

Stability Operations: From the Post-Vietnam War Era to Today

**A Monograph
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Abstract

STABILITY OPERATIONS: FROM THE POST-VIETNAM WAR ERA TO TODAY by Mr. Jimmy M. Phillips, U.S. Army, 51 pages.

As operations in Iraq and Afghanistan end, it is useful to analyze the current state of stability operations within the U.S. Army and determine its ability to conduct these types of operations in the future. Analyzing the state of stability operations in the post-Vietnam War era gives us a useful benchmark in analyzing the current state of the Army's ability to conduct stability operations. A study of the de-evolution of stability operations doctrine in the period between the end of the Vietnam War and the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) provides insight on how prepared the U.S. Army was in conducting stability operations at the beginning of GWOT. The peacekeeping missions of the 1990s also provide insight into the ability of the Army to conduct stability operations, and are helpful to compare the operations of the 1990s with the operations in the first decade of the 2000s. Finally, by analyzing how both operations on the ground and doctrinal changed in GWOT, this monograph provides insight into the adaptability of the Army in executing these types of operations. The important question for future study is the U.S. Army's level of preparedness in conducting stability operations in the future.

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Introduction

Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult.

--Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

True to the quotation above, there is nothing easy about the U.S. military conducting stability operations, and its level of difficulty increases exponentially when attempted in a non-permissive environment. Following the early success of major combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq in the early stages of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), providing a safe and secure environment to allow stability to occur has proven difficult indeed. One has only to look at the long history of the U.S. military to get a sense of the importance of the military's role in stabilizing nations during and after major combat operations.¹ Were the initial failures of the U.S. military in conducting stability operations in the beginning stages of GWOT a classic case of "those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it?" Alternatively, were there other factors involved in the initial failure? Did the success in stemming violence in Iraq beginning in 2007 occur because of a sudden change in strategy, a view held by the majority of the American public, or was it the result of an "intellectual rethinking" of stability operations over the course of GWOT?² How did the military learn to get stability operations right, and were the successes due

¹ The U.S. Army's Combined Arms Center, Combat Studies Institute's annual Military History Symposium at Fort Leavenworth, KS provides excellent examples of the historical significance of the U.S. military conducting stability operations. Brian M. De Toy, ed, *Turning Victory Into Success: Military Operations After the Campaign* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004). Kendall D. Gott and Michael G. Brooks, eds., *Security Assistance: U.S. and International Historical Perspectives* (Ft Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006).

² The White House's message to the American public was that this was the result of a "new strategy" focused on stability operations/counterinsurgency and resulted in the "surge." See White House, "President's Address to the Nation," 10 January 2007. The publication of FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency* (2006) corresponded to this "new strategy."

to a change in strategy or innovation on the ground? More importantly, are the policies and procedures in place to ensure the same missteps do not occur in future campaigns requiring the U.S. military to conduct stability operations?

Before tackling these questions, a review of terminology is required. In recent literature, the terms “stability operations” and “counterinsurgency” (COIN) are often synonymous.³ In current Joint and Army doctrine, the terms have a distinct flavor.⁴ Nevertheless, much of the current literature, from both military and civilian writers, use the terms interchangeably. Additionally, military writers often use the term counterinsurgency when discussing operations involving stability operation tasks.⁵ The Army identifies stability operations as one of the major components of full spectrum operations in FM 3-0, *Operations*, for operations conducted outside the U.S. It is prudent to discuss COIN within the larger context of stability operations.⁶ Thus, though in a permissive environment stability operations by definition will not have a COIN component, when this monograph discusses COIN it is within the context of the larger goal of stability.

³ According to one definition, the “difference between stability operations and counterinsurgency campaigns is often not very pronounced, if at all extant” See David H. Ucko, *The New Counterinsurgency Era* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 65.

⁴ Joint Publication 1-02, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, (As Amended Through 15 May 2011) defines stability operations as “an overarching term encompassing various military missions to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief,” while counterinsurgency is defined as “comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances.” The distinction becomes blurred on the battlefield but most would certainly agree that the goal of counterinsurgency is stability.

⁵ According to U.S. Department of the Army Field Manual 3-07, *Stability Operations*, (Washington, DC: October 2008), 2-5; stability operations tasks are to: establish civil security, establish civil control, restore essential services, support to governance, and support to economic and infrastructure development.

⁶ U.S. Department of the Army Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, (Washington, DC: February 2008), Chapter 3.

This monograph recognizes the difficulty of combining stability operations and COIN into the same vernacular. COIN, in particular, is often seen under the umbrella of overarching doctrinal terms. According to FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, insurgency and COIN are included in the broader concept of irregular warfare.⁷ According to the current FM 3-0, *Operations*, irregular warfare is one of the operational themes conducted within joint military operations, along with peacetime military engagement, limited intervention, and peace operations.⁸ Of the four operational themes, stability operations are more likely to be conducted within irregular warfare and peace operations. This monograph will note the differences between conducting stability operations in the peace operations of the 1990s with the irregular warfare operations conducted in the first decade of the 21st century. Additionally, the outdated terms low intensity conflict and operations other than war (OOTW) are examined as doctrinal phrases in the initial phases of GWOT. Finally, this monograph recognizes the evolutionary nature of terminology in the conduct of warfare. Hybrid threats blur the lines between the aforementioned operational themes with the enemy using a combination of conventional and unconventional warfare.⁹

This monograph consists of four sections. The first section, “Stability Operations Before GWOT” will provide a broad historical overview of the U.S. military’s forays into stability operations. The starting point for evaluating stability operations is the post-Vietnam era. This starting point is important in describing the stability operations experiences of officers who would

⁷ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*. (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, December 2006), 1-1.

⁸ U.S. Department of the Army Field Manual 3-0, Change 1, *Operations* (Washington, DC: 22 February 2011), 2-4.

⁹ See Joint Irregular Warfare Center, *Irregular Adversaries and Hybrid Threats: An Assessment - 2011* (Norfolk, VA: Joint Forces Command, 2011), http://www.ccoportal.org/sites/ccportal.org/files/irregular_adversaries_and_hybrid_threats_-_an_assessment-2011.pdf (accessed 15 September 2011).

ultimately lead the GWOT effort. This section also surveys how the U.S. military conducted peace operations in the 1990s as well as how doctrine evolved. Examining stability operations in the post-Vietnam War allows a potential outcome of stability operations in the post-GWOT era. Will stability operations continue to evolve or will the military turn its attention elsewhere? Ultimately, this section examines the preparedness of the U.S. military for conducting stability operations in the beginning stages of GWOT.

The second section, “Stability Operations in the Beginning of GWOT” charts the strategic context of initial GWOT operations and the means by which the U.S. military turned strategic directives into action. This section also examines innovative approaches by individual brigade commanders and the means by which they effectively executed stability operations. Finally, this section will examine how stability operations doctrine began to slowly change but was unable to keep up with the innovation displayed by the commanders on the ground.

The third section, “The Emergence” examines the commonly held belief that beginning in early 2007 the changing of strategy and stability operations/COIN doctrine resulted in sudden successes in Iraq and Afghanistan. This section examines the “surges” in OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) in 2007 and OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) in 2010 and assesses their respective roles in improving stability. Additionally, this section reviews the evolution of stability/COIN operations doctrine by examining the influence of innovative successes conducted by brigade commanders in OIF and its role in setting the stage for success in the theater. The fourth section, “Future Considerations” will look at the state of stability/COIN operations as we move past Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM/NEW DAWN. This section will examine the state of the U.S. military in conducting stability operations in the future and provides suggestions for the conduct of future stability operations. This section also explores whether or not we should anticipate a stability operations “fatigue” analogous to the period after the Vietnam War.

The intent of this monograph is to examine the evolution of stability operations and show similarities between the post-Vietnam War and post-GWOT eras in the Army's attempt to prepare for the next war. The post-Vietnam War era clearly had a more salient mission, the defense of Europe and the defeat of the Soviet Union. The post-GWOT era is a little more ambiguous in determining the prevailing existential threat. However, the danger exists, similar to the post-Vietnam War era, to disregard the substantial gains in institutional knowledge on conducting stability operations that were hard won during GWOT. While there is some concern that the Army is on a course to repeat the same mistakes, the analysis is not final, and there is time to change course. Military leaders must recognize this fact and ensure that the tendency to not "fight the last war" negates the current institutional knowledge of stability operations.

Stability Operations before GWOT

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the United States has conducted generally successful efforts with reconstruction and stability operations in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Germany, Italy, Japan, Austria, and South Korea.¹⁰ However, repeatedly the U.S. military has failed to capitalize on these successes and had to relearn stability operations in the next conflict. As Russell F. Weigley explains, "Whenever after the Revolution the American Army had to conduct a counter-guerrilla campaign—the Second Seminole War of 1835-1842, the Filipino Insurrection of 1899-1903, and in Vietnam in 1965-1973—it found itself almost without an institutional memory of such experiences, had to relearn appropriate tactics at exorbitant costs,

¹⁰ Conrad C. Crane, "Phase IV Operations: Where Wars are Really Won," in *Turning Victory Into Success: Military Operations After the Campaign* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, September 2004), 2.

and yet tended after each episode to regard it as an aberration that need not be repeated.”¹¹

Contrary to the popular perception that the military refight the last war, it is sometimes the case that citizens and the generals that serve them are eager to forget the last war.

The U.S. Army’s troubled history with stability operations stems most fundamentally from its self-perception as a force intended for major combat operations.¹² With victory, the Army instinctively returned to the topic of conventional war, its initial experience with irregular operations having done little to inform its later evolution.¹³ John D. Waghelstein noted, “there is seemingly something in the Army’s DNA that historically precludes it from preparing itself in serious way until the dam breaks.”¹⁴ The U.S. Army did not develop the training, education, and doctrine necessary to prepare for stability/COIN operations in their campaigns

During the course of its commitment to Vietnam, the U.S. military devoted considerable resources to conducting stability and counterinsurgency operations. The initial counterinsurgency policy in Vietnam combined military action with development and reform. The implementation of this policy was through the form of pacification beginning with military operations that expelled insurgents, followed by South Vietnam government officials to reestablish public services.¹⁵ Training emphasized psychological operations and civil affairs with these subjects becoming a required subject for officer candidate, basic, and career courses, as well as the

¹¹ Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), 36.

¹² John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 43-44.

¹³ Robert Cassidy, *Peacekeeping in the Abyss: British, and American Peacekeeping Doctrine, and Practice after the Cold War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 88.

¹⁴ John D. Waghelstein, “What’s Wrong in Iraq? Or Ruminations of a Pachyderm,” *Military Review* 86, no. 1 (January-February 2006), 112.

¹⁵ Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2006), 16-17.

Command and General Staff College (CGSC).¹⁶ The Army also insisted that every soldier receive some exposure to counterinsurgency training. West Point devoted 103 lessons to counterinsurgency-related instruction by 1966. By 1968, nearly half of the infantry basic course was devoted to counterinsurgency subjects.¹⁷ Similarly, CGSC increased counterinsurgency instruction significantly, growing from about 92 hours of instruction in 1965 to 200 hours by 1968.¹⁸ Clearly, the U.S. military saw counterinsurgency to be an essential element of the Vietnam War.

Additionally, the U.S. military expended great effort to revise its stability operations/COIN doctrine during the Vietnam War. Many new manuals were written, old ones refined, and lessons learned codified. The Army also made a concerted effort to heighten aspects of stability and counterinsurgency operations, particularly in civil affairs, psychological operations, and intelligence. Overall, Army doctrine emerged from the war years with a fairly balanced and realistic portrayal of the many facets and challenges of stability operations and counterinsurgency. The intent of this monograph is not to enter the debate concerning the effectiveness of the U.S. military's conduct of stability/COIN operations in the Vietnam War. Regardless of how one assesses the effectiveness, it is clear that the U.S. military *did* emphasize and expend a great deal of energy and resources to these types of operations during this conflict. More important is whether the military would continue to expand upon the synergy produced by the Vietnam War concerning stability operations, or would the emphasis be placed elsewhere.

¹⁶ Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2007), 456.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 457-459.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 461.

The section that follows examines what came from this investment in the years following the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Post-Vietnam Era

The U.S. military went through a fundamental change in the 1970s following Vietnam. After the obsession with counterinsurgency in the 1960s, in the decades following the popular refrain was – “no more Vietnams.” This view would doom the evolution of stability and counterinsurgency operations and prevent garnering lessons learned from the conflict. As early as 1973, the Army conducted a study group to assess the service’s future. Since America’s greatest strategic interests lay in Europe and the greatest threat to those interests was the massive armed might of the Soviet Union, the group concluded that the Army should devote its dwindling resources to the defense of Western Europe by conventional forces. The prevailing Nixon administration policy following Vietnam was not to be militarily involved in low intensity conflicts (LIC). Accordingly, the U.S. Army decreased the size of its special forces from thirteen thousand in 1971 to less than three thousand in 1974.¹⁹ Stability and counterinsurgency operations would return to the periphery of military affairs.

Although the Army possessed a sizeable pool of combat veterans experienced in conducting stability and counterinsurgency operations, many of these soldiers lacked conventional warfare training. The Army responded by reemphasizing conventional training. In 1971, the service deleted stability operations orientation from basic combat courses. Following suit, CGSC reduced stability operations instruction to a mere eight hours by 1979.²⁰

¹⁹ Richard Lock-Pullan, “An Inward Looking Time: The United States Army, 1973-1976,” *Journal of Military History*, 67, no. 2 (April 2003), 486.

²⁰ Birtle, 479-480.

A similar de-evolution was occurring in doctrine following Vietnam. In 1974, FM 100-20, *Internal Defense and Development* eliminated the stability operations term. This manual was the codification of the Nixon Doctrine that stated that host countries bore the primary responsibility for its own defense during an insurgency.²¹ It was not until the release of FM 100-20, *Low Intensity Conflict*, in 1981 that ended almost a decade of silence on such operations. In 1986, the Army updated its capstone FM 100-5, *Operations*, which for the first time in more than a decade emphasized the need for the Army to master operations across the spectrum, including counterinsurgency. This new emphasis had some speaking of the 1980s as having “ushered in a new counterinsurgency era.”²² However, the new capstone doctrine emphasized that low intensity conflicts were secondary by stating, “while Air Land Battle Doctrine (ALB) focuses primarily on mid- to high-intensity warfare, the tenets of ALB apply equally to the military operations characteristic of low intensity war.”²³ Thus, stability operations and counterinsurgency would not receive special attention and deemed to have the same characteristics of mid- and high-intensity warfare.

Any pretense that the military was seriously considering stability operations in the 1980s were abandoned with the introduction of the “Weinberger Doctrine” by the then Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, on November 28, 1984. This doctrine prescribed that when the U.S. military deploys it would maintain domestic support by employing overwhelming force and thereby achieve a quick victory, presumably the destruction of the targeted enemy. Among other prerequisites for the commitment of U.S. troops, it precluded the use of force unless there was a

²¹ Rod Paschall, “Low-Intensity Conflict Doctrine: Who Needs it?” *Parameters*, 15, no. 3, 42

²² Ucko, 32.

²³ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1986), 6.

clear exit strategy and U.S. troops were “committed wholeheartedly and with the clear intention of winning.”²⁴ Messy, protracted, and extensive stability operation campaigns were clearly not something the Department of Defense was eager to conduct.

The invasion of Panama by U.S. forces in 1989 intend to oust dictator Manuel Noreiga from power , named OPERATION JUST CAUSE, validated the tenets of the Weinberger Doctrine, and corresponding avoidance of stability operations. The post-conflict stabilization phase of OPERATION JUST CAUSE, named *Blind Logic*, lacked coherent planning and its application resulted in the looting and criminality that followed the collapse of the Panamanian government.²⁵ General Maxwell Thurman, Commander-in-Chief (CINC) of the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) later remarked “I did not even spend five minutes on *Blind Logic* during my briefing as the incoming CINC... We put together the campaign plan for JUST CAUSE and probably did not spend enough time on the restoration.”²⁶ Thus, the legacy of the Weinberger Doctrine prevented a long lasting conflict whereby stability operations were necessary. This assumption would be tested during the peacekeeping operations of the 1990s, as the next section will prove.

Peacekeeping Operations in the 1990s

The U.S. military’s operational experience with peacekeeping and peace enforcement during the 1990s in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo strongly affected its of stability operations

²⁴ See Caspar W. Weinberger. “The Uses of Military Power.” Remarks to the National Press Club, November 28, 1984. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, News Release No. 609-84.

²⁵ Jennifer Morrison Taw, *Operation Just Cause: Lessons for Operations Other than War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1995).

²⁶ Richard H. Schultz, Jr., *In the Aftermath of War: U.S. Support for Reconstruction and Nation-Building in Panama following Just Cause* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1993).

as it moved into the twenty-first century.²⁷ It would seem that the virtually uninterrupted institutional experience with Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) would have prepared the armed forces for stability operations.²⁸ After all, both stability operations and MOOTW tend to be protracted civil-military affairs, occurring principally in urban environments and requiring restraint, legitimacy, and political astuteness on the part of the intervening force.²⁹ Additionally, an inter-service discourse was occurring over the lessons of the Gulf War. The Army was fending off airpower advocates who believed that future warfare would be won by precision airpower alone. These impediments to stability operations would require a supreme effort to overcome.

At first there appeared to be promising signs of the revival of stability operations. There were notable initiatives relating to stability operations during the 1990s. These included the opening of the Peacekeeping Institute in 1993 by Army Chief of Staff General Gordon Sullivan; the issuing of the Army's FM 100-23, *Peace Operations*, in 1994; and of Joint Publication 3-07, *Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other than War*, in 1995. Yet, the only place that addressed stability operations in 1990s doctrine was in FM 100-23's two-paragraph section on "restoration and maintenance of order and stability," which stated:

Military forces may be employed to restore order and stability within a state or region where competent civil authority has ceased to function. They may be called upon to assist in the maintenance of order and stability in areas where it is threatened, where the loss of order and stability threatens international stability,

²⁷ OPERATION RESTORE HOPE in Somalia, 1992-1993, attempted to protect humanitarian relief efforts; OPERATION UPHOLD DEMOCRACY in Haiti, 1994-1995, was an intervention to remove a military dictator from power; OPERATION JOINT ENDEAVOR in Bosnia, 1995-1996, relieved the NATO forces and enforced the Dayton Peace Accords; U.S. involvement in Kosovo took the form of participation in the Kosovo Force (KFOR) in 1999, a NATO-led peacekeeping force responsible for establishing a secure environment.

²⁸ Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) in Joint doctrine, Operations Other Than War (OOTW) in Army doctrine.

²⁹ Ucko, 48.

or where human rights are endangered.”³⁰

The U.S. military was attempting to come to grips with the types of operations it was conducting in the 1990s. However, the institution was in conflict concerning the nature of these operations. Exactly what were they? Peace operations? Military operations other than war? Nothing that had occurred in the previous decade had prepared the U.S. military to conduct these operations and it found itself struggling to describe the type of operation that it was conducting.

The peace operations of the 1990s would prove to be radically different from the stability operations of the first decade of the 21st century. With the exception of the Somalia intervention in 1992-1994, the missions of the 1990s were all in semi-permissive environments, where U.S. ground troops only rarely faced armed resistance.³¹ Rather than reassess the grounding assumptions of peace operations and prepare for future stability operations conducted in non-permissive environments, the U.S. government reacted to the experience by seeking to avoid any peace operation that might risk U.S. combat troops.³² Future humanitarian operations were to operate according to a clear timetable and exit strategy. In short, the Weinberger Doctrine applied to peace operations with a view to reduce risk to U.S. combat forces.³³ The Weinberger Doctrine could not foresee the types of operations inherent within GWOT and proved to be a poor model for future operations.

³⁰ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-23, *Peace Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, December 1994), 7.

³¹ The Bosnian War was not always permissive. NATO military intervention against the Serbs in 1995 proved key in ending the conflict.

³² Neil MacFarlane, *Intervention in Contemporary World Politics*, Adelphis Papers, No. 350. (Oxford: OUP for International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2002), 61.

³³ Ivo H. Daalder, “Knowing When to Say No: The Development of U.S. Policy for Peacekeeping,” in William Durch, ed., *UN Peacekeeping, American Politics, and the Uncivil Wars of the 1990s* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1996), 36.

As it turned out, the U.S. military failed to learn from the 1990s' peace operations that nation building is a protracted process and stability operations would be required for a long period. The semi-permissiveness of the 1990s' campaigns had two pernicious effects on the U.S. military's understanding and prioritization of stability operations. First, it encouraged a view within the U.S. military that operations short of war were "lesser-included" cases, simpler than high-intensity combat not requiring any special training so therefore could be immediately resolved prior to deployment. Second, the distraction of conducting these operations eroded the U.S. military's readiness to conduct conventional combat. Thereby the U.S. military created a mind frame that someone other than the U.S. military should conduct these missions.³⁴ Clearly, the avoidance of counterinsurgency operations due to the U.S. experience in Vietnam was still fresh in the mind of our military leaders. Wesley Clark noted that the lesson from Vietnam was that these "voluntary" wars were "efforts to stop war or provide humanitarian assistance" and that casualties in these protracted affairs would not be accepted by the American government nor the American public.³⁵

By this logic it was natural and justifiable for DoD to devote most of its attention and resources to high-intensity war and to marginalize all types of MOOTW, including stability operations. The doctrine of the time reflected this bias. Although the field manuals of the 1990s talked of "full-dimensional operations," this was taken to mean, "employing all means available to accomplish any given mission decisively and at the least cost."³⁶ While winning decisively and at a low cost of soldiers life is an admirable goal, stability operations is likely to put soldiers in

³⁴ Ucko, 50.

³⁵ Wesley Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2002), 437-438.

³⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1993), 1-4.

danger. The type of force protection conducted in major combat operations is likely an obstacle to conducting effective stability operations. Importantly, the ambiguity of peace operations extended to all operations short of war and therefore tainted the prospect of committing U.S. troops to stability operations. The confusion of peacekeeping with stability operations reflects the U.S. military's erroneous conflation of all operations other than conventional war into one analytical category.³⁷ An attempt to clarify and expand the concept of OOTW in doctrinal evolution of FM 100-5, *Operations* was circumvented by the writing team being reassigned before the manual's publication. This widely accepted re-write was never published and delayed the publication of a new operational doctrine until the publication of FM 3-0 in 2001.³⁸ The trend to lump all operations into conventional warfare was reinforced by the U.S. military's experience with conventional campaigns during the 1990s, in which the emerging technologies associated with the Revolution of Military Affairs (RMA)—including satellites, precision bombing, and information technology—had appeared to provide a means of avoiding the pitfalls of complex ground operations.³⁹ These trends would carry over into the next century, and would describe how the military viewed stability operations going into GWOT.

This was the status of stability operations at the turn of the new century. The new U.S. President, George W. Bush, made no secret of where he stood with regard to U.S. military participation in stability operations. "I don't think our troops ought to be used for what's called nation-building," Bush contended during the 2000 presidential debate. "I think our troops ought

³⁷ Though President Clinton's Presidential Decision Directive 56, Managing Complex Contingency Operations, issued May 1997, sought to resolve interagency responsibilities in said operations, it did not change the military's review of lumping all military operations into one category. See PDD 56 <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd56.htm> (accessed 17 September 2011).

³⁸ Robert T. Davis II, *The Challenge of Adaptation: The U.S. Army in the Aftermath of Conflict, 1953-2000*, The Long War Series, Occasional Paper 27 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2008), 92-96.

³⁹ Ucko, 51.

to be used to fight and win war.”⁴⁰ Instead of conducting nation building, Bush wanted the U.S. military to take advantage of the “strategic pause” in international relations to make the RMA a reality. To implement this agenda, Bush appointed Donald Rumsfeld to become Secretary of Defense on January 20, 2001. Rumsfeld took immediate steps to capitalize on the seemingly revolutionary developments in information technology, with RMA rebranded as “Transformation.” Transformation became a dominant theme in the Pentagon’s September 30, 2001, Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). This QDR made no mention of stability operations (QDR, 2001). However the document did declare that the capability to achieve decisive victory “will include the ability to occupy territory or set the conditions for regime change if so desired,” something that would presumably involve stabilization and reconstruction activities.⁴¹ While the QDR was “one of the first documents to state directly that the U.S. military must be capable of unseating any enemy government and occupying an enemy country...it did not consider the consequences of the policy of regime change that it openly accepted as a possible military mission.”⁴² Ironically, this was a situation that the military would soon find itself facing.

Stability Operations in the Beginning of GWOT

The dramatic events of 11 September 2001 quickly changed the U.S. military’s focus from peacekeeping missions in Europe to combatting the terrorists that were responsible for that day’s terrible events. On that day, a relative small number of U.S. Army units were on

⁴⁰ The second Gore-Bush presidential debate of October 11, 2000, can be retrieved at Commission on Presidential Debates (www.debates.org)

⁴¹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2001* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, September 30, 2001), 5.

⁴² Frederick W. Kagan, *Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006), 285-286.

peacekeeping missions in the Balkans and the Sinai desert. Many Soldiers realized that their country was now preparing for war and that they would likely be called on to act against their country's enemies. Like the unconventional attack that struck America, the U.S. campaign in response did not resemble past armed conflicts, a fact that led President Bush to describe it as "a different kind of war."⁴³ A war not between nation states, but a war where one side consists of various anti-Western terrorist groups throughout the world. This was the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism.

Operation Enduring Freedom

Within hours of the attack, President Bush identified the radical Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda as the likely perpetrator of the attacks and began preparing the U.S. military for retaliation actions.⁴⁴ In the beginning stages of OEF, U.S. forces deployed to countries surrounding Afghanistan, and U.S. warships collected offshore in the Arabian Gulf. U.S. Special Forces, in cooperation with the Northern Alliance and disgruntled ethnic Pashtuns who rallied in opposition to the Taliban in the south, conducted a lightning-fast military campaign that featured precision U.S. bombing and missile strikes of Taliban forces and ground assaults by Afghan fighters. The Taliban was quickly routed and a void in governance ensued. In its place, an interim government, made up of anti-Taliban factions and headed by Hamid Karzai, took power in Kabul. Five thousand peacekeepers of the International Security Assistance Force, established by the United Nations Security Council on 20 December 2001 in accordance with Resolution 1386, formed to

⁴³ George W. Bush, "Radio Address from the President to the Nation," 29 September 2001. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010929.html> (accessed 19 June 2011).

⁴⁴ Donald P. Wright, *A Different Kind of War: The United States Army in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM October 2001-September 2005* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, May 2010), 1.

support the new government with U.S. military forces continuing to pursue remnants of the Taliban and al Qaeda. On 11 October, President Bush stated in a nationally televised press conference that the United States would remain to help stabilize post-Taliban Afghanistan once the military mission was completed.⁴⁵ The president's statement immediately rekindled the argument over whether stability operations were relevant to U.S. strategic interests.⁴⁶ Though regime change frequently involves a power vacuum, the role of the U.S. military in the stabilization effort was initially unclear.

Despite the President's remarks on 11 October, the White House and Pentagon approach to OEF saw no role for the U.S. military in the international stabilization force, the International Security Assistance Forces, or in stability operations in general. This was clear in Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's comments on 16 December 2001: "We don't think of ourselves as being part of the security force in Kabul... What we want to do is to capture or kill the senior Taliban leadership and see that they are punished... With respect to Al Qaeda, we want to capture or kill the senior leadership and imprison the remainder... When those things are accomplished from a military standpoint, we will have done our job."⁴⁷ The role of the U.S. military in the stabilization effort was clear. Its job was done and now was the time to turn over stabilization to someone else.

There were many reasons behind the reluctance to commit U.S. troops to the stabilization of Afghanistan. First, the missions in the Balkans persuaded both the White House and Pentagon

⁴⁵ George W. Bush, "Radio Address from the President to the Nation," 11 October 2001. <http://www.cnn.com/2001/U.S./10/11/gen.bush.transcript> (accessed 20 June 2011).

⁴⁶ Robert M. Perito, *Where is the Lone Ranger When We Need Him? America's Search for Postconflict Stability Force* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2004), 253-255.

⁴⁷ "Go After Them and Destroy Them." *Washington Post*, Excerpts from interview with Donald Rumsfeld conducted by *Newsweek-Washington Post* correspondent Lally Weymouth, 16 December 2001.

that its European coalition partners were capable of undertaking stabilization tasks. In a press conference on 17 April 2002, Secretary Rumsfeld explained that “if it’s appropriate to put in more forces for war-fighting tasks, the United States will do that” but that “there are plenty of countries on the face of the Earth who can supply peacekeepers.”⁴⁸ The rationale behind this burden sharing, Rumsfeld continued, was that the U.S. military should conduct only strike and advisory missions. This stance was informed by the U.S. military’s growing disregard for MOOTW, including stability operations, as interminable and as of lesser importance, a mind-set shaped by its memory of the 1990s’ peacekeeping missions.⁴⁹

The Bonn Agreement of 5 December 2001 requested the United Nations to authorize the development of a security force to assist in maintaining security in Kabul and its surrounding areas. On 20 December 2001, the UN Security Council approved the first resolution authorizing the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Throughout 2002 and most of 2003, command of ISAF was rotated in six month increments by various nations. However, because of the difficulty in securing new lead nations, by August 2003, NATO agreed to take over the duties of ISAF, thereby transferring control of ISAF from UN to NATO. Initially, UN peacekeepers did not show up in sufficient numbers, and even when they did, their mission was simply to secure Kabul. The new Afghan regime in Kabul was too weak to assert control over its territory and resolve the substantial obstacles facing it. The key challenges included security issues, population

⁴⁸ Donald Rumsfeld, “Special Briefing on the Unified Command Plan,” Arlington, VA, 17 April 2002.

⁴⁹ This was becoming apparent in the Kosovo War in 1999. See Wesley Clark, *Waging Modern War*, pgs XXII, 137 and 163,

movements, food security, environment and infrastructure, health, and education.⁵⁰ Reacting to the worsening conditions, the U.S. military laid out plans “to disperse teams of combat soldiers, civil affairs specialists and Afghan troops around the nation to help secure the countryside and boost reconstruction efforts.”⁵¹ The Combined Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force (CJCMOTF) began to think of innovative ways to improve the Afghanistan reconstruction efforts. The result was the development of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) with three pilots PRTs established in early 2003 with the U.S. as the lead country. These teams would be made up on not only military members but also at least one representative from USAID, Department of State, and the Department of Agriculture. Despite the fact that the logistical, transportation, and security needs of the PRTs took resources away from Combined Task Force 82 (CTF 82), the CTF 82 commander, MG Vines, concluded that the PRTs made a positive overall contribution to CJTF-180’s campaign even in their first months of operation.”⁵² The first signs of the innovative and adaptive nature of the U.S. military were beginning to show in conducting stability operations. However, the focus of the U.S. military would turn to Iraq as military resources were diverted to the invasion of Iraq and OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM.

Operation Iraqi Freedom

⁵⁰ Rhoda Margesson , Afghanistan’s Path to Reconstruction: Obstacles, Challenges, and Issues for Congress, *CRS Report for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 8 April 2002), <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/9662.pdf> (accessed 17 September 2011)

⁵¹ Bradley Graham, “Pentagon Plans a Redirection in Afghanistan: Troops to Be Shifted into Rebuilding Country,” *Washington Post*, November 20, 2002.

⁵² Wright, 226-229. In June 2002, Combined Joint Task Force-180 (CJTF-180), commanded by LTG Dan K. McNeill, became the headquarters responsible for the Coalition’s campaign in Afghanistan. CTF 82, commanded by the 82nd Airborne Division’s MG Vines, was a CJTF-180 subordinate unit and its primary means of engaging the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

When President Bush named Iraq as part of the “axis of evil” during a State of Union address on 29 January 2002, speculation about a renewed war with Iraq came to the forefront. Although coalition forces remained engaged in combat operations in Afghanistan, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) shifted focus toward a possible offensive campaign to remove Saddam’s regime. By the spring of 2002, CENTCOM planners had laid out the broad outline of what would eventually become the campaign known as Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. As planning continued through the summer of 2002, the campaign’s basic outlined took shape. CENTCOM’s main effort would be a ground attack out of Kuwait to defeat Iraqi forces, isolate the regime in Baghdad, remove the regime from control of the country, and transition to security operations after major combat operations were complete. On 19 March 2003, OIF would begin with the “shock and awe,” a decapitation strike intended to kill Saddam Hussein and the senior regime leadership.⁵³ On 1 May 2003, President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq were completed. The next step was transition to stability operations.

The U.S. military’s experience in Iraq accelerated the reorientation to stability operations. There the successful overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in April 2003 was giving way to a protracted phase of instability, marked by political uncertainty, a rapidly deteriorating security situation, and violent attacks on U.S. forces, their Iraqi partners, and international workers. The U.S. military in Iraq assumed control over a stability operation larger in scale and complexity than anything it had previously undertaken, at the very least since the Vietnam War. The task entrusted to the U.S. military far exceeded its capacity and preparation for post conflict stabilization. Pentagon planning for “Phase IV,” the post conflict phase, assumed that the destruction of the regime would lead seamlessly to the installation of Iraqi exiles and other

⁵³ Ibid, 86.

caretaker figures in a new transitional government. DoD's postwar planning thus concerned other matters, primarily the recovery of Saddam's alleged stocks of weapons of mass destruction, the provision of humanitarian assistance, and the resettlement of displaced civilians.⁵⁴ Despite attempts to think about Phase IV, the assumptions made were sufficiently discordant with decisions made in Washington DC and Baghdad to invalidate much of the planning effort.

The allegation that the United States Central Command (USCENTOM) did not have a plan for Phase IV is patently incorrect. Though by the admission of one of its planners in Phase IV planning (named Operation ECLIPSE II):

The challenge was translating the plans into action while dealing with guidance and assumptions from higher echelons of command, the deployment process, and evolving policy. As a result, our plans never quite evolved to link ground operations to logical lines of operation that would lead to setting solid military conditions for policy objectives.⁵⁵

The assumptions concerning post conflict operations included "Opposition groups will work with us; co-opted Iraqi units will occupy garrisons and not fight either U.S. Forces or other Iraqi units;" the U.S. Department of State "will promote creation of a broad-based, credible provisional government-prior to D-Day;" and the number of U.S. troops in theater will be reduced to 5,000 by December 2006.⁵⁶ These particular assumptions were overly optimistic and were damaging in the initial stages of stability operations.

The U.S. military had planned to delegate the post conflict phase to the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA). ORHA was a coordinating body set up within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), but included personnel detailed from other

⁵⁴ Rowan Scarborough, *Rumsfeld's War* (Washington, DC: Regency, 2004), 181.

⁵⁵ Kevin Benson, "OIF Phase IV: A Planner's Reply to Brigadier Aylwin-Foster," *Military Review* 86, no. 8 (March-April 2006), 61.

⁵⁶ Scarborough, 174-181.

agencies. This division of labor failed in practice. Not only did ORHA lack resources, expertise, and policy coherence; it also had no mandate or capacity to address the growing insecurity of postwar Iraq, a fundamental prerequisite for reconstruction to occur.⁵⁷ Left with the consequences of this capacity gap, U.S. combat troops undertook tasks for which they had no plans, preparation, and guidance.

Facing criminality, looting, and escalating violence U.S. troops in Iraq developed improvised responses to an unfamiliar operating environment. A few units managed to devise sophisticated counterinsurgency strategies; these units had commanding officers with either firsthand knowledge of the 1990s' peace operations or advanced education, including doctoral degrees, in counterinsurgency-related topics.⁵⁸ The initial U.S. campaigns in OEF and OIF saw a number of successful units in the field internalize best practices through ad hoc adaptation.⁵⁹ The learning curve was, however, highly uneven, with several units adopting a predominately enemy-centered approach to their area of operation, geared almost exclusively toward the physical elimination and incarceration of those opposing the U.S. effort. With a narrow focus on rooting out terrorists and Saddam sympathizers, yet with scant intelligence on the adversary, these units conducted indiscriminate sweep and cordon-and-search operations, whose aggressiveness generally served to alienate Iraq civilians and generate more resistance.⁶⁰ While some

⁵⁷ Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: the American Military Adventure in Iraq* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 203-206.

⁵⁸ See Rick Atkinson, *In the Company of Soldiers: A Chronicle of Combat* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 286-303, for an account of then MG David Petraeus's comparatively successful experience in Mosul in 2003.

⁵⁹ See Atkinson, 297-303; Ricks, 419-424; and Henry D. Tunnell IV, *Red Devils: Tactical Perspectives from Iraq* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 19-20, for examples of innovative commanders applying successfully ad hoc solutions.

⁶⁰ See George Packer, "The Lesson of Tal Afar." *The New Yorker*, April 20, 2006.

commanders were successful others found their previous education and experience lacking in this complex environment.

In August 2005, Commander of Multi-National Force Iraq (General Casey) commissioned Colonel William Hix, Chief of the MNF-I strategy office, and Kalev Sepp, a COIN expert at the Naval Postgraduate School, to survey U.S. units to determine their COIN proficiency. The survey found that 20 percent of units in the field were demonstrating COIN proficiency; 60 percent were struggling to reorient themselves; and 20 percent of the units showed little COIN proficiency at all.⁶¹ The more creative and flexible commanders improvised effectively and devised new methods adapted to local conditions, while other have not. Some have shown greater initiative than others have in military operations or intelligence collection or civil affairs. Success in building relationships with key local power players has varied widely from one place to another according to the social skills and competence of the American commander on the scene. From the early experiences in Iraq, senior Army generals recognized an insufficiency in creativity and flexibility among certain officers and took effective remedial measures, from training and education to promotion and command selection. A number of Army generals also concluded that risk-aversion within the service was impeding initiative, and they sought to promote risk-taking.⁶² Not only education and training determined a successful commander in COIN/stability operations. Another key ingredient for success was the willingness to accept risk, an essential element for operational art.

⁶¹ James A. Russell, *Innovation, Transformation and War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 5.

⁶² Mark Moyer, "Counterinsurgency Leadership: The Key to Afghanistan and Iraq," in *Counterinsurgency Leadership in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Beyond*, edited by Nicholas J. Schlosser and James M. Caiella (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2011), 13.

An addition problem with the U.S. military conducting consistent stability operations is that the “can-do” spirit of the U.S. military was running counter to prudent realism. As noted by Eliot Cohen, at the beginning of every rotation every unit would invariably report that the situation was much worse than they believed before they deployed. At the six-month mark, the unit would report cautious optimism, and by the end of the rotation would report the achievement of hard won irreversible momentum. Then the next unit would fall in on the first, and report once again, that the situation would worse than they had imagined and the process began again.⁶³ The causality led to an inconsistency in American policies at the tactical level, the level that was most notable to the Iraqi community.

This lack of consistency was directly due to the brigade and battalion commanders receiving little in the way of theater headquarters-level guidance on how to conduct stability/counterinsurgency operations. It is clear that the improved performance of certain American units in Iraq during 2005-6 occurred in the absence of competent top-down direction from the highest level of the civilian and military hierarchy. The White House, State Department, Defense Department, Joint Staff, CENTCOM, and MNF-I appeared incapable of jointly formulating and directing the execution of a unified strategic plan in Iraq that linked the application of military force to clearly defined political objectives.⁶⁴ That brigade and battalion level commanders were able to conduct operations, which influenced strategy, is the true application of military operational art.

⁶³ Elliott A. Cohen, “Supreme Command in Irregular Warfare,” in *Counterinsurgency Leadership in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Beyond*, edited by Nicholas J. Schlosser and James M. Caiella (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2011), 20.

⁶⁴ Russell, 4.

Initial Attempt at Top-Down Approach

It is thus necessary to make a distinction between bottom-up adaptation and top-down learning. Whereas the former suggests changes in tactics, techniques and procedures implemented on the group, the latter involves the institutionalization of these practices through changes in training, doctrine, education, and force structure. Ambassador Eric S. Edelman, U.S.

Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, stated in 2006 that the ongoing adaptation seen in Iraq demonstrated that, “great progress has been made on the ground by our civilians and our military, who have learned to work together and have adapted in innovative ways to meet these challenges. However, for every ingenious adaption we see in the field, we should ask ourselves-what institutional failure were they trying to overcome? What tools did we fail to provide them?”⁶⁵ Every policymaker should ask these important questions concerning the application of military forces.

One year into the Iraq campaign stability operations gradually became more relevant to the senior echelons of the Pentagon. At this point, the DoD leadership came to see the instability in postwar Iraq as a crucial challenge to the installation of a democratic and stable regime. In February 2003, the Army released FM 3-07, *Stability Operations and Support Operations*, and devoted two chapters to these types of operations in the 2001 edition of FM 3-0, *Operations*. None of the previous publications on stability operations had signaled a change in the culture of the U.S. military or the manner in which its soldiers conducted such operations; they clearly did not do much in terms of preparing the Army for stability operations in Iraq.⁶⁶ In October 2004, after only five months of drafting, the U.S. Army issued FMI 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency*

⁶⁵ Eric Edelman, Ambassador and Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. Remarks at the DoS and DoD Counterinsurgent Conference. Washington, DC, September 28, 2006.

⁶⁶ Ucko, 69.

Operations, an interim field manual on counterinsurgency and the first doctrinal publication devoted exclusively to the topic since 1986. This doctrine was intended only as a stopgap measure, meant to provide preliminary guidance and gain time for the production of a new comprehensive counterinsurgency doctrine. Nonetheless, this 180-page document was already able to offer an extensive overview of the main characteristics of counterinsurgency, of the Army’s role in such campaigns, and of the nature and importance of PSYOPS and intelligence.⁶⁷ However, FMI 3-07-22 included only military tasks—security assistance, exercises, intelligence and communications sharing, logistics, and the use of U.S. combat forces—all geared toward the destruction of the enemy rather than the provision of security, of services, or of basic governance.⁶⁸ FM 3-07-22 stated without qualifications that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) “is the government agency responsible for nation building.”⁶⁹ Progress was being made, but still not there yet in terms of effective application of stability operations.

DoD Directive 3000.05: Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations, published on 28 November 2005, provided guidance on stability operation and established DoD policy that “assigned responsibilities within the Department of Defense...to conduct and support stability operations.”⁷⁰ The directive’s most notable provision was its policy statement that “stability operations are a core U.S. military mission that the Department of Defense shall be prepared to conduct and support” and that they “shall be given priority comparable to combat operations and be explicating addressed and

⁶⁷ Ibid, 66.

⁶⁸ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-07-22, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, October 2004), vii.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 3-2.

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of Defense. Department of Defense Directive 3000.05, *Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 28 November 2005), 1.

integrated across all DoD activities, including doctrine, organizations, training, education, material, leadership, personnel, facilities and planning.”⁷¹

In October 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice elaborated a new strategy for Iraq that recalled counterinsurgency best practices from Vietnam, Malaya, and elsewhere. She explained that “our political-military strategy has to be to clear, hold, and build: to clear areas from insurgency control, to hold them securely, and to build durable, national Iraqi institutions.”⁷² In contrast with the previous approach, this new strategy emphasized the so-called “oil-spot” technique, used to good effect against earlier insurgencies, whereby consolidating control in specific cities and regions ensures countrywide stability. The new strategy’s basis is on the operational experience of those commands who had achieved a comparative level of success in Iraq. The experience freshest in the minds of the administration was that of Army Colonel H.R. McMaster, who had commanded the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Tal Afar from May 2005 to February 2006. By adopting a community-oriented approach his unit was able to minimize violence in Tal Afar, turning a stronghold of insurgent activity into a U.S. success story in counterinsurgency.⁷³ Innovation at tactical commander level had an impact on determining national strategy in Iraq. Similar to what occurred during the Vietnam War, the U.S. military began to adapt its training to educate its officers on this ever-growing insurgency threat. The Command and General Staff College (CGSC) began to modify its officers’ course in late 2004, placing greater emphasis on cultural awareness, counterinsurgency, and stability operations. LTG David Petraeus, commanding the Combined Arms Center from October 2005 to February 2007,

⁷¹ Ibid, 2.

⁷² See Condoleezza Rice, “Iraq and U.S. Policy,” Opening Remarks before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Washington, DC, October 19, 2005.

⁷³ Packer, 52.

was able to cement this shift in priorities. By early 2006, the ten-month CGSC course included 201 hours of instruction on counterinsurgency and related topics out of a total of 555 hours of core curriculum.⁷⁴ MNF-I adopted this approach in November 2005, when General Casey opened the COIN Academy at Camp Taji, Iraq. Supplementing the often-uneven instruction in counterinsurgency that incoming troops were receiving prior to deployment, the academy provided a five-day course of topics ranging on stability operations and counterinsurgency theory.⁷⁵ The professional articles published in military journals indicated not only an increased interest in counterinsurgency and stability operations, but also the growing influence of those officers and experts most familiar with these types of missions. In 2004, *Military Review* featured at most nine articles relating to counterinsurgency; in 2005, the number rose to twenty-nine. In the U.S. Army War College quarterly *Parameters*, the figure rose from three articles in 2004 to eleven in 2005.⁷⁶ Sure signs of the importance of stability operations/COIN in the minds of military leaders.

By late 2005, there was discernable momentum to the U.S. military's learning of counterinsurgency and stability operations. The enemy-centered approach to counterinsurgency was no longer creditable, at least in theory, and this shift had enabled the ascendance of several commanders and academics versed in the finer points of stability operations and counterinsurgency.⁷⁷ The result would be instrumental in turning around the situation in Iraq.

⁷⁴ Volney J. Warner, and James H. Willbanks, "Preparing Field Grade Leaders for Today and Tomorrow," *Military Review* 86, no. 1 (January-February 2006), 108.

⁷⁵ Thomas E. Ricks, "U.S. Counterinsurgency Academy Giving Officers a New Mind-Set," *Washington Post*, February 21, 2006.

⁷⁶ Ucko, 77.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 78.

The Emergence

By 2006, it is apparent that changes were afoot on how the military viewed stability operations. Tactical innovation led to discourse on how the military should tackle the issue of stability/COIN operations and standardize these procedures across the military. Discourse habitually starts laterally within the military's professional journals and leads to changes in doctrine. Similarly, professional military education keeps pace by training the officers of changes in the field before sending them back into the fray. This innovation had a trickle up effect. Tactical innovation led to operational innovation that led to changes to the strategic context. This change would lead to troop surges in both Iraq and Afghanistan that, with changes at the tactical and operational level, would be instrumental in achieving strategic goals.

Discourse and Doctrinal Changes

Given the ongoing challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan, the professional discourse on stability operations and COIN gained momentum the longer those two conflicts continued. This monograph will mention a few that were instrumental in developing doctrine. Major General Peter Chiarelli and Major Michaelis argued in an article published in 2005 proposed that the traditional and doctrinal template of focusing initially solely on combat and counterinsurgency operations and stability operations afterwards, created seams that the insurgents could exploit.⁷⁸ The remedy was to give stability operations equal billing with combat and counterinsurgency operations in the conceptual framework of full spectrum operations, working across "equally

⁷⁸ Peter Chiarelli, and Patrick Michaelis, "Winning the Peace: The Requirement for Full Spectrum Operations," *Military Review* 85, no. 4 (July-August 2005), 4.

balanced, interconnected lines of operation.”⁷⁹ This article and the discourse that followed were influential in FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency*, published in 2006, and FM 3-0, *Operations*, and FM 3-07, *Stability Operations*, published in 2008.

In 2006, the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) added its voice to the discourse. In its *Torchbearer* journal, AUSA weighed in on the importance of stability operations in Full Spectrum Operations and advocated the U.S. Army’s role in stability operations. The article argued that six steps were necessary to improve the U.S. Army’s approach to stability operations: 1) Give stability operations equal importance in pre-deployment training; 2) hire nonmilitary observer/controllers to improve stability operations training; 3) continue modular and active/reserve component rebalancing initiatives; 4) integrate stability operations into all Soldier and leader training events; 5) recruit senior civil affairs into the reserve component; and 6) help organize the joint, interagency and multi-national effort .⁸⁰ These ideas are not original, but AUSA did summarize the primary discourse that was gaining traction in the U.S. military concerning stability operations and would influence upcoming doctrine.

The year 2006 was pivotal in new top-down guidance from the Pentagon. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) was highly anticipated as an opportunity to meet the operational demands of the era, particularly in the areas of counterinsurgency, stabilization and reconstruction efforts.⁸¹ The review asserted that “in the post-September 11 world, irregular warfare has emerged as the dominant form of warfare confronting the United States, its allies and

⁷⁹ Ibid, 7.

⁸⁰ Association of the United States Army. “The U.S. Army’s Role in Stability Operations.” *Torchbearer* Issue (October 2006), 4.

⁸¹ Michele A. Flournoy, “Did the Pentagon Get the Quadrennial Defense Review Right?,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol 29, no 2. (Spring 2006), 68.

http://www.twq.com/06spring/docs/06spring_flournoy.pdf (accessed 26 September 2011)

its partners” and that, accordingly, “guidance must account for distributed, long-duration operations, including unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and stabilization and reconstruction operations.”⁸² The QDR also redefined its “Force Planning Construct” divided into three activities: Homeland Defense, War on Terror/Irregular (Asymmetric) Warfare, and Conventional Campaigns. Finally, the QDR acknowledged that operational end states such as “winning decisively” was less useful in stability/counterinsurgency operations currently ongoing in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁸³ This guidance was helpful in the development of doctrine to combat counterinsurgency and enhance stability operations. The first such doctrine was FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*, published on 16 December 2006.

In February 2006, U.S. Army LTG David Petraeus and USMC LTG James N. Mattis convened a two-day conference at Fort Leavenworth to discuss the new counterinsurgency manual to replace the interim counterinsurgency field manual issued in 2004. Whereas the latter had been drafted with minimal consultation from outside the Pentagon, the updated and final version would be the product of discussion and exchange within and beyond the DoD. One of those invited to the conference was Brigadier Nigel R.F. Aylwin-Foster, the British officer who in 2005 had authored a scathing critique of the U.S. military attempts to learn and conduct counterinsurgency.⁸⁴ This new approach to counterinsurgency espoused the Army concept for full spectrum operations advanced by MG Peter Chiarelli in the summer of 2005. This Army/Marine

⁸² U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review (2006)*, 6 February 2006, 36.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ See Nigel Aylwin-Foster, “Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations,” *Military Review* 85, no. 6 (November-December 2005).

collaborative doctrine would serve as the base document for counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and spur further discourse.

The contribution of FM 3-24 to the U.S. military's synthesis of counterinsurgency was significant, based upon the understanding of the current and past counterinsurgency operations. Beyond constituting the first official manual of the topic since the 1980s, it also presented a far more analytically advanced and realistic assessment of COIN operations. FM 3-24 postulated that from the outset counterinsurgency would include a significant deployment of U.S. ground troops. Previous manuals described these types of counterinsurgency operations as a possible type either of MOOTW or as an example of complex contingency operations. FM 3-24 distinguished between "a mission to assist a functioning government" with those operations "where no such viable entity exists or where a regime has been changed by conflict," noting that "the last two situations add complex sovereignty and national reconstruction issues to an already complex mission."⁸⁵ FM 3-24 paid most attention to the "clear-hold-build" and "combined action" approaches, either of which involves significant U.S. ground forces. Clearly, the lessons learned the field was having a huge impact on doctrinal changes.

FM 3-24 emphasized the need for the U.S. military to take on the full gamut of tasks associated with counterinsurgency. From the outset it recognized that while "the purpose of America's ground forces is to fight and win war, throughout history...the Army and Marine Corps have been called on to perform many tasks beyond pure combat...this has been particularly true during the conduct of COIN operations."⁸⁶ In setting out the "aspects of counterinsurgency," the manual made it clear that this mission "requires Soldiers and Marines to be ready both to fight

⁸⁵ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, December 2006), 1-20.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 1-19.

and to build.” Throughout, the manual stressed the need for the military to undertake “nonmilitary” tasks in the absence of adequately resourced and deployable civilian agencies.⁸⁷ On force protection (“Sometimes, the More You Protect Your Force, the Less Secure You May Be”) the manual emphasized closer contact with the populace, rather than self-imposed confinement to armored barracks, so as to gain trust and support. On the need for constant adaptation and initiative, the manual emphasized that “If a Tactic Works this Week, It Might Not Work Next Week; If It Works in this Province, It Might Not Work in the Next.”⁸⁸ FM 3-24 was important in laying out the conceptual framework for conducting counterinsurgency operations.

The authors clearly did not intend for FM 3-24 to represent an all-encompassing solution to these types of operations or suggest a proscriptive method. The manual’s purpose was instead to familiarize the military with the logic of counterinsurgency and the many ways in which these endeavors differ from convention combat.⁸⁹ The healthy discourse continues within the military of the merits of the principles in FM 3-24. One study provides statistical evidence to support the merits of these principles. The study examined insurgencies worldwide from 1978 to 2008 and found that the “vast majority of governments and COIN forces that adhered to multiple tenets of the manual prevailed over the insurgencies they opposed. In the preponderance of insurgencies in which COIN forces did *not* follow the principles of FM 3–24, they lost.”⁹⁰ FM 3–24 is far from the Army’s only doctrinal manual, or the only one that shows the influence of a new pattern of thinking about the nature of the wars we are fighting today and are likely to fight in years to

⁸⁷ Ibid, 1-27.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 1-26 to 1-28

⁸⁹ Ucko, 111.

⁹⁰ Christopher Paul and Colin P. Clarke, “Evidential Validation of FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency Worldwide, 1978-2008,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 60 (1st Qtr, January 2011), 126.

come. The publication of FM 3–0, *Operations*, in February 2008 supplemented this new pattern of thinking concerning ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As the Army’s capstone doctrinal manual, FM 3–0 went through an even more rigorous internal review than did FM 3–24. It is thus significant that, with the benefit of analysis of a year’s experience in applying the principles of FM 3–24 in the field, a completely different writing team produced a document that underlined the applicability of the two big ideas of FM 3–24, particularly its focus on protecting the population in order to win their support.⁹¹

The previous version of this cornerstone document had been released before the 9/11 attacks. This edition of FM 3–0 represents a significant departure from past doctrine. It describes an operational concept where commanders employ offensive, defensive, and stability or civil support operations simultaneously as part of an interdependent joint force to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative, accepting prudent risk to create opportunities to achieve decisive results. “Just as the 1976 edition of FM 100–5 began to take the Army from the rice paddies of Vietnam to the battlefield of Western Europe, this edition will take us into the 21st century urban battlefields among the people without losing our capabilities to dominate the higher conventional end of the spectrum of conflict.”⁹² Whereas in 2001 it had devoted two chapters to stability operations and support operations, the 2008 version emphasized throughout the need to consider stabilization and reconstruction as pertaining to all military operations. The manual also picked up on DoD policy stated in Directive 3000.05 that stability operations are a core U.S. military mission that should be given equal priority to combat operations—and emphasized the need for

⁹¹ John A. Nagl, “Constructing the Legacy of Field Manual 3-24,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 58 (3rd Quarter, 2010), 119.

⁷⁹ William S. Wallace, “Forward” Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, February 2008). Emphasis in the original.

the U.S. Army to master “full spectrum operations,” that is, simultaneous offense, defense, stability, and civil-support operations.⁹³

The importance of FM 3-0 in establishing stability operations is a key component of full spectrum operations, and reflected the change in policy concerning stability operations depicted in DoD Directive 3000.05 two years previous. Its importance in determining its level of importance is evident in the following paragraph:

Stability and civil support operations cannot be something that the Army conducts in “other than war” operations. Army forces must address the civil situation directly and continuously, combining tactical tasks directed at noncombatants with tactical tasks directed against the enemy. These tasks have evolved from specialized ancillary activities—civil military operations—into a central element of operations equal in importance to the offense and defense—stability and civil support.⁹⁴

For the first time in the nation’s Global War on Terrorism, Army doctrine signaled the reality on the ground, that without stability operations the counterinsurgency mission would fail.

Field Manual 3-07, *Stability Operations*, published in October 2008, built upon the same ideas reflected in FM 3-24 and FM 3-0. FM 3-0 continued a doctrinal renaissance that reverberated across the Army and set in motion ideas that fundamentally altered the concept of stability operations, chiefly it heightens the importance of stability operations in its full spectrum operations concept. In developing FM 3-07, the Army took its most comprehensive revision of stability operations it had ever attempted. It acknowledged and stressed the “whole-of-government” approach essential to achieving sustainable success in this era of persistent conflict and for the uncertain future before us.⁹⁵ A key element of FM 3-07 was the introduction of the

⁹³ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, February 2008), Chapter 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, viii.

⁹⁵ William B. Caldwell IV and Steven M. Leonard, “Field Manual 3-07, Stability Operations: Upshifting the Engine of Change,” *Military Review* 88, no. 4 (June 2008), 56.

term “security force assistance” into Army doctrine under the umbrella of security sector reform. This is an important concept that focuses on the reestablishment or reform of the institutions and key ministerial positions that provide oversight for the safety and security of the host nation and its people. An all-important task for the U.S. military in its stability operations mission.

While FM 3-24 was instrumental in driving changes that proved critical in stemming the tide of the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan; doctrine that focuses solely on a narrow band of activities cannot begin to address the seemingly insurmountable challenge of rebuilding a fragile state. Stability operations are lengthy endeavors, and approached with a focus toward long-term sustainment rather than short-term gains.⁹⁶ In essence, the triad of doctrine (FMs 3-0, 3-07 and 3-24) separately do not provide the required guidance for conducting operations in a complex environment. However, taken together these documents are instrumental in the understanding of military leaders in conducting full spectrum operations in today’s and future conflicts. These documents were instrumental in turning the tide in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and were the result of changes not only in the military but of changes to our strategic approach in both conflicts.

The Surge

The shift to stability and counterinsurgency operations officially began on January 10, 2007 when President Bush set out his new direction for Iraq. Popularized in the press as the “surge,” the president’s new approach featured an increase in troop levels in Baghdad; a new force posture designed to establish a security presence throughout the city; and a range of nonmilitary measures designed to satisfy the requirements for stability. Specifically, Bush

⁹⁶ Ibid, 59.

announced, “more than 20,000 additional American troops would be sent to Iraq,” predominantly to Baghdad and al-Anbar Province, to “work alongside Iraq units and be embedded in their formations.” Their mission would be “to help Iraqis clear and secure neighborhoods, to help them protect the local population, and to help ensure that the Iraqi forces left behind are capable of providing the security that Baghdad needs.”⁹⁷ These important steps would feature stability operations in the surge.

Five days earlier, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced that the promotion and appointment of LTG David Petraeus as commander of Multinational Force Iraq (MNF-I). As the primary supervisor of FM 3-24 his appointment to MNF-I indicated that U.S. policy in Iraq would benefit from his expertise with counterinsurgency and stability operations. As Gates put it, “Petraeus is an expert in irregular warfare and stability operations, and recently supervised the publication of the first Army and Marine counterinsurgency manual in two decades...He’ll bring all the tools to enable Iraq and coalition forces to create a stable and secure Iraq.”⁹⁸ The campaign outlined by LTG Petraeus would follow the clear-hold-build format of counterinsurgency laid out in FM 3-24: U.S. troops would first clear selected neighborhoods, targeting extremist elements; then maintain a full-time presence in these area, operating out of small forts or “joint security stations” constructed across the city; and then, with Iraqi security forces gradually assuming the lead, pursue efforts to stimulate the local economy, initiate reconstruction, and improve the infrastructure.⁹⁹ With strategic and operational concepts in place, the time was ripe to widely implement this new direction of conducting stability operations.

⁹⁷ White House, “President’s Address to the Nation,” January 10, 2007

⁹⁸ DoD, “Defense Secretary Gates Announces Recommendations,” 5 January 2007.

⁹⁹ See Press Conference with MG Joseph Fil, Jr., Commanding General, Multinational Division, Baghdad and 1st Cavalry Division, February 16, 2007.

Though the causes of the decline in violence are still debated, there is a definite correlation between the surge and the decrease in violence in Iraq. According to one estimate, the number of conflicted-rate civilian casualties declined from a high of approximately 3,000 per month in autumn 2006 to around 1,500 in April 2007, when the surge was beginning to take effect, to 300-600 from September 2007 onward.¹⁰⁰ In terms of security incidents—attacks against infrastructure and government facilities, detonated and found bombs, small-arms attacks, and mortar, rocket, and surface-to-air missile attacks—MNF-I in April 2008 reported an increase from around 800 per week in early 2006 to 1,400 in early 2007. However, immediately following this increase a marked gradual decline resulted, leading to an average of below 600 per week from mid-September 2007 onward.¹⁰¹ All quantitative measures—although not the most reliable of metrics—indicated the tentative success of the surge.

Two main factors lay behind this progress. First, the Sunni community was increasingly turning against the extremist—or *takfiri*—groups such as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), creating a split in the Sunni-led insurgency. AQI rendered themselves unpopular with the Iraqi populace by disrupting and taking over informal business networks, seeking to marry into the higher tribal echelons, and otherwise challenging the sheiks' authority. Seeking to coerce the tribes into submission, AQI also launched a wave of brutal attacks on the tribes and their leaders. By late 2006, these efforts had resulted in a backlash.¹⁰² The second factor was the U.S. military's change in strategy. The transition from larger isolated bases to smaller joint security stations helped U.S. troops provide security, which enabled bridge building with local communities seeking greater stability or protection. In addition, the U.S. military actively assisted and even enabled the

¹⁰⁰ See Iraq Coalition Casualties, icasualties.org/Iraq/index.aspx, for statistics on casualties in Iraq.

¹⁰¹ David Petraeus, "Report to Congress on Situation in Iraq," 10-11 September 2007.

¹⁰² Ucko, 126.

decoupling of Sunni moderate and extremists.¹⁰³ Combined these factors would be significant in ensuring the success of the surge.

The official shift in strategy in early 2007 helped formalize the practices that innovative brigade commanders had previously conducted ad hoc. Launched officially on 13 February 2007, Operation Fardh al-Qanoon divided Baghdad into nine sectors, with the U.S. military constructing twenty-seven joint security stations across the city. In line with theory contained in FM 3-24, the U.S. military then deployed to the stations with Iraqi forces and set about providing security at the local level. Areas were subjected to intense yet discriminate infantry security operations and were then cordoned off with checkpoints and barriers; the population was issued identity cards and any travel to and from the area was strictly enforced. Because these operations were manpower-intensive, they required the surge of five additional brigades (35,000 troops in the end) that enabled the U.S. military to extend its reach, provide sustained security, and interact with local communities.¹⁰⁴ As the most important center in Iraq, Baghdad would serve as the testing ground for this new strategy.

Another important factor to turning the situation around in Iraq was the so-called “Awakening” in response to AQI’s brutality. Coalition forces were successful in in co-opting Sunni tribal leaders and turned both passive supporters as well as former insurgents into active participants of the counterinsurgency. The new alliance and birthplace of the Awakening Movement began in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province. There the tribal leader struck a deal with U.S. forces in which he provided recruits for a local security force in exchange for U.S. assistance in building and securing police stations in the Ramadi area. The deal proved

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ International Crisis Group, *Iraq After the Surge II*, 7

successful, and the U.S. trained hundreds of local volunteers. Security in Ramadi gradually improved. The Awakening Movement rapidly spread across the country due to the success in Ramadi. By spring of 2008, the local volunteer forces, now called Sons of Iraq (SoI), were present at nearly two thirds of Iraqi provinces, and totaled more than 70,000.¹⁰⁵ Without the support of the Awakening Movement, the success of the surge was in question.

If the adoption of a counterinsurgency strategy and the enlarged U.S. footprint helped pacify the Sunni insurgency, it also compelled the Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr to rein in his militia, the Mahdi Army, which had been responsible for much of the violence against Sunnis in 2006. When the U.S. deployed additional troops to Baghdad and acquired Prime Minister al-Maliki's authorization to enter Sadr City, the cleric decided that now was the time to lie low and refrain from further operations. Alongside this coercive advantage, the U.S. military command added co-option to its strategy based on finding common causes and transforming erstwhile adversaries into peaceful political actors.¹⁰⁶ This strategy proved to be an important step in this counterinsurgency operation.

The success of the surge in Iraq is due to several factors, one of which was good timing. The situation was ripe to exploit the Iraqis turn against AQI. Former enemies of the coalition became part of the Awakening Movement. President Bush also deserves credit for understanding the environment and taking the political risk of increasing troop strength in what had become by then an unpopular war. However, perhaps the most important aspect was the new counterinsurgency doctrine and the way that the U.S. military conduct stability operations.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Harari, "Uncertain Future for the Sons of Iraq," *Backgrounder*, Institute for the Study of War (3 August 2010), http://www.understandingwar.org/files/Backgrounder_SonsofIraq.pdf (accessed 20 July 2011)

¹⁰⁶ Ucko, 129.

Understanding these new counterinsurgency principles backed with sufficient numbers of troops turned the situation completely around. As stated by one of the units deployed to Baghdad in support of the surge:

The main ingredient in the surge was extra troops—more than thirty thousand soldiers to reclaim Baghdad and the surrounding belts from insurgents and sectarian extremists. By itself, this was not enough. Without innovative tactics and an extensive vision of how to use the new force to bolster Iraq’s government and economy, there could have been no progress. At the root of reconstruction was the use of military power to establish security.¹⁰⁷

Fortuitous timing, superb strategic direction, and the troop strength to implement the new strategic direction were the essential elements of the success of the surge.

By early 2009, the success of the surge in Iraq was considerable, allowing U.S. troops to take more of an assist and advisory role with the Iraqi security forces in the lead. By the time President Obama assumed office in January 2009, there were 160,000 U.S. troops in Iraq and 32,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. By the fall of 2009, it was obvious that the U.S. military would shift priorities, begin to drawdown its troop commitment in Iraq, and significantly increase its forces in Afghanistan. By October 2009, troops diverted from Iraq in huge numbers, with U.S. forces in Afghanistan having more than doubled to approximately 68,000.¹⁰⁸ However, using the Iraqi surge as a model for effective counterinsurgency/stability operations, more troops were required. The reemergence of the Taliban required more troops to counteract and defeat the Taliban. President Obama authorized an additional 30,000 troops to deploy to Afghanistan in a speech to West Point cadets on 1 December 2009; this increase completed the buildup of troops

¹⁰⁷ Dale Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad: The 3rd Infantry Division and Task Force Marne in Iraq, 2007-2008* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2010), 388.

¹⁰⁸ See White House Press Release, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” West Point, NY: 1 December 2009.

for the Afghanistan surge.¹⁰⁹ The shift from Iraq to Afghanistan allowed a second environment to test the success of the COIN/stability operations enjoyed in Iraq.

Per President Obama, the Afghanistan surge intends to accomplish the following objectives: deny al-Qaeda a safe haven; reverse the Taliban's resurgent and prevent it from overthrowing the government; and strength the capacity of Afghanistan security forces and government so they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future.¹¹⁰ The latter objective is important for this discussion concerning stability operations. Though this type of operation normally is time intensive and cannot be constrained, this surge has a short shelf life. The initial plan called for troops to begin return from Afghanistan in July 2011. The President announced that month that 10,000 troops would withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of 2011 and that a rough timeline of an additional 23,000 troops withdrawing by the summer of 2012, with the full transition to Afghanistan forces occurring by 2014. All of the forces that were surged as of the December 2009 speech will be withdrawn by next summer. The clock is ticking to accomplish these goals and many wonder if this is sufficient time.

Progress thus far has been is undeniable but it is too early to call the surge a success. Coalition forces have driven the Taliban from their major safe havens in southern Afghanistan and are continuing to press into lesser enemy strongholds. The Taliban have launched operations to retake the ground they have lost, but so far to no avail. Their tactics, moreover, indicate their weakness. Having long eschewed suicide bombings and direct attacks against Afghan civilians for fear of alienating the population, the Taliban are increasingly carrying out such attacks. The attacks, in turn, are driving a wedge between the enemy and the population, a phenomenon we

¹⁰⁹ General McChrystal, U.S. Commander in Afghanistan, originally requested 50,000 additional troops to fully accomplish the COIN/stability operations mission.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

have seen in Iraq and elsewhere. There is every reason to believe that coalition forces and their increasingly effective Afghan partners can hold the gains in the south through this fighting season (that is, until November). This would allow them to create meaningful security zones around all of the major population centers in the south for the first time since 2001, but only if they have the resources and the time to do it. Aggressive operations have managed to preserve a great degree of security in Kabul and are slowly expanding out from there. However, the elimination of enemy safe havens in eastern Afghanistan is a prerequisite before turning over this area to Afghan responsibility. It has not been possible so far to undertake such clearing operations in the east because the surge was limited to 30,000 troops. Without the full-force package requested by Gen. Stanley McChrystal, commanders first had to focus on southern Afghanistan, which was in imminent danger of falling to the Taliban in 2009.¹¹¹ Progress is evident but with the limitation of troops, the country can only be won province by province.

Above all, the Afghan population needs confidence before it commits to resisting the Taliban and supporting the government. It can gain such confidence only by seeing that the coalition and Afghan forces will successfully fight off the coming Taliban counterattack. A successful fighting season this year would permit decisive operations in eastern Afghanistan in 2012. If the coalition can clear remaining safe havens in the east in 2012, the enemy is likely to counterattack in 2013, and the coalition and the Afghans will have to defeat that counterattack to demonstrate to the local people that the insurgents have lost and are not coming back. Pressure for withdrawal comes largely from concerns about the U.S. budget, frustration with Afghanistan's

¹¹¹ Frederick W. Kagan, and Kimberly Kagan, *Defining Success in Afghanistan*, Report: American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War. 7 January 2011. <http://www.understandingwar.org/files/DefiningSuccessinAfghanistanElectronicVersion.pdf> (accessed 2 June 2011), 1-2.

government, anger at Pakistan, and irrational exuberance about the impact of Osama bin Laden's death. However, bin Laden's death is not significant to the situation on the ground in Afghanistan today because it has no meaningful effect on popular attitudes about the likelihood of insurgent victory or defeat.¹¹² The key element in increasing Afghan confidence is being able to conduct operations on their own accord.

Though it is still too early to determine the final success of the Afghanistan surge, conditions look favorable, though a bit precarious. The former Deputy Commander of U.S. Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A), LTG David Rodriguez, recently signaled that the Afghan security forces are gaining in strength and competence. The country's security forces have grown by 94,000 new police and soldiers since the surge began, Rodriguez says, and their total strength is expected to reach 350,000 by next year. Rodriguez is confident that the Afghan forces will be ready by 2014 to take over the security of the country. First the 20,000 to 30,000 Taliban forces must be marginalized and lose the support of the local populace.¹¹³ Only by the use of the principles established within FM 3-0, 3-07 and 3-24 will the Taliban lose its grip on Afghanistan. These principles are once again tested in Afghanistan, just as they were tested and proven to work in Iraq. As the operations in Afghanistan begin to draw down, we are left with the question about the validity of these doctrinal principles and how it reflects upon COIN/stability operations in the future. The key to the future lies in the U.S. military maintaining its significant knowledge of conducting these types of operations and to institutionalize stability operations within soldier training.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Sami Yousafzai, "General Rod's War," *Newsweek*, 26 June 2011, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/06/26/david-rodriguez-the-general-who-planned-the-afghan-surge.html> (accessed 31 August 2011)

Future Considerations

Operations in Iraq are quickly drawing to a close. The almost 45,000 troops there today will leave by Christmas of 2011; ending a mission that has cost \$1 trillion and nearly 4,500 American lives.¹¹⁴ It is unclear as of this writing if the Iraqi government will request even a minimal American military presence to remain. Violence continues though not at the level seen in previous years. The Iraqi government is an indecisive and divided body and Muqtada al-Sadr threatens to constitute his Mahdi Army militia to drive out any remaining Americans. The ability of the U.S. military to strengthen Iraqi institutions is no longer viable. At this point, it is up to the Iraqis to determine their own future. However, this is likely a moot point. The U.S. domestic economy issues are a higher national security concern than the strengthening of Iraqi institutions.¹¹⁵ According to one estimate, it costs about \$1 million a year to keep a soldier in Iraq.¹¹⁶ The scheduled drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan is also due largely to economics. Overseas contingency operations are expensive endeavors and future operations are bound to result in scrutiny in today's political environment. The Department of Defense will see an overall reduction in its budget as the current operations close. DoD already faces a 6.6% reduction in spending in FY12 compared to the previous year.¹¹⁷ More reductions are foreseeable in the future for the Department of Defense. Just like the limited budgetary years following the Vietnam War, the Department of Defense and its services must make tough decisions in what programs will see

¹¹⁴ "Leaving on a Jet Plane," *The Economist*, 20 August 2011, 44.

¹¹⁵ See U.S. National Security Strategy, May 2010.

¹¹⁶ *Economist*, 44.

¹¹⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request* (Washington DC: Department of Defense, February 2011). http://comptroller.defense.gov/defbudget/fy2012/FY2012_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf (accessed 14 June 2011).

reductions. A seemingly easy target is COIN/stability operations as the force turns its attention from these operations to major combat operations (MCO).

Change 1 to FM 3-0, *Operations*, published on 22 February 2011, emphasizes MCO and “expands and clarifies the discussion of major combat operations.”¹¹⁸ MCO is defined as involving “a series of named operations, such as Operation Desert Storm, each involving significant offensive and defensive operations and supporting air, land, sea and special operations.”¹¹⁹ Additionally, MCO “differ from the other operational themes due to the extreme violence inherent in their conduct. Major combat operations employ all available combat power (directly and indirectly) to destroy an enemy’s military capability, thereby decisively altering the military conditions within the operational environment.”¹²⁰ The original language of full spectrum operations does not change in this revised doctrine, however it appears that some Army leaders are placing a new emphasis on MCO, at the expense of COIN and stability operations. The mind frame is that COIN and stability operations have eroded the skills of soldiers and now is the time to return to the core competency of conducting MCO.

Consecutive issues of the U.S. Army’s professional journal, *Military Review*, in 2011 reveal this mind frame of COIN and stability operations eroding soldier’s warfighting skills. One author began his article with the following statement:

We have a problem. Our counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine states that, ‘Soldiers and Marines are expected to be nation-builders as well as warriors.’ In ten years, we haven’t built an Afghan nation, but the effort to do so has diverted and weakened the warrior ethos.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ U.S. Department of the Army. Change 1 to Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 22 February 2011), v.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 2-4.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 2-12.

¹²¹ Bing West, “The Way Out of Afghanistan,” *Military Review* 91, no. 2 (March-April 2011), 89.

This statement assumes, without evidence, that conducting COIN and stability operations erodes the soldiers' warrior ethos. Another author claims, "our veteran Army is an effective stability and counterinsurgency force, but our junior leaders and soldiers are untrained on the wide area security and combined arms maneuver tasks found in our current METL."¹²² This author further states that "we all but stopped training on tasks supporting MCO several years ago... We have made enormous gains in stability and counterinsurgency skills.... However, these gains have come at the expense of our ability to conduct MCO."¹²³ The author additionally acknowledges that in a time of tightening "we must make hard choices about the training, capabilities, and force structure of our organizations."¹²⁴ This author clearly is on the side of diminishing the training and resources for conducting COIN and stability operations in order to increase the Army's ability to conduct MCO.

The U.S. Army's Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) continued the argument that soldiers' warfighting skills are eroding due to almost a decade focus on COIN and stability operations. In October 2010, JRTC conducted its first "Full Spectrum Operations" (FSO) in eight years. The rotation was the "initial effort to broaden training after nearly a decade of preparations for counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan to include the larger palate of FSO."¹²⁵ Though the article clarified the FM 3-0 definition of FSO as including offense, defense and stability operations, throughout the author signaled that FSO was synonymous with MCO. The author implies that COIN and stability operations are different entities from FSO and

¹²² Michael S. Tucker and Jason P. Conroy, "Maintaining the Combat Edge," *Military Review* 91, no. 3 (May-June 2011), 9.

¹²³ Ibid, 10.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Mark Landis, "H-Minus Ready for War: Panther Brigade in Full Spectrum Operations," *Army* 61, no. 5 (May 2011), 55.

deemed as being on the lower end of FSO. This is readily apparent in the following statements: “General Casey commented upon visiting during the rotation, “decisions come faster in FSO, what takes months to set conditions in COIN, takes hours in FSO.”¹²⁶ “Not only is the fight in FSO faster than COIN, it also moves, often very quickly.”¹²⁷ Though the author finally concludes, “the battle hardened force has learned its lessons for the last eight years and although the focus changes from a COIN environment to combined arms maneuver fight, the principles and technical and tactical skills at most levels of command immediately cross over.”¹²⁸

A counter argument currently circulating throughout the U.S. Army is that the COIN/stability operations conducted over the last decade have developed a more proficient and flexible leader able to transcend across all missions across FSO. One author states, “good COIN leaders also tend to be good conventional leaders. Good conventional leaders, on the other hand, have often failed in COIN, because they don’t have the extra attributes required of COIN commanders.”¹²⁹ Another author chimes in with:

The military did not do terribly well in preparing its leaders in the run-up to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. U.S. military forces have done much to adapt to COIN warfare since then, but need to do more to enhance professional military education (PME) to prepare leaders for these types of conflicts. If PME is so important to the ability of U.S. officers to command forces in COIN warfare then the U.S. military should once again treat it as a serious career gate.... Many of the educational competencies-history, culture, languages-needed in COIN operations are not adequately taught in PME programs.”¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Ibid, 57.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 58.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 59.

¹²⁹ Moyer, 14.

¹³⁰ Peter R. Mansoor, “Brigade Command in Counterinsurgency Operations: Lessons from the Iraq War.” in *Counterinsurgency Leadership in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Beyond*, Nicholas J. Schlosser and James M. Caiella, eds. (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2011), 37-48.

The belief in this camp is that soldiers must train in COIN and stability operations to maintain proficiency in these types of operations. By not doing so threatens the soldiers' ability to conduct the full spectrum of operations.

It is apparent that the Army is leaning towards emphasizing major combat operations at the expense of COIN/stability operations, particularly during these times of dwindling resources. While clearly the experience of the last decade has resulted in a more adapt and flexible soldier able to successfully conduct COIN/stability operations, it is not clear that war fighting skills have eroded as a result.¹³¹ However, what is alarming is the propensity to equate full spectrum operations solely with major combat operations.

Conclusion

Examining the post-Vietnam War era informs a potential descriptive outcome of the post-GWOT in terms of losing institutional knowledge of conducting stability operations. This monograph examined some of the similarities apparent between the two eras. However, this mistake needs not be repeated. The institutions are currently in place to ensure that stability operations doctrine maintains its position in full spectrum operations. Additionally, there is enough institutional knowledge within the force to maintain its proficiency in conducting stability operations. However, during this time of limited resources and budgetary constraints, military leaders could be enticed to focus its attention on major combat operations and military operations such as stability operations.

¹³¹ Additional metrics are required to determine the impact of COIN/stability operations on war fighting abilities.

The U.S. military has a long history of stabilizing nations during and after major combat operations and should be justifiably proud of its accomplishments. However, conducting stability operations is not an easy task and must be continually trained upon, and the hard-won lessons learned not forgotten. These lessons were largely forgotten during the post-Vietnam era and the peacekeeping operations of the 1990s were insufficient preparation for what the Army would experience during the initial stages of GWOT. Innovative commanders with a wide spectrum of education, with the ability to re-learn lessons, and with the aptitude to accept risks were instrumental in directing the appropriate policy for implementing stability operations. This led to the codification of stability operations in the military's doctrine. By the end of GWOT the military appears to have gone a long way in getting stability operations right.

However, in future complex ill-defined environments the military should strive to become adaptable in its application of stability operations. What worked in GWOT may likely require modification in future operations. The current doctrine gives a template for conducting stability operations but is easily adaptable to unique situations. While doctrinal precedence is important, equally important are the adaptive abilities of the commanders and staff on the ground. This can only be obtained by continuing education of our leaders and staff on stability operations. A prospect currently in danger as the military refocuses on major combat operations.

Equally important is the use of terminology. A common language is important in stability operations. The use of MOOTW in defining an aspect of stability operations set the precedence of how the military would look at stability operations in the post-Vietnam area. Today stability operations are an important element of full spectrum operations. It is essential that stability operations be implemented in all phases of military operations and continues its prominence within full spectrum operations, lest it fall in danger of again being within the periphery of military operations. While clearly there is a merger at the edges of stability and counterinsurgency operations, they should not be lumped together to describe "other operations"

of less importance than major combat operations. Each has its own set of unique circumstances and deserves the full benefit of intellectual thought.

As has occurred throughout its history, the U.S. military appears to be at a crossroads. Identifying the future threats to national security and how the U.S. military will be utilized to counter these threats is the key to current and future discourse. The federal government may also be hesitant in sending in troops in find ourselves caught in operations similar to Iraq and Afghanistan in the future. This fatigue in conducting COIN and stability operations is comparable to the post-Vietnam fatigue. However, if history tells us anything it is that once again the U.S. military will be called upon to stabilize a foreign nation's institutions. If these skills are not maintained within our force we will be susceptible to repeating our mistakes. We owe it to ourselves and to the American public to ensure that this does not happen.

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