To be an effective advocate of indirect strategies, a representative needs to be independent from the existing services in order to avoid the same drift towards direct attack. Additionally, the indirect champion should be given the same status as the most prominent champions of direct strategies to ensure the indirect options are not suppressed before they can reach decision makers. At a minimum, this would need to be at the Combatant Commander level and perhaps even as high as that of a Secretary.

Fourth, the military needs to ensure that it maintains an effective indirect strategy capability. This capability needs to be vigilantly maintained and not re-learned as required during conflict, because, in the words of former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, “you go to war with the Army you have. . . not the Army you might want or

wish to have at a later time.”<sup>178</sup> Forces need to be familiar with the tactics and overall goals of indirect strategies to ensure the effective implementation of indirect strategies. If this is not followed, the intricacies and nuances required in executing an indirect strategy will be carried out in a ham-handed manner, reducing their efficacy. The U.S. military learned much about counterinsurgency throughout the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, those lessons were not retained very well; immediately after U.S. withdrawal, two of the Special Forces groups were disbanded. Over two decades later, the mistake was realized and they were finally reformed but much of the institutional learning had been lost. The lessons, training, and skills learned during conflicts such as Vietnam are purchased at too high of a price to be dumped at the cessation of hostilities only to be relearned later through a new conflict, such as OEF or OIF.

Lastly, the military should adopt some type of mechanism to continuously reassess the conflict and determine which type of strategy is more appropriate. Following a change in the character of the conflict, the military should then be agile enough to enact a change in strategies. This strategic agility could remove much of the opportunity insurgencies are given to gain support among the population, as occurred during direct attack operations by the U.S. in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Had the U.S. military effectively adjusted to an indirect attack strategy sooner in both of those conflicts, the insurgencies may not have had the time and political space to gain the momentum that they did.

Speaking in broad-brush terms, a more neutral institutional predisposition could be achieved with a counterbalance to the existing direct-focused force. An organization concerned exclusively with indirect options would provide that overall balance. One possibility would be to create a new organization within the military that would focus exclusively on indirect strategies. This is what Rothstein argued for in *Afghanistan and the Trouble Future of Unconventional Warfare* when he advocated legislation to “create a

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<sup>178</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, “Rumsfeld Gets Earful from Troops; Complaints Cite Equipment Woes, Extended Tours and Pay Delays,” *The Washington Post*, sec. A. 1, December 9, 2004 (accessed May 26, 2009).

separate service” that would “provide the nation with unconventional warfare forces.”<sup>179</sup> The biggest benefit of this approach would be a DoD “in house” solution that should make inter-service coordination relatively smooth. Unfortunately, legislation for another service would likely meet with entrenched resistance. Another approach would be to change an existing organization to give it the lead on the indirect strategy. Although this solution could avoid the problems associated with creating an entirely new organization, it may prove almost as difficult in the long run: existing organizational factors may make it difficult to adapt an existing organization to the indirect strategy. To avoid this problem, the U.S. could empower an existing organization that has demonstrated an inclination towards the indirect strategy, such as the CIA or the State Department. However, this solution would be outside of the DoD and could make interagency cooperation more difficult.

As such, the best way of making these changes to the institutional predisposition of the U.S. military is a subject for another research project—most likely centered around organizational design theories. Each different solution will have a variety of associated benefits and detriments that must be taken into account and systematically evaluated.

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<sup>179</sup> Hy S. Rothstein, *Afghanistan and the Troubled Future of Unconventional Warfare* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 180.

## X. CONCLUSION

*The direct use of force is such a poor solution to any problem, it is generally employed only by small children and large nations.*

— David Friedman

This paper approached conflicts with a few starting assumptions: that the military is sent into a conflict with the goal of victory; that a military is built to achieve victory across the entire spectrum of warfare; and that a military is built around a controlling theory of the best way to predict war outcomes. From these starting assumptions, the paper built upon Ivan Arreguín-Toft's theory of strategic interaction to create a game-theoretic model to analyze implications. That model showed that direct attack strategies are logical for strong actors in early stages of conflicts but not for prolonged conflicts after weak actors are forced to their dominant strategy of indirect defense. The observation that strong actors often fail to change to an indirect attack strategy when appropriate is attributed to strategy selection being driven by factors other than probability of victory. The most important of those factors is the institutional predisposition because it is the most consistent and the most controllable by a military.

This theory fits well with multiple case studies. Game theory can be used to explain why strong actors initially employed a conservative strategy of direct attack in early operations of the conflicts. It also shows that after the bulk of enemy capacity to resist is destroyed, an indirect strategy would result in a more favorable strategic interaction for strong actors. However, the U.S. has shown repeatedly a failure to deliberately switch to an indirect attack strategy in a timely manner. In the case of the U.S. military, this strategic rigidity is attributed to an institutional predisposition that favors direct attack to an unacceptable degree. The time it takes to finally switch to a more appropriate indirect attack strategy can have devastating effects on shaping the battlefield—even if an effective indirect attack strategy is eventually pursued—as the case of U.S. involvement in Vietnam lends support for. Therefore, the U.S. military should alter its institutional predisposition to a more indirect-friendly stance. One way to

accomplish this would be through the creation of an organization that focuses on indirect strategies to provide a balance to the existing direct strategy bias.

Changes that the U.S. military adopts to create a more balanced institutional predisposition should institutionalize a strategic look at the desired ends before entering a conflict. The goal of this analysis will be to consciously select an appropriate strategy for achieving those ends. Additionally, there needs to be a champion for the indirect strategy—an office that provides indirect approaches to achieving desired strategic goals. The pros and cons of the indirect strategy can then be weighed against those of the direct strategy to give decision makers viable options. Additionally, the military needs to ensure an effective indirect capability is maintained at all times and not continually re-learned during conflicts only to be discarded immediately afterwards. Lastly, a mechanism to ensure a timely switch between direct and indirect attack strategies, as appropriate, would help bring conflicts to an end much sooner instead of allowing insurgencies the chance to build and strengthen.

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