



SMALL WARS

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

In his Senate Confirmation Hearing, GEN Martin Dempsey, the newly appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, surmised that it was time for the military to start thinking harder and training better. The articles in this month's Journal speak to different aspects of such reform.

-- SWJ

Cover Photo: Iraqi Army soldiers of 4th Battalion, 21st Brigade, 5th IA Division stand in review before senior officers during a graduation ceremony at Kirkush Military Training Base, Iraq. *U.S. Army photo by* Sgt. Shawn Miller, 109th MPAD, USD-N PAO. (US DoD public domain).

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Evolving the COIN Field Manual: A Case for Reform

by Carl Prine, Crispin Burke, and Michael Few

Published [online](#) July 22, 2011

Nearly a decade removed from 9/11, United States military forces remain entrenched in small wars around the globe. For the foreseeable future, the United States Government (USG) will continue to intervene in varying scale and scope in order to promote democracy and capitalism abroad. While many made efforts to describe small wars and methods of coping with them, our field manuals have not kept up with the wealth of knowledge and wisdom learned on the ground.

In order to prepare for the future, we must first understand where we have been moving beyond individual articles of best practices and lessons learned. The intent of this essay is to provide the critique in order to promote an evolution in our thinking. The purpose is to better prepare those who will follow in our footsteps. Finally, we believe that this reform is a duty required from those who directly observed the costs of today's small wars.

1. FM 3-24 must be rewritten. It has been superseded by other manuals, including SFA (FM

3-07.1), Stability (FM 3-07) and Design (FM 5-0). More weight should be given in the new work to lessons learned during the past 10 years of war. These include, but are not limited to, analyzing how criminality and competition by fratricidal militias, feral criminal syndicates and host nation officials for resources shape the irregular battlefield; the complexity of communal conflicts; tips on reconciliation, amnesty and reintegration of guerrillas and bandits; the role theology and deterritorialized foreign fighters play in a revolt; more up to date notions on the training and equipping of foreign forces; and the nettlesome problem of insurgent safe havens.

2. There is much that is worthwhile, important and lasting in FM 3-24. While the strongest section is that on "intelligence," other pieces within the manual remain relevant for the COIN practitioner such as those on logistics, ethics and air power. Nevertheless, much of the work belongs to another age of revolution and over the

past ten years best lessons learned in Iraq, Afghanistan and other conflicts must be reconsidered and adapted for doctrine.

3. Everyone's perceptions of "COIN" are bounded by personal experiences and institutional prejudices. A frank and transparent discussion by professionals should not only guide the rewriting of FM 3-24 but compel a larger discussion about the strategic goals and likelihood of their success in the conflicts we wage overseas. The process should be undertaken with humility and draw upon a wide range of perspectives inside and outside the military and U.S. government. The drafting of a new manual should draw a wide net and include practitioners from Special Operations Command, the U.S. Department of State and the intelligence agencies. Not only will these voices create better doctrinal advice, but they will own more of the process and goals of the doctrine that is concocted. Academia should help to provide an interdisciplinary approach, an openness of broad lenses, methodologies and frameworks.

4. The new manual should incorporate the experiences of a generation of officers and non-commissioned officers who have spent the bulk of their careers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Best practices learned at the most junior levels of the military have not been absorbed well by the institution or have been mischaracterized for political or bureaucratic purposes. While the field manual often hints at the bottom-up activism of guerrilla operations, there is little attention paid to adapting the U.S. military and civilian agencies in the same sort of flattened, highly effective and nimble ways in response -- except in the Special Forces. Consideration should be paid to identifying practitioners who by temperament excel tactically and operationally in the arts of irregular warfare, regardless of rank.

5. The dichotomy between "counter-terrorism" and "counter-insurgency" is a false distinction designed to force political choices. Too many scholars now have their reputations and careers staked on the efficacy and durability or failure of FM 3-24 and how it relates to the competing narratives about its use on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan. While we embrace these debates because they are intellectually vital for a nation at war, ultimately we must move on and find new means of analyzing irregular conflicts America is likely to face. "COIN" is not the "graduate school of war" because all forms of modern war-making are complex and are guided by

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intellectual responses to complicated events and ideas.

6. FM 3-24 fails to fully define the insurgencies and insurgents likely to bepopulate a complex war amongst the people. The very definition of "insurgency" used in the manual is outmoded and simplistic. Rapid changes in the ways of waging and funding guerrilla warfare -- often with deterritorialized support, virtual audiences and transcendently global objectives -- have transformed at the pace of 21st century technological and operational innovation. Better anal-

ysis on how humiliation, revenge, dishonor, alienation, conspiracy theories, adventurism, injustice and other feelings and compulsions spur individuals and movements to insurgency should be provided alongside the best advice on how to mitigate these causative forces (which also are often the consequences of our intervention and operations).

7. Locked in time because of reputational and institutional taboos, FM 3-24 has not kept pace either describing post-Maoist conflicts or prescribing solutions to them. Partly this is because of the very form a field manual takes, but it's also for a range of other reasons that could be partially mitigated by rewriting it. Case studies might serve today's readers better than the typical format of field manuals. Building it by wiki or more informal methods of reaching junior personnel should be strongly considered.

8. The center of gravity for a counter-insurgent might or might not fall upon the population confined to the borders of the state suffering rebellion. Even if a frontline population is the center of gravity in a campaign, care must be given during the confection of any manual to address the different natures and goals of host populations, diaspora populations from all sides in the dispute and the populations of those nations that have sought to intervene in the conflict. Questions should be asked whether one today can script a pacification campaign that addresses realistically all or even most of these dispersed multiple and multiplying populations. The same goes for guerrillas in what some now term the "Federated Insurgency Complex," the complicated and shifting mix of enemies, bandits and militias on the irregular battlefield.

9. "COIN" can't be described or prescribed by checklists or examples from history deemed timeless. While potentially helpful as a thought exercise, unempirical notions such as David Galula's assurance that the political dimension of COIN is "80 percent political and 20 percent military" should be strongly reconsidered in light of learned lessons in today's ongoing wars

10. Questions also should be asked about our continued strategic focus on an indirect approach to achieving foreign policy goals. This requires a willing host nation regime that will "out govern" guerrillas or "terrorize" terrorists who might, or might not, be seeking to rule. Sections such as 1-147 are simplistic and often contradicted by real world experiences and should be rewritten.

11. In an attempt to posit timeless truths about insurgency and counter-insurgency, FM 3-24 removed the primacy and complexity of history. All "COIN" is local in the sense that insurrection is motivated by complex social forces or set to goals that often are animated by theological, economic, kinship or ideological concerns a foreign intervening army initially is unlikely to fathom, much less address through selective applications of force or suasion. Care should be given in better understanding and advising on the uses of economic development projects, support to host nation governments and other assumptions about achieving broad support of people who are in revolt or leaning toward insurrection. It is our concern that some prescriptive advice in FM 3-24 might prolong insurgencies or retard the ability of host nations to reach the "recovery" and "outpatient care" stages described in 5-5 and 5-6.

12. Violence is a natural condition of war. Practitioners of "COIN" should have no illusions about the need to kill guerrillas, destroy property, seize terrain and practice coercive practices to achieve necessary ends. Euphemisms and anodyne obfuscations should not be employed to describe processes that are brutal, even if not all lines of operations involve brutality. The application of violence nevertheless should fall under the rule of law and the traditional norms of battlefield morality. Practices that are abhorrent to the professional member of the military are outlawed by statute and treaty, including torture, should be prohibited even if perceived by some to be efficacious.

13. Not once in FM 3-24 is the term "propaganda of the deed" used. A rewrite should build upon 3-120 and 6-78 to restore primacy to propaganda of the deed as an operational concept used by guerrillas to wage war. This also will restore to the centrality of COIN the notion of "psychology" and compel practitioners to consider the social forces causing the revolt and the second and third-order consequences of their actions seeking to solve or mitigate them. This will require an expansion of B-23.

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The Void in Tactical Level Economic Doctrine

by David Anderson and Jonathan Schaffner

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In light of experiences in the Balkans, the Horn of Africa, the Caribbean and ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States military made several revisions to its doctrine. Many of these revisions account for the complexities in counterinsurgency, stability and reconstruction operations, especially when these operations take place amongst ongoing kinetic activities. Some of the changes reflect a newfound respect for operations conducted in Vietnam or, depending on the source, a thinly veiled reference to French actions in Algeria. These changes acknowledge the need for a whole of government approach, mention the word economy or economics as if it were permanently connected to social or political considerations, and even elevate the economy to an operational variable. However, they fail to fully expound on the tactical leader's involvement in economic activity and the necessity for achieving sustainable economic development in the operating environment. Using current Army Field Manuals (FM), a contracted research document and military source directives and instructions, this review will present the context in which these publications mention or address economics and the depth they venture to explain applications at the tactical level.

Department of Defense Instruction 3000.5 published in 2009 establishes stability operations as a core United States military mission that units will conduct at the same proficiency as combat operations.¹ Further, it directs military forces to conduct and support stability operations through all phases and ranges of military operations. The document designates the military as the lead agent to establish civil security and control, restore essential services, repair and protect critical infrastructure and deliver humanitarian assistance.²

The instruction also identifies the integration with civilian efforts as essential to the conduct of successful operations and guides the military to collaborate stability operations planning with other United States government agencies, foreign governments and international and non-governmental organizations as appropriate.³ In addition, the military is to foster the growth of civil-military teams to incubate the success of stability operations.

In specifically addressing the economy, the document states that the military will support operations to foster economic stability and development.⁴ Economic considerations are a characteristic of an area's intelligence assessment.⁵ According to the document, Joint Intelligence Operations Centers (JIOCs) will produce economic-centric intelligence products.⁶ Missing from the Instruction that was present in its precursor Department of Defense Directive 3000.05, published in 2005, is the long term goal of building a market economy in indigenous society, the task to help encourage citizen-driven economic activity and related infrastructure requirements.⁷ Bottom-up, entrepreneurial economic growth was a key concept in the initial directive. This concept would have broad applicability at the tactical level however the revised document places the military in a supporting role to higher level organizations and agencies.

Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, mentions the word economy or economics over 50 times. However, nearly half of the time it is mentioned in the context of "economy of force." The first paragraph addressing economic activities is paragraph 1-30 which discusses the connection between the local economy, and local politics while providing lists of factors affecting an individual's incentives to

¹ U.S. Department of Defense, Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 3000.05: Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations (Washington, D.C.: Secretary of Defense for Policy, 2009), 2.

² *Ibid.*, 2

³ *Ibid.*, 2

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15

⁷ *Ibid.*, 2 and 3.

change the economic status quo. Factors include technical knowledge, decentralized capital flow, investment, price fluctuations, debt, financial instruments, property rights and black market activity.⁸ These factors do not translate well at the tactical level. In fact, the most direct economic guidance in the manual demonstrates a misunderstanding of the importance of economic stability by stating that basic infrastructure must be functioning before shifting efforts to stabilize the economy.⁹ In fact, reconstituting the power, transportation, communication, health and sanitation, firefighting, mortuary services and environmental control capabilities of a country should be integrated in an overall economic development plan. These services provide employment and infrastructure necessary to advance commerce.

The manual goes on to list five all-inclusive elements of economic stabilization – restoring employment opportunities, initiating market reform, mobilizing domestic and foreign investment, supervising monetary reform and rebuilding public structures.¹⁰ While having merit at the national level, only portions of two elements, rebuilding public structures and restoring employment opportunities, have application at the tactical level. Nor does the document’s listing of economic considerations reference, or directly align, with guidance in FM 3-07, *Stability Operations*, discussed later. Overall the document does not constructively address economic concerns at the tactical level.

Field Manuals 5-0, *The Operations Process*, and FM 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*, each mention the word “economy” approximately 10 times. In the only specific explanation of the word, FM 5-0 states that the economy is an influencing operational variable in an operating environment.¹¹ Again, these two manuals do not substantively add to a tactical commander’s understanding of the importance of a functioning economy.

Field Manual 3-07, *Stability Operations*, mentions economy or economics over 200 times in its text and provides the most detailed explanation of considerations for military interaction with, and shaping of, the host country economy. Department of Defense Directive 3000.05 published in 2005, since replaced by the less prescriptive version of the document (DOD Instruction 3000.05) provides

the basis for ideas in FM 3-07. This manual describes the military necessity to rebuild government and develop a market economy, and provides several vignettes in its first chapter describing how a leader can influence local economies.¹²

A common theme in FM 3-07 is the connection of political and economic goals and the importance of understanding both policies and their interaction two levels up and down the chain of command. Further, the document describes a direct connection between political and economic freedom and then goes as far as referencing the national security strategy that links a market economy with independent businesses as a characteristic of a legitimate, effective state.¹³ The manual also addresses the primary stability task of Support to Economic and Infrastructure Development.

The first chapter of the manual specifically ends by providing an important consideration to commanders at all levels, that the immediate post-conflict economy is ripe for quick gains.¹⁴ This section, titled *Sustainable Economy*, is the most instructive portion in any of the field manuals regarding potential tactical level application of economic influence. It describes how at the end of a conflict, the local government is often in a state of decreased capability and military forces have the opportunity to immediately begin reconstruction efforts. These efforts should be focused on aspects of the economy that support its ability to self-sustain rather than looking for rapid, but temporary gains.¹⁵ These tactical-level projects include rebuilding physical infrastructure, establishing a viable workforce, business development and effective management of natural resources. The manual further recognizes that non-governmental and governmental aid agencies rush to provide aid in the immediate post-conflict economy, but describes this aid as a temporary and undirected injection into the economy. This short description assists in a tactical commanders’ understanding but does not describe required further actions.

Chapter two of the manual explains stability in the context of full-spectrum operations, describing how stability, offense and defense are present in all phases of military operations. The chapter further describes the Department of State’s stability sectors, recognizing they are by policy the lead stability operations agent. Most notable is the economic stabilization and infrastructure sector. Meaningful reference to the economy begins in paragraph 2-

⁸ FM 3-0, 1-7.

⁹ Ibid., 3-16.

¹⁰ Ibid., 3-16.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Defense, *U.S. Army Field Manual 5-0, The Operations Process* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 2010), 1-1.

¹² FM 3-07, vi.

¹³ Ibid., 1-10 and 1-29.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1-18.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1-18.

40, with a series of sections titled Economic Stabilization and Infrastructure. These sections provide a limited framework for initial economic stabilization activities in a post-conflict country focusing on the establishment of basic policy, securing and rebuilding existing economically important physical and process structures.¹⁶ The chapter also describes the post-conflict environment as an opportunity to build private sector capabilities.¹⁷

Chapter three provides detail on how a commander can determine which of the primary stability tasks, or their subcomponents, merit the title of essential stability tasks. The chapter leads the reader to recognize the necessity of linking efforts across stability sectors--from the economy to governance and security--and that military forces must understand the economy of their operating area is the foundation for future development. Further, it emphasizes the importance of monitoring price fluctuations that result from military purchases/environmental influences. For example, local buying by military forces that drive prices or availability of commodities out of range of the rest of the population. Military operations must reach a balance between immediate concerns and long term growth opportunities relative to the available workforce, existing economic infrastructure, and the infrastructure that must be built.¹⁸

While FM 3-07 provides the most detailed planning and execution tool for economic development, it focuses on considerations rather than sources of applicable tactical techniques. Furthermore, it does not fully recognize the interconnectedness of society with its economy. The most glaring examples of this are in chapter one where the manual separates infrastructure from the economy and places security and restoration of essential services as a greater necessity than economic support, rather than discussing operations that can support all three simultaneously. The subordinate to FM 3-07, Field Manual 3-07.31, *Tactics, Techniques and Procedures in Peace Operations*, alludes to economics considerations, but does not provide substantive depth in conducting tactical operations in support of economic activity.

Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, and FM 3-24.2, *Tactics, Techniques and Procedures in Counterinsurgency*, provide more detailed tasks for military forces in support of local economies, but only in terms of conducting counterinsurgency operations. These manuals see economic disparity as an insurgency driver and inequities as a source

of unrest. Additionally, the manuals see the economy as a source of power through formal and informal commerce.¹⁹ Economy does become an example of a logical line of operation in chapter five of FM 3-24, but is considered as a function or outcome of a legitimate government rather than an integral requirement of a sustainable society.²⁰

The final chapters and appendices of FM 3-24 provide some mention of possible tactical applications of economic incentives. However, they are focused on counterinsurgency application rather than promoting sustainable economic growth. According to these chapters, economic stability and support must achieve objectives along other lines of operation rather than existing as part of an integrated plan where all lines support each other.²¹ Since they present a measurable output, both manuals encourage counterinsurgency commanders to utilize economic outputs as indicators of mission effectiveness. These manuals do offer guidance to not disturb local economies with an injection of military funds, and go on to provide examples of tactical applications of economic incentives specifically designed to disrupt the status-quo, and in some instances quite deeply.²²

Field Manuals 3-24 and 3-24.2 provide many examples of tactical application of economic incentives. However, not in the context of economic stability operations, since they provide economic incentive for an activity or service that is outside the economic interests or needs of a population. They are merely a method to change a local political powerbase. As such, they do not directly facilitate the establishment of a long term viable economy. Using money as a weapon's system is also an expensive and often counterproductive proposition since a commander must continuously provide incentives to targeted populations or risk losing security momentum achieved through the injection of funds.²³ Furthermore, although the manuals provide many valuable economic considerations, they

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, *U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2006), 3-10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8-1.

²² *Ibid.*, D-7 discusses how not to disrupt the status-quo with CERP funds but FM 3-24.2 discusses tactics on how to use money as a weapon system to distribute or support powerbases on pages 3-11 through 3-13.

²³ Sons of Iraq are a prime example of the necessity of long-term involvement in reaching an immediate end. By paying the Sons of Iraq, the military was arguably taking bodies away from the insurgency; however, the necessary continued payment became an issue, especially when the Government of Iraq was to provide payment to these individuals after the Status of Forces Agreement and other economic opportunities were unavailable.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-8 and 2-9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2-12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-15.

provide little in the way of describing how to build a viable, self-sustaining economy.

To address shortfalls in current doctrine, specifically in building a tactical level understanding of the economy in an operating environment, The United States Army contracted RAND Corporation to produce a “how to” guidebook titled “*Guidebook for Supporting Economic Development in Stability Operations*”.²⁴ The book was designed to “help U.S. Army personnel to more effectively use economic assistance to support economic and infrastructure development.”²⁵ It was influenced by the October 2007 USAID produced *Guide to Economic Growth in Post-Conflict Countries* and is specifically geared to tactical commanders. The document provides the Department of Defense a publication that helps commanders chose and implement programs based on a better understanding of their economic environment.

This book’s extensive introduction provides interpretation of the economic and infrastructure support task of stability operations. The differentiation between humanitarian tasks and development tasks is important because recognizing that such activities are separate will lead commanders to better understand their effects on their environment’s economy.²⁶ Humanitarian tasks are generally in response to a population’s emergency needs while development tasks may support broader mission goals or focus on fostering long-term economic growth.²⁷ The tactical application of the economic and infrastructure support task translates into the creation of a local economic environment where individuals engage in legal economic activities while military forces work to further secure the area.²⁸

The book is subsequently divided into several semi-standalone chapters including: What You Need to Know Before You Go; Players, Coordination and Resources; Humanitarian Assistance; Infrastructure and Essential Services; Agriculture; Currencies, Budgets, Finance and Foreign Trade; Private Sector Development and Employment Generation; Natural Resource Management; The Effects of the U.S. Military on Local Economies. Each chapter begins with frequently identified problems at the tactical level, and then moves into tasks for the Host Government, Civilian Agencies,

NGOs and state-owned enterprises. Following this sub-section the chapters list and discuss potential army assessment, support and security tasks.

The chapters continue by describing the resources and capabilities of non-military players and host government entities in the context of stability operations. The authors acknowledge that there are many economic support tasks for both the military and outside agencies while painting a complex and thorough picture of how to look at a local economy in this operational context. The tasks identified in each chapter are useful considerations for commanders at all levels and provides a relatively well explained reason for each task’s ability to support economic development. The book echoes these inferences in Chapter 1:

While these operations are often conducted in support of a host-nation or interim government, they may also be executed as part of a military occupation or under other circumstances where no functioning government exists. Moreover, while stability operations are best conducted in coordination with other instruments of national power, the U.S. military should also be prepared to act in those circumstances that preclude collaboration from civilian agencies and actors. This is particularly important in the transition from high-intensity conflicts to stability operations insofar as the U.S. military may be the only actor capable of carrying out this role.²⁹

While this statement greatly expands most commanders’ interpretations of full spectrum operations, understanding these additional burdens is important in estimating troops-to-task down to the lowest tactical level. The document reiterates the importance of economic support and its linkages to security and governance. It further clarifies that economic support operations must be in conjunction with security and support to governance activities.

The final and most militarily focused chapter discusses the economic effects military forces may have on the host economy. In some cases, the relationship between the local economy and hosted forces can be parasitic and is often damaging. The presence of the United States military can lead to extreme localized inflation of goods and services required by military forces and exacerbate disrupted pre-conflict economic advantages and power-bases.³⁰ The chapter also provides several mini-cases that depict positive and negative practices with regard to stabilizing and encouraging growth

²⁴ Keith Crane et al., *Guidebook for Supporting Economic Development in Stability Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2009), xi, 52, 105.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, iii.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

in a local economy. However, this chapter, like the others, provides a long and thorough list of considerations but is relatively thin on supporting background and economic reasoning.

The guidebook is a useful source for identifying the kinds of information required to explain economic situations in an intelligence gathering context/framework, potential approaches during mission analysis and course of action development. It further describes definitions of the roles and capabilities of non-military players who may be able to assist with mission-focused tasks and how to measure progress and successful outcomes.³¹ It draws heavily on best-practices in vignettes and anecdotes gleaned from ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, through commander interviews, existing publications and the interaction between military and civilian personnel. The authors also draw upon other areas of unrest such as Liberia. However, the only overarching theme in the book is that the military is suppose to be in a support role, as the title of the document indicates, and that sometimes complex economic operations must occur to ensure the viability of a recovery from conflict. Another concern is that it operates under the premise that military manpower exists in a theater to support economic tasks initiated and managed by a massively expanded expeditionary element of the Department of State, USAID and NGOs.³² Ideally this method should breed success, but in light of the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, and its lack of sufficient civilian expertise at the tactical level, the document seems to miss the mark in supporting DODI 3000.05. With this background and the book's defined setting of a conflict and post-conflict environment, its stated reliance on other than military initiatives for, and management of, economic projects (especially at the tactical level), is unrealistic.³³ Therefore, the book has limited practical use.

Documents that guide tactical commanders in conducting economic activities focus almost exclusively on the “what” of a local economy not the “how” or “why.” Tactical commanders need to better understand the how and why of the economy within which they operate so they can directly influence and/or support necessary economic activity. Going forward, military doctrine and guiding directives must make significant strides to fill this tactical level void in guidance. Closing this critical gap must also include seamlessly linking these guiding documents to truly be effective.

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³¹ Ibid., 5.

³² Ibid., v-ix.

³³ Ibid., xii.

Words Matter: Re-imagining Irregular Warfare

by David Gayvert

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Current doctrine framing Irregular Warfare is wrong—historically, semantically and conceptually—and should be reexamined to enable decision-makers at all levels to better identify emerging threats, vulnerabilities, and opportunities, better allocate resources, and in the process, enhance our national defense.

Much of the debate over the proper balance between and relative importance of what are now binned as “Irregular” vs. “Conventional” capabilities in our national security strategy reflects a paradigm sorely in need of revision. Rather than the current context that is fundamentally linear, and focused on things and component categories, we need a systems-oriented perspective, centered upon understanding—and influencing—complex, dynamic relationships and environments that constantly interact and give rise to ever-changing threats to our national interests. Treating Irregular Warfare—or as I will propose as an alternative descriptor, *Evolving Threat Operations*—as a collection of defined capabilities, distinct from traditional warfare, rather than as a context and way of thinking about a fluid threat environment, impedes our ability to effectively address questions critical to our collective future. These include, but are certainly not limited to:

- How do we better integrate component military competencies, weapons systems and TTP to be able to more quickly, agilely and synergistically counter threats across and against the full spectrum of operational settings and adversaries?
- How do we better coordinate, integrate, and employ non-military, and even non-governmental knowledge and capability within this threat environment?
- How can we evoke preferred actions and responses in adversaries, and lure/maneuver them onto “battlefields” of our choosing—or better, achieve Sun Tze’ “highest skill” of defeating an enemy without a fight?
- Perhaps most important, how do we identify and counter threats, and reduce or exploit vulnerabilities that may fall outside the scope of all military activities, at least as currently conceived? In other words, to what extent are we “looking where the light

is good” instead of where the real emerging threats and vulnerabilities are developing? To use the parlance of a former Secretary of Defense, how do we get better at responding to “known unknowns” and reducing the universe of “unknown unknowns?”

This essay will argue that what in official publications are now referred to as “irregular threats” and the capabilities necessary to respond to them should neither be defined nor understood as things fundamentally different from or in opposition to the threats and capabilities included under the rubric of “conventional” or “traditional” warfare; that words matter—how they are used both reflects and informs thinking; and that we indeed need to think about “irregular warfare”—and all threats to our national interests—but in a significantly different context than that contained in current doctrine. Finally, it will briefly outline one possible alternative framework for doing just that.

HISTORY MATTERS: IRREGULAR WARFARE ACTIVITIES AREN’T

Arguments have raged the past decade over the nature and definition of Irregular Warfare (IW), its doctrine, and the role all that should play in resourcing, training and employing our military forces. For example, the implications and potential ramifications of placing too much or too little emphasis on counterinsurgency (COIN)—currently the reigning (perhaps soon to be waning) *primus inter pares* of IW—is continuously being discussed in fora like *Small Wars Journal*,¹ and reports are now beginning to surface questioning core precepts for COIN and related stability operations.² Having

¹ The ongoing debate there and elsewhere between Gian Gentile and John Nagl and their various supporters is emblematic—though certainly not all-inclusive—of this argumentation.

² See for example, Moyar, Mark, *Development in Afghanistan’s Counterinsurgency: A New Guide*, ORBIS Operations, Mar 2011; also see the recent report from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Evaluating US Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan* (S. Prt 112-21) at <http://foreign.senate.gov/reports>, accessed 30 Jun 2011. See also William F. Owen, *Killing Your Way to Control*, British Army Review, Number 151, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2011/07/killing-your-way-to-control/>, accessed 6 Jul 2011.

an approved definition,³ Joint Operating Concept(s) for Irregular Warfare, a Department of Defense (DOD) Directive and Instruction, and various other official publications delineating strategy, definitions, relationships and responsibilities for IW have not quelled such foment. Yet in a fundamental way, much of such debates elides an obvious point: COIN, counterterrorism (CT), stability operations (SO), foreign internal defense (FID), and unconventional warfare (UW)—the core Irregular Warfare activities, as currently identified—are profoundly *regular*, in the sense that they are the military operations most often performed historically. Moreover, in many cases, they do not in their conduct meet the definitional criteria of favoring “indirect and asymmetric approaches;” COIN doctrine is about as symmetrical as it gets, and nothing is as direct as the targeted kill/capture operations that are the centerpiece of counterterrorism.⁴ As the Army’s new Irregular Warfare Fusion Cell puts it:

Irregular Warfare (IW) is not so irregular. In fact, it is so prevalent and our Army has been engaged in irregular conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan for so long that soldiers in non-Special Forces units have become proficient in key IW and counterinsurgency warfighting tasks.⁵

And thus it has always been. As many recent commentaries have pointed out, despite the military’s penchant for state-on-state set battle scenarios ala World War II, the bulk of conflicts and associated military activities over the span of our republic (and the world as well) have consisted primarily of what we have come to wrong-headedly term “irregular” war. Sebastian Gorka and David Kilcullen point out in a recent essay, that over the past 200 years, less than 20% of wars have consisted of “conventional” state vs. state/soldier against soldier conflict; more than half have been what we now refer to doctrinally as Irregular Warfare (COIN, CT, UW, etc.).⁶ Similarly, how much sense

does it make to continue to refer to all too well known threats such as improvised explosive devices (IED), or Iranian support to militants in Iraq or Afghanistan as “irregular?” There is a whiff of doublespeak about characterizing the bulk of historical (and contemporary) military operations as “irregular,” and an argument for doctrinal reform could be mounted upon this point alone.

But the implications of “mis-conceptualizing”—and thus mischaracterizing—IW extend well beyond lexical imprecision. Significantly, they constrain and can distort discussion of the content and application of important military capabilities like COIN and CT. More importantly, however, they inevitably limit the scope of thinking and action in the rapidly expanding universe of “irregular” threats that confronts the country today.

WORDS MATTER I: RESOURCES

In government, words frequently mean very little—except, of course, when they involve legislative authorizations and appropriations, or executive budgetary guidance—in other words, money. Then great and specific import is attached to particular words, as program dollars, personnel and other resources can rise or fall depending upon how one describes a project initiative or mission activity. “Money follows words” is an oft-cited truism in the world of government program management. Thus how Irregular Warfare (or its successor term and concept) is defined and scoped will have a significant impact on how it is resourced and ultimately conducted. These decisions in turn drive dynamics that shape what and how analysts, decision-makers and staffs care and think about, direct, and execute. Moreover, framing IW primarily in terms of military core and enabling operations—even the use of the term “warfare”—can confuse or alienate needed IW partners in other agencies of the government.⁷ While in no way diminishing the im-

³ Per JP 1, “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence and will.”

⁴ This is not to say that the activities that comprise IW cannot be used to detect, counter or exploit indirect/ asymmetric threats, but the same could be said of almost any line of military operations.

⁵ US Army Combined Arms Center, IWFC portal page, <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/coin/index.asp>, accessed 5 Jul 2011.

⁶ Gorka, Sebastian and David Killcullen, *An Actor-centric Theory of War: Understanding the Difference between COIN and Counterinsurgency*, Joint Forces Quarterly, Issue 60, 1st Quarter

2011, pp 14-18. They draw relevant data for their analysis from the Correlates of War project, accessible at <http://www.correlatesofwar.org>.

⁷ See Davidson, Janine, *Operationalizing the Comprehensive Approach: The Military as Enabler...*, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2009/02/operationalizing-the-comprehen-1/>, accessed 5 Jul 2011. Relevant excerpt: “But the most toxic and possibly counterproductive term in the current military lexicon is ‘irregular warfare.’ While our allies frown at the intellectual confusion and ambiguity of the term, our own diplomats have more serious problems. Although the term has been useful in generating a paradigm shift among warriors who bristled at sissy terms like ‘peace operations’ or even ‘stability ops,’ diplomats and aid workers rightly resist having their missions cast as a type of ‘war.’”

portance of thinking about how best to train, equip, man, fund, and integrate activities like counterterrorism, foreign internal defense and stability operations, placing such analysis, debate and resources for operations that are historically conventional⁸ within the context of a portfolio ostensibly dedicated to countering indirect, asymmetric and emerging threats crowds out the thinking, activities and supporting resources that truly belong there.

WORDS MATTER II: PARADIGM SETTING

Words and terms convey more than simply their ostensible meaning. They both reflect and influence attitudes, beliefs, and modes of thinking. The words we use to express concepts, perceptions and intentions ultimately are understood within a contextual framework that in no small measure is set by the very words themselves. In short, they play a large part in forming cultures which either foster or impede effective analysis, decision-making and other critical behaviors within groups and institutions. Indeed, the very act of collective understanding—or “sensemaking”—is shaped by the words used describe events and observations. As one organizational expert puts it,

Organizations also have their own language and symbols that have important effects upon sensemaking . . . vivid words draw attention to new possibilities, suggesting that organizations with access to more varied images will engage in sensemaking that is more adaptive than will organizations with more limited vocabularies.⁹

This is why defining IW as a finite collection of core and enabling capabilities tends to create an artificial, limiting and distorting box around IW that not only determines which activities get funded (and just as importantly, which don't), but inevitably determines which activities get seriously thought about as well. The truism that “if all one has is a hammer, all problems look like nails” applies: if IW is COIN, CT, UW, FID, and SO, then “irregular threats” will tend to be seen in terms of insurgency, terrorism, and areas that lack stabil-

⁸ That many of the core activities of IW—FID, UW, CT—are exclusively or primarily conducted by Special Operations Forces (SOF) does not make them “irregular” in the sense argued above.

⁹ Weick, Karl E., *Sensemaking in Organizations*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996, pp 3-4.

ity.¹⁰ And as history has demonstrated repeatedly, thinking about the wrong things—or even thinking wrongly about the right things—can lead to ineffective action, missed opportunity, unintended outcomes, and perhaps most seriously, strategic surprise, too often with momentous, even catastrophic consequences. That is why we need a profound shift in the way we frame, scope, and execute activities aimed at identifying, countering, or exploiting indirect or emerging threats and vulnerabilities.

THINKING—AND SPEAKING DIFFERENTLY ABOUT IW

If one accepts the line of argument offered thus far, then how to proceed? The first step ought to be replacing Irregular Warfare with a term that more accurately reflects and evokes the reason for and activities of that line of operations. The second is describing the capabilities that ought to reside within the newly crafted and christened paradigm. The third task is to outline the context in which these capabilities may best be employed.

For the reasons argued above, I propose that activities designed to detect and respond to indirect, asymmetric and emergent threats be deemed *Evolving Threat Operations* (ETO). The “evolving” designation acknowledges the non-static nature of known threats, as well as the emergence of new threats as the world itself evolves. “Operations” implies a comprehensive range of missions and tasks, not limited in scope to a handful of military activities, or a particular environment or category of threat or adversary. It thus addresses conceptually what is recognized to be a “false dichotomy between IW and ‘major combat operations,’”¹¹ and is fully aligned with the doctrine of full spectrum operations.¹²

ETO will not (necessarily) require new capabilities, and instead will be built around the re-

¹⁰ Here, even the traditional concept of stability upon which our doctrine is based—what elements comprise it, how it may be recognized and achieved may be problematic. Researchers in the physical and life sciences talk about “organized instability” as perhaps a better way to understand our environment. See for example, Sole, Ricard, David Alonzo, and Alan McCane, “Self-organized Instability in Complex Ecosystems,” <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1692980/>, accessed online 16 Jul 2011.

¹¹ Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 3-0 *Operations*, Washington, DC: February 2011, Foreword by General Martin Dempsey.

¹² *Ibid.*, p 3-1. ETO also would comport with “Design” the problem-solving approach the Army currently advocates. See FM 5-0, *The Operations Process*, Ch 3.

alignment, integration, scope, prioritization and application of extant knowledge, disciplines and skill sets. Broadly, it must focus upon:

- Ways to recognize and define fluid threats and developing vulnerabilities
- Continuous critical analysis of a shifting global environment through a collaborative process between analytical disciplines, and highly skilled analysts selected both for their competence and aptitude for non-linear cognition Iterative development of a full spectrum array of response options (military/civilian, kinetic/non-kinetic, defensive/offensive, direct/oblique, overt/covert/ clandestine, etc.).
- Some of the specific questions it may address could include:
- Emerging threat recognition, prioritization and pre-emption/deflation—how to counter or exploit the actions of malign actors ranging from states like Iran or Venezuela to “super-empowered” actors like Wikileaks or Anonymous, driven by various anti-US agendas?
- How to evoke preferred actions and responses in adversaries, and lure/maneuver them onto “battlefields” of our choosing, or better, achieve Sun Tze’ “highest skill”—subduing the enemy without a fight?
- How to better understand—and then manipulate—the environments in which our adversaries operate? Instead of “draining the swamp” (impractical/impossible/ineffective —they will simply move), should we think about *poisoning* it, or slow-boiling the “frogs” within it?
- How to better identify/understand and attack network nodes (or “joints”); how can we apply jujitsu/aikido principles to threat response?
- What is /are new models and concepts for deterrence and conflict avoidance—and not creating unintended consequences? How do we better understand and predict the “systems effects” of our decisions and actions?
- How does our understanding of and assumptions about “stability” and rationality impact our perception and analysis? How do Western assumptions about stasis and the (apparent) linearity of events skew our ability to accurately perceive and describe “how the world works?”
- How can we better recruit, assess, select and train analysts and practitioners to build and employ such capabilities?

Innovation—in the way we perceive, understand, analyze and act within the environment of threat and opportunity—ought to be seen as the “core capability” for this new line of operations, around which technologies, organization, roles and responsibilities and TTPs are formed. It is beyond the scope of this essay to detail the Doctrine, Organization, Training, Material, Leadership and education, Personnel, and Facilities (DOTMLPF) implications of operationalizing a concept like ETO. However, it may be questioned whether “doctrine,” for example—at least in the usual sense of the term—is useful in describing and improving our ability to accurately and quickly perceive, understand and respond to indirect, asymmetric and emerging threats and vulnerabilities. As Albert Einstein famously observed, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” So if what we need most is the capability to rapidly and continuously achieve perceptual/ cognitive innovation, what is to be the doctrine for that? There are of course, a number of practices that can foster innovation: flat organizational hierarchies to enable rapid decision-making at the lowest possible level; high tolerance for experimentation and failure; rewarding rational risk-taking and non-conventional thinking, etc. In other words, practices not often prominently featured in the various bureaucracies of our national security agglomeration. It seems likely then, that the critical factors in creating ETO will lie in the realm of organization, personnel, and training, and instilling structures and practices that promote a culture of cognitive innovation.

Drawing upon insights from the natural and social sciences, leading organizational and leadership experts have often stressed the importance of “systems thinking” in planning and executing effective operations—understanding and exploiting the influences, interplay and interstices between disparate parts within a whole. Management expert Peter Senge in particular emphasizes the power of leverage within systems, and discovering non-obvious ways in which it may be applied. Using the analogy of trim tabs on the rudders of large ships, he illustrates how small, low cost/low effort actions can create big impacts, just as the relatively tiny movement of a trim tab at the very rear of the ship can ultimately change the direction of a huge oil tanker or ocean liner.¹³ ETO must embody this sort of systems approach, in which new sources of

¹³ Senge, Peter M., *The Fifth Discipline—The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization*, New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990, pp 64-65.

leverage are constantly sought, discovered and applied.

ETO as a context and design for perceiving and making sense of irregular threats necessarily must transcend organizational boundaries and equities, seeking and sharing inputs from any and all sources as it constantly works to better understand and influence the system(s) that comprise the threat environment. Perhaps the two most critical questions practitioners must continuously and evermore deeply ask as actions are contemplated, and *before* decisions are made are “Why...?” and “What if...?” At the heart of such an approach must be a ruthless and on-going examination of assumptions—about our adversaries, environment, and most importantly, ourselves—and how those assumptions shape what we see, think about, and ultimately come to believe.

This process must also drive a continuous, reality-based assessment of the nexus between policy and strategy on the one hand, and the efficacy of our national security efforts on the other. For example, in an age of persistent conflict with diverse and shifting state, non-state, proxy, and individual actors, what are the implications for the Treaty of Westphalia-based international system? In particular, do the conventional definitions (and understandings) of “war” and “peace” still apply? Policy and strategy will flow from how that question is answered, which in turn will either advance or impede options considered to deter, counter, exploit, or defeat adversaries.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn notes that revolutions (whether scientific or political) occur when existing institutions or paradigms have “ceased adequately to meet the problems posed by an environment that they have in part created.”¹⁴ I submit that within our inter-agency security bureaucracy we have reached precisely that point, and that a real revolution in our thinking and organization is desperately needed. Yet as all who have worked within that often dysfunctional system knows, creating the conditions, structures, culture and relationships necessary for a concept like Evolving Threat Operations as outlined above would seem all but impossible.¹⁵ Even

¹⁴ Kuhn, Thomas, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970 (Second Edition), p 92.

¹⁵ For one possible way to address this inertia, see Allard, Kenneth, “Changes and the American Security Paradigm,” in *Orbis*, vol 54, no 1, Winter 2010, pp 87-97. He argues that we should

a preventable catastrophe like 9-11 could not shake us from our hide-bound modes of thinking and problem-solving; despite recognizing the fundamental role that bureaucratic parochialism and risk aversion played in the failure to understand and disrupt the plot, our collective solution was to create and layer over our extant structures, two huge new bureaucracies, which in many ways have only reinforced the worst aspects of the status quo ante.

Whatever the difficulties in achieving substantive change in how we understand and respond to threats to our national interests and security, however, those of good will must continue to advocate for it in all ways they can. Evolving Threat Operations as described above may not be the answer, but something like it almost certainly is.

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establish decentralized, non-bureaucratic analysis and communications centers (like the Urban Warfare Analysis Center in Oklahoma) that tie into, but operate independently of the ossified national security apparatus in Washington, DC.

Yemen: Testing a New Coordinated Approach to Preventive Counterinsurgency

by Robert E. Mitchell

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An American-designed strategy attempts to link counterinsurgency and traditional development programs in Yemen and thereby provide a model that can be applied elsewhere. Rapidly changing conditions with simultaneous multiple small wars impair the ability to design and implement such a challenge. At the same time, there are legitimate questions about the thinking that went into the original formulation.

Much can be learned from America's linked military and civilian development initiatives in Yemen, a country in which the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been active over the years whereas the Department of Defense (DoD) has not had boots-on-the-ground. Boots-on-the-ground, in contrast, preceded USAID in both Afghanistan and Iraq. (USAID was earlier active in the former country.)

If the evidence on which this new combined Yemeni strategy proves approximately accurate, and if the inferences about the outcomes of proposed interventions in this country are sound, then American foreign and military policies have a model potentially exportable to other states in varying stages of failure and where American anti-terrorism programs are not yet active.

Even the best of Yemen's worst times challenge local development programs and especially those linked with the kinds of anti-terrorism initiatives supported by the U.S. military. During 2009 and 2010, the DoD and USAID formulated a coordinated development-and-security strategy based on evolving conditions at the time. America's parallel civilian development programs were to be seamlessly linked to those targeting counter anti-regime militant extremists. Of course Yemen has suffered some of its worst times over the past year or so, and it is possible that the proposed American strategy for this country will be aborted or significantly amended.

Still, the present analysis will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the thinking underlying the proposed American strategy. As will be suggested, this joint strategy was based on inadequate evi-

dence, questionable assumptions, and hypothetical intervention-outcome linkages. To move forward in an even more chaotic environment warrants a review of what went into the original strategy that current events suggest are no longer relevant. The assessment to follow has implications not just for USAID's development assistance programs in Yemen but also for the DoD's tribal-based counterinsurgency interventions in any environment with occasional non-overlapping small wars.¹

On March 16, 2010 General David Petraeus outlined the American development and counterinsurgency strategy for Yemen in his testimony before the Senate Armed Forces Committee. He referred to the DoD's program in Yemen as "Preventive Counterinsurgency Operations" that will "help Yemen deal with challenges that could become much more significant if not dealt with early on."² In support of this new formulation, a 2010 report issued by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations stated that "Yemen's security and socioeconomic challenges are inter-related" and, as a consequence, "the military has been given a bigger role than is the norm in carrying out development

¹ Over the years, Yemeni tribes have fought one another and individually against the state. There have been multiple types of small wars. Space does not permit a review and summary of the growing literature on counter-insurgency, small wars, and terrorism. One starting point for such a review might be William R. Polk's *Violent Politics, A History of Insurgency, Terrorism & Guerrilla War from the American Revolution to Iraq* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007). The *Small Wars Journal* is itself a rich resource of information and analysis that can be hypothetically linked to Yemen. The analysis of al Qaeda's hard drives captured from Osama bin Laden's compound on May 2, 2011 provides new insights into the organization of this terrorist group, an analysis that leads in directions different from such works as Louise Richardson's *What Terrorists Want, Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat* (New York: Random House, 2006) that tend to focus on the motivations of individual terrorists. For a summary of the latest readings of the bin Laden tapes, see Renny McPherson, "Inside Al Qaeda's Hard Drives," *Boston Sunday Globe*, July 17, 2011, K1 and K4. By not expanding the focus of the present article, the author can be legitimately criticized for his narrow country-specific focus. Guilty as charged, with apologies.

² Statement of General David H. Petraeus on The Posture of U.S. Central Command, Senate Armed Services Committee, March 16, 2010 available online at <http://www.centcom.mil/en/about-centcom/posture-statement/>

work—under the banner of countering extremism.”³ This development work includes village-level nation-building, the traditional responsibility of USAID. Both USAID and the U.S. military are to be responsible for coordinating the design and implementation of their respective projects in Yemen.

Even under normal abnormal conditions, it would be a challenge to formulate and implement these two programs so that they supported one another in ways that contribute to meeting the longer-term development needs of Yemen. USAID programs don't typically focus on near-term security threats, whereas the U.S. military has more immediate security interests that in Yemen relate to the terrorists who might threaten the American homeland. And whereas USAID has had several decades of on-and-off experiences in Yemen, the U.S. military's physical presence is more recent as seen in public reports on the training of Yemeni military counterparts, the supply of military ordnance, and the deployment of drone aircraft to track and attack terrorists.

USAID has been intermittently active in Yemen since 1959.⁴ Relations between the U.S. and Yemen were broken in 1967 only to be restored in 1973 with a new USAID agreement. It lasted until 1990 when relations were interrupted following Yemen's UN vote against expelling Iraq from Kuwait. After seven years' absence, USAID began anew in 2003.

Much had changed in Yemen during USAID's absence from the country in 1990. In 2003, the Agency had little contemporary field-level country knowledge, experience, or experts to draw on in preparing its renewed country strategies. Not only was USAID absent for seven years, so were social scientists conducting community field studies. This absence, together with U.S. security concerns, influenced both the strengths and possible weaknesses of USAID's current ambitious (and perhaps unrealistic) strategy and programs.⁵

The Agency's strategies, mind set and program portfolios changed since 1959. Early on, the Agency funded two major infrastructure projects, the Mo-

cha-Taiz-Sana'a highway and the Kennedy memorial water project in Taiz. In the late 1980s (during my tenure in Yemen), USAID had a traditional portfolio of sectoral projects in agriculture, health, education, and water, as well as an initiative to strengthen the private sector, support for women in development, and the first initiative to promote democracy and improve the administration of justice in a country covered by AID/Washington's Near East Bureau.

9/11 changed the way America viewed Yemen. Reflecting America's new security concerns, USAID's portfolio of projects in 2003 targeted “five remote, very poor, rural governorates,” also referred to as “tribal governorates” that were sources and havens for terrorism. Traditional community-level health, education and agricultural projects were seen to be promising approaches to alleviating security problems found in these governorates.⁶

The current 2010-2012 program is built around a security-centered strategy. USAID is to target “highly vulnerable areas” with a “localized stabilization strategy” to address “drivers of instability and conflict” in eight governorates (three more than covered in the 2003-2009 strategy). These drivers are to be identified by the “frustrations and needs” that the targeted local communities themselves identify. However, for the most part, the drivers are long-term sticky national challenges of a “rapidly growing population, unequal development, political marginalization . . . declining government revenues, growing national resource scarcity” and America's apparent real concern: “violent Islamist extremism.”

Although the illustrative interventions to address long-term challenges describe multi-sectoral programs, elsewhere the strategy implies that project implementers will draw on traditional sectoral programs. If the USAID Mission in Sana'a is organized by sector (with separate offices for agriculture, health and education), then there is a good chance that these offices will drive the selection of interventions, not local communities.

The 2010-2012 strategy has three components: (1) The Community Livelihoods Project, a multi-sectoral initiative that is intended “to mitigate the drivers of instability”; (2) a Responsive Governance Project, a rather standard capacity-building effort but one that will allow USAID to target specific communities with interventions that will “require relatively little effort to garner support, and that will have the biggest strategic impact for the

³ Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, *Following the Money in Yemen and Lebanon: Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Security Assistance and International Financial Institution Lending* (111th Congress, 1st Session, January 5, 2010, S. Prt. 111-38), pp. v. 11. Available online at <http://foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/54245.pdf>

⁴ The history of this involvement is available online at http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACP572.pdf. Also see USAID|Yemen, *Previously Funded Projects* at <http://yemen.usembassy.gov/prepro.html>

⁵ For a review of past social science reports on Yemen, see Robert E Mitchell, “What the Social Sciences Can Tell Policy-Makers in Yemen,” *The Middle East Journal* (forthcoming).

⁶ See footnote 4.

resources extended in quickly and effectively” mitigating “critical threats to stability in Yemen.” Finally, (3), the Yemen Monitoring and Evaluation Program will track and evaluate the first two programs. Security is the ultimate objective; local and national interventions are to achieve the objective. There is certainly nothing unusual in this kind of thinking.

The strategy was developed “amidst growing instability and a greater sense of urgency” that required a “new stabilization strategy.” This urgency (which has been overtaken by recent events over the past several months) may explain why some issues do not appear to have had a full airing. For example, the emphasis is on strengthening governance and local community organizations that central government ministries control. USAID is to “enhance the capacity of government officials, promote decentralization, and empower communities” in the eight high-priority problem governorates. This can be seen as an effort to reduce the power of tribes and traditional leaders, but USAID’s documentation makes only a very few mentions of tribes and no reference to USAID’s support for an earlier “tribal conflict mitigation program,” let alone the recent urban-based opposition to Yemen’s president.⁷

In skirting a discussion of tribes and the existing research on them (recent evidence suggests a decline in the importance of tribal identification and systems⁸), it would appear that tribalism does not merit a high priority. This oversight may be explained by the nature of a formal bilateral nation-to-nation agreement with the government of Yemen, not its tribes, as the American counterpart. USAID will build the capacity of the Republic of Yemen (ROY), not tribes, in governorates with strong tribal systems. The intention is that “by empowering communities [not tribes] and linking them with governing structures . . . public services will reinforce the presence, and to a lesser extent, legitimacy of the state in those areas.” However, Yemen’s recent urban-based turmoil questioned the legitimacy of the government, if not the state itself. And the open tribal challenges to Yemen’s president question the likelihood that local communities will uniformly accept a strengthened central government.

By focusing on formal government bodies and shading the importance of tribes and the admittedly limited and dated social research on them (concerning, for example, the ROY and Saudi government payments to sheiks), the American program seems to have ignored the real possibility that tribes, through their leaders, would likely capture and direct local programs supported by USAID even though it appears that the Agency’s programs intend to replace tribes by strengthening local councils and associations. These local groups are government entities under the control of national ministries that in turn are often led by tribal members. Reforming the tribal system would replace or reform these ministries and perhaps replace their leaders. This would be done by developing new local non-tribal leadership that would no longer receive payments from the ROY and the Saudi government. The difficulties of achieving this transformation are not mentioned in USAID’s country strategy. Moreover, the urban-based turmoil of recent months suggests that both Yemenis and Americans will need to revisit the meaning of a central government as well as the tribes themselves.⁹

Even if the authority of the already weak central government is not significantly diminished, the lack of security in the targeted governorates means that USAID staff and contractors would only have limited physical access to these areas. This would make it very difficult to base project interventions on “community-determined needs” and to deliver and monitor programs that might adversely affect the tribal system in the eight tribal governorates. Even before the past year’s turmoil, “USAID officers have not been able to visit some USAID-funded projects in many years.”¹⁰

The current country strategy lists numerous “illustrative activities” that might help achieve program results. Since the Agency’s purpose is to weaken “drivers of instability” (including the tribal system), the challenge will be to collect and assess information on the likely immediate effects an activity will have on the welfare of a community and how that welfare will in turn reduce instability. Research supportive of the proposed activities and their assumed effects is thin at best.¹¹ One would

⁷ For USAID’s current role more generally with the “Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework,” see Steven Alan Honley, “Smart Power in Action: S/CRS,” *Foreign Service Journal* (May 2, 2010), 43.

⁸ Mitchell, “What the Social Sciences Can Tell Policy-Makers in Yemen.”

⁹ In July 2011, demonstrators in Taiz, Yemen’s second largest city, questioned the narrow interests of a tribal leader attempting to control opposition to the central government. See Sunarsan Raghavan, “In Yemen, tribal militias flex muscles,” *Washington Post* (July 8, 2011).

¹⁰ Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, *Following the Money*, p. 11.

¹¹ Mitchell, “What the Social Sciences Can Tell Policy-Makers in Yemen”

need to see the social soundness analyses the Mission prepared in support of its three major programs, but the kinds of social research supported by USAIDs worldwide are not especially relevant to the security thinking behind the Mission's current strategy.¹²

The absence of pertinent USAID research and expertise on Yemen and other countries with serious security challenges suggests that the Yemen mission relied on largely unproven assumptions and assertions about cause-effect relations commonly used in other countries as well as in U.S. domestic programs. For example, the current strategy claims that “the foundation of political opposition and extremist ideologies is, to a great extent, based on people's level of satisfaction with the services their government provide and whether there are real opportunities.” The strategy also states that “the development hypothesis of the USAID/Yemen Strategy postulates that addressing the development needs of underserved communities is causally related to improving political and social stability.” However, the causal linkages (if there are any) don't seem to capture the motivations and personal backgrounds of known jihadists (e.g., the 9/11 hijackers) and the leadership of untold other anti-American insurgent groups.¹³ According to many commentators, America's opponents base their ideologies both on religious grounds and on what are seen to be American foreign and military policies.

If communities will not base their beliefs and activities on the benefits of USAID-funded local projects, then USAID anticipates that other “out-reach efforts will promote behavior change that will help individuals take advantage of service and employment opportunities.” The intention is to forcefully create and enable “agents of change” favorable to the objectives stated in the USAID and DoD programs in Yemen. These are well-intentioned hypothetical aspirations.

USAID staff is challenged to distinguish between needs and preferences. Although there are multiple possible needs as well as initiatives to meet them, there is a danger that USAID's focus will be primarily on needs for which the agency has

traditional programs and Washington offices back-stopping them. This suggests that the Mission's interventions will deal with agriculture, maternal and child health, education, and micro-credit, all long-standing programs with AID/Washington offices promoting and dedicated to these sectors. It would not be the first time (in my memory) when AID/Washington sectoral offices attempted to influence a USAID mission's program strategy.

Finally, because USAID has a bilateral nation-to-nation program, it is likely that national ministries based in Sana'a will shape if not control which local communities will benefit from American-supplied services and assistance. Even within a modest-size governorate, this would permit Sana'a to reward and co-opt some communities and their leaders rather than others not in favor with the central government. Unfavored groups could be the very same communities “most at-risk of generating political instability and providing possible refuge for terrorists.” Of course, without a widely accepted central government (the current situation), the implementation of this capital-based development strategy is questionable at best.

The DoD appears not to be as reticent as USAID in recognizing the importance of tribes. If the US military (with boots on the ground) adopts a short-term perspective by rewarding tribes and their leaders as the Saudi and ROY have done in the past,¹⁴ then both the civilian (USAID) and military (DoD) will not be mutually supportive of one another. Given the apparent greater freedom of in-country physical movement that DoD personnel have and the US Government's emphasis on security threats, there is a danger that USAID would become a junior (adjunct) partner in the American assistance and security programs in Yemen. A single US government policy for this country requires not just a commitment to a common objective but also a common understanding of the problems to be addressed, adequate field-level information on the problems, a portfolio of responses to address the problems, and mechanisms in place to implement and monitor project performance. It remains to be seen if USAID and DoD capabilities can in a coordinated manner meet the challenges set forth as a single American strategy for Yemen. And this was just before the recent turmoil.

Under Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act, the DoD funds and implements both military and civilian development projects in Yemen. The American military's Special Opera-

¹² For guidelines for the conduct of USAID's social soundness analyses, see <http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/govpubs/for/yemen.htm>. For a list of some recent USAID project evaluations, see http://www.google.com/#hl=en&ei=8rLhS6PGNYT7lwfFlZGqAg&sa=X&oi=spell&resnum=0&ct=result&cd=1&ved=0CAUQB SgA&q=http%3A//usaid.gov/pubs/usaid_eval/&spell=1&fp=a86c207b1c79523e

¹³ As analyzed in Richardson's *What Terrorists Want* as well as by numerous other authors.

¹⁴ Mitchell, “What the Social Sciences Can Tell Policy-Makers in Yemen.”

tions Command Control office in Yemen manages its own “civil affairs and community outreach projects . . . including community-based development activities” as well as the public diplomacy program staffed by a Military Information Support Team (MIST) with its traditional psychological warfare techniques.¹⁵ While USAID may not be targeting tribes and their leaders, the DoD will carry on an “active dialogue with tribal leadership and civil affairs development projects . . . designed to improve the quality of life and offer a viable alternative to violent extremist activities.” These DoD non-urban projects include economic development and good governance, specifically “rural development programs in Yemen’s tribal areas.” Moreover, according to the earlier-referenced 2010 Senate report, USAID and the DoD have carried out “joint programs,” in part because, from the American perspective, the “challenges facing Yemen are inter-related and cannot be addressed in isolation.” Given the assumed close linkage between USAID and the DoD, it is no wonder that U.S. Senate investigators found that Yemeni government officials “did not distinguish at all between military-administered or civilian-administered programs.” And it is also no wonder that a DoD “rural development program reportedly got off to a rocky start due to misperceptions on the part of tribal leaders about what the USG’s intentions were.”¹⁶

Although the American ambassador is responsible for assuring coordination between USAID and the DoD, in fact the military “operate under the authority of their respective commands, as opposed to under Chief of Mission authority” and, as one result, U.S. military officers “are allowed to travel to some areas of the country that are off-limits to civilian personnel” and as noted earlier, “due to Embassy travel restrictions for civilian employees, USAID officers have not been able to visit some USAID-funded projects in many years.”¹⁷ These restrictions and USAID’s focus on eight security-challenged tribal governorates raise questions about the ability of the Mission and its contractors to plan and manage the activities proposed

under its 2010-2012 country strategy. Moreover, field-level coordination is not possible if USAID does not have access to areas that the DoD has its own targeted development activities. Coordination can become a rather meaningless concept.

I have not found a description of the specific community-level projects managed by the DoD in Yemen, but USAID’s own country strategy reports that SOCCENT (Special Operations Command Central) projects involve “active dialogue with tribal leadership.”¹⁸ That is, the DoD, unlike USAID (at least in its public documents), seems to consciously target tribes and their leadership. Particular attention, it seems, is likely to be placed on religious leaders. According to the Joint Special Operations University’s Strategic Studies Department, research is invited on how to engage “the constructive Muslim Ummah to counter violent extremist ideology.” This (non-development) focus is incorporated in the Department’s focus on “combating Terrorist Networks.”¹⁹

¹⁸ SOCCENT has two teams in Yemen: the Civil-Military Support Element (CMSE) and the Military Information Support Team (MIST). They are the primary interfaces between DOD and USAID/Yemen. The “civil affairs development projects are designed to improve quality of life and offer a viable alternative to violent extremist activities.” CMSE oversees development and humanitarian assistance projects, and MIST implements initiatives that utilize various modes of communications, information networks, and community leaders to spread critical messages that attack drivers of instability and reinforce basic functions of civil society. USAID projects must collaborate closely with DOD where feasible. The DOD and the USG have still other programs in Yemen. For example, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) funds projects that help “build the capacity of non-governmental organizations.” This program “targets civil society organizations.” And in addition to the USAID, DOD and MEPI programs, the USG extends assistance through the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the Department of Defense, the Department of Commerce and other Washington-based offices, many of which rely on American contractors to implement projects. Yemen also receives assistance from a range of bilateral and multilateral donors and financial institutions. This large number of donors is said to overwhelm central ministries and, as a result, project funds are not spent or, if spent, not adequately tracked. In its earlier incarnation, MIST was responsible for “psychological operations” (shades of the Phoenix Project in Vietnam). Today MIST produces leaflets, radio broadcasts, and loudspeaker messages to influence both soldiers and civilians. During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, this unit dropped leaflets encouraging Iraqis to surrender. Presumably MIST in Yemen would have a different focus, one that requires the unit to be subordinate to the rural development programs initiated and implemented by the U.S. military. Malcom Nance has proposed that Muslims, Yemeni and foreign groups need to design and implement programs to delegitimize Al-Qaida and its leaders. His suggestions on how to do this are in his *An End to al-Qaeda, Destroying Jihad and Restoring America’s Honor* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010), Chapters 9 and 10.

¹⁹ Joint Special Operations University, *USSOCOM Research Topics 2010* available online at

¹⁵ In the past before becoming part of the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Information Agency would have provided such services. For more information on MIST, see <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=1&ved=0C BYQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.africom.mil%2FgetArticle.asp%3Fart%3D3642&rct=j&q=military+information+support+team+mist&ei=bZMbTiaFO4T68Abk3ayeCQ&usg=AFQjCNHIpB2Di5syoOR3QUU-iqxxw> For more information on SOCCENT, see footnote 17.

¹⁶ *Following the Money*, p. 11. USAID’s national decentralization strategy is online at http://www.usaid.gov/locations/middle_east/countries/yemen//

¹⁷ *Following the Money*, p. 11.F

The above account of two U.S. development programs in Yemen, one by the civilian USAID and the other by a counter-terrorism military group, can be placed in the larger context of the research traditions of the two agencies (USAID and the American military), the potential value of academic field studies of Yemeni tribes, and the distinction between projects addressing long-term development challenges and those with a more immediate (security) focus. Civilian USAIDs worldwide draw on social research to help design projects and evaluate their progress in sectors such as health, education, agriculture, national economic policies as well as in “general development,” governance, and democracy. The U.S. military’s two general social research foci include attention to a government’s stability (as reflected in studies currently funded by the DoD-NSF Minerva Project and in the DoD’s earlier ill-fated Project Camelot) while the other focus has a more immediate tactical value (such as the Human Terrain System used in Afghanistan). Neither DoD focus necessarily includes traditional development objectives supported by USAIDs.²⁰

SOCCENT would no doubt draw on military intelligence to identify Yemeni communities to receive security-mitigation projects. The Strategic Studies Department within the Joint Special Operations University lists the kinds of research that might help the SOCCENT team in Yemen to design and implement projects in targeted communities. The list is divided into six sections that include “irregular warfare” and “regional and cultural studies.” Two research topics specifically mention Yemen: A32: “Engaging the constructive Muslim Ummah to counter violent extremist ideology,” and B.25: “Strategic decision making for irregular warfare—case studies on irregular-warfare success and failure.”²¹

Proposed project A32 asks “what are the barriers to the flow of information among 10–40-year-old Muslims? What can the U.S. government, and others, do to reduce these barriers? Which U.S. policies and/or actions should be increased,

http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2010/10_ussocom-research-topics.pdf.

²⁰ See Robert E Mitchell, “Department of Defense Support for International Security-Related Social Research” in *Contexts* (forthcoming).

²¹ Joint Special Operations University, *USSOCOM Research Topics 2010* available online at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2010/10_ussocom-research-topics.pdf. For more online information on SOCCENT, see <http://www.socom.mil/default.aspx>

strengthened, and/or reduced to enhance positive engagement of the constructive Muslim Ummah? Which instruments of U.S. government ‘soft power,’ as identified by Secretary of Defense Gates, should be engaged or enhanced?” The purpose of the proposed B25 project is “is to capture lessons learned from recent, relevant irregular-warfare activities to better understand national decision-making process, accuracy of planning assumptions, and effectiveness of operations to improve future operations.” Unfortunately there is no open-source information on completed or ongoing SOCCENT studies in Yemen. Nor is there information on how SOCCENT-supported research would help in the follow-up design and implementation of field-level projects. And there is an unknown, unstated and questionable linkage between these SOCCENT proposals and the development-oriented ones that USAID is to support. Some DoD initiatives could very likely run counter to those managed by USAID.

Finally, although immediate pre-turmoil short-term security challenges shaped USAID’s program in Yemen, in fact the Agency (worldwide) primarily addresses heavy macro-economic and social challenges (e.g., water, employment and agricultural productivity) that require long-term perspectives and solutions. In contrast, the U.S. military’s SOCCENT program focuses primarily on immediate short-term non-urban security challenges. If successful, USAID’s proposed program in Yemen should over time benefit targeted communities, but it is unrealistic to assume that the Agency’s claims on cause-effect linkages will lead to widespread national benefits that will significantly ameliorate security threats. USAID programs have long-term objectives. The DoD’s projects have a short and almost immediate-term time perspective.

The relatively few dated studies of Yemen’s tribal systems and changes in them could, if ground-tested today, provide an understanding that can be useful to both USAID’s development agenda and to the DoD’s focus on drivers of insecurity.²² It is not apparent that either US agency has drawn on this literature and updates to it for guidance in formulating and implementing projects. This literature could be especially helpful to the DoD for it, in contrast to USAID, is specifically targeting individual tribes for rural development projects that are intended to lower identified threats to Yemen’s security - - and to America’s as well.

²² Mitchell, “What the Social Sciences Can Tell Policy-Makers in Yemen”

The DoD's focus on the drivers of insecurity provides a mindset different from USAID's traditional focus on development. Yet USAID/Yemen has adopted the DoD's definition of American concerns, making the focus on security the official U.S. strategy for Yemen. USAID's country strategy is a vehicle to achieve the DoD's security agenda, an agenda that the DoD is pursuing with its own rural development projects that in the past have been the responsibility of USAID.

USAID is in danger of being limited to a role primarily (if not exclusively) supportive of the U.S. military. This possibility feeds into charges by critics that the U.S. foreign policy has been militarized and that the missions of civilian agencies are becoming subservient to the military. Although the State Department's and USAID's 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review is supposed to enhance civilian capabilities,²³ and although the Pentagon's own Quadrennial Defense Review supports a strengthened role for civilian agencies, in fact the military has in the past attempted to free itself of restrictions placed on it by the Foreign Assistance Act, including "strict compliance with human rights standards."²⁴

USAID's supportive role raises questions concerning the Agency's traditional approach to program and project design, one that involves linking specific interventions to the achievement of designated goals. The cause-effect (means-ends) links in USAID/Yemen's country strategy have little if any empirical justification. All the linkages are hypothetical. This judgment applies to the DoD's community development projects as well.

Both USAID and the DoD are designing programs in an information-and-knowledge poor environment. Information and understanding of individual villages and tribes is required, not just an overall assessment that led to USAID's focus on eight governorates. Even this primarily village or tribe-centered focus can now be questioned, for the recent turmoil seems to have been primarily urban based, although the media has often focused more on northern tribal opposition to the country's president. Neither USAID nor the DoD has programs directly addressing the sources of and solutions to the challenges of urban protestors who demand a change in the national government, not solutions

to tribal-based threats to American security. This distinction between urban vs. tribal suggests that American assistance programs need (as they often do) to distinguish between short-term security threats and those that influence sustainable long-term economic and political change that minimize drivers of instability and conflict - - between rural-tribal programs and those that address more urban-based grievances. My guess is that USAID and the DoD will need to reformulate their cooperation and begin to draw on individuals who know not just more about Yemen but also about how to wisely select among alternative means-ends solutions to development and security challenges.

Robert E. Mitchell earned degrees from the University of Michigan, Harvard's China Area Program, and Columbia (Sociology), has been an academic in the US and overseas, a Foreign Service Officer with USAID (including a tour in Yemen in the late 1980s), consultant on various international challenges, and published widely on a variety of topics (most recently in MIT's Journal of Interdisciplinary History). He is retired, living in Brookline, Massachusetts and an active leader and member in Harvard's Institute for Learning in Retirement.

²³ Gordon Adams, *Bulletin of the Atomic Sciences*, (February 1, 2010) available online at <http://www.thebulletin.org/web-edition/columnists/gordon-adams/the-quadrennial-diplomacy-and-development-review-separating-the->

²⁴ Bill Clifton, *RIGHTS: Bill Shields Pentagon Aid Boost Oversight*. Available online at <http://www.etan.org/et2007/may/19/13pentag.htm>

The Iraqi COIN Narrative Revisited: An Interview with Douglas A. Ollivant

by Octavian Manea

Published [online](#) July 24, 2011

The fundamental truth of the Iraqi settlement is that the sectarian civil war ended—and the Sunni lost. Upon realizing this defeat, the Sunni went into damage control mode to reach a settlement....In short, the Sunni had reached what military scholar Stephen L. Melton calls looming demographic collapse, a threshold of casualties which convinces one side in a conflict that it has lost and that suing for peace is the only means of ensuring group survival.

—Douglas A. Ollivant, [Countering the New Orthodoxy](#)

How would you see today the rationale behind the 2007 Baghdad surge? To act as a buffer between the Iraqi sectarian, ethnic pressures and ontological (group extinction) fears? To protect a Sunni population that could not be protected by the formal Iraqi security forces (either because of weakness or because the Sunnis didn't trust them) and setting the stage for the next level—a rational political space?

Protecting the population is important. But the sad fact is that by early 2007 in Baghdad, the Sunni groups had been pushed back to small enough enclaves that it was fairly easy to protect them, save in Southern Baghdad, where the cleansing continued well into the fall of 2007. The continued cleansing in South Baghdad made me skeptical that things were working until very late in 2007, despite the obvious reduction in violence elsewhere in the city as of late summer.

So yes, protecting the population is important. But I don't think that we could have done much to protect them in mid-2006. The civil war had to burn itself out—the Sunnis had to realize that they had lost and the Shi'a had to realize that we had won—before a settlement could be reached.

I do think that the presence of additional U.S. troops in the urban areas tamped down the end of the civil war faster than it might otherwise have happened. U.S. forces worked with the local trend to accelerate it, and did not impose a totally foreign agenda. Had we started the "surge" plan in Sadr City, for example, I think the outcome might have

been much less favorable. I have come to a more tempered view of what military forces are able to accomplish, as I tried to lay out in my Washington Post piece on the "[three wars](#)" in Afghanistan.

The Iraqi surge hardly happened in a vacuum. Could you list and explain, which were in your opinion the other conditions or pieces of the puzzle that contributed to the drawdown of the violence, but actually set before the surge? And for which the surge provided a galvanizer, accelerator or a booster?

First, Iraq is a much more favorable place to try an outside intervention. It is a twentieth-century society, with education, infrastructure, roads, civil servants, bureaucracies, a military tradition, rivers, and a seaport (and lots and lots of oil). And as I said earlier, I think the fundamental trend in Baghdad is the end of the civil war. Were the civil war not already ending, even ten brigades and three Dave Petraeuses wouldn't have brought order to Baghdad. And for that matter, had we been able to stop the civil war before it was brought to a conclusion accepted by both sides, then Iraq might still be unstable today. Given that the outcome of civil war was clear, then the activities taken by MNF-I during the "surge" period—flooding the zone with troops, building Joint Security Stations, working with the Iraqi Security Forces, building more police stations, putting up concrete walls, assisting with political negotiations, bringing in the nationalist Sunni insurgency, stepping up the campaign against AQI and the Shi'a "special groups"—all these things were helpful and probably did make Baghdad stable faster. But again, had we not been taking the Iraqis in the direction that they already wanted to go, I don't think we would have experienced success—and certainly not on a politically acceptable timeline.

Which was in your opinion the most plausible trigger for the "Anbar Awakening"? And how important was the so called "Lawrence of Arabia moment" of the US military in this process (I am referring to the efforts of thinkers like Captain Travis

Patriquin in engaging the tribes and building trust bonds with their sheiks)?

I consider the Patriquin Power Point on “How to Win in Anbar” to be the most important single document produced during the 2004-2007 period. In a very simple and irresistible format, Patriquin makes you think differently about what you are doing and how the problem should be approached. He forces you to see Iraq from the perspective of the natives. Now, I think he was just a touch naïve (or was deliberately so in the document) about the good intentions of the Sheiks, and I think that fear of Baghdad government played a much larger role than those who worked the Anbar problem like to admit. It isn’t far from Fallujah to Baghdad, and Baghdad had a lot of Sunni refugees from the 2004 Second Fallujah battle living as refugees. I believe the Anbar sheiks were painfully aware of the sectarian cleansing occurring in Baghdad and that this fact was very high in their calculus. But from the perspective of those working the problem in Anbar, the motivation of the sheiks really isn’t all that important. What is important is that there is now an opening to change the dynamic of the insurgency, and the usual suspects mentioned in the Anbar account deserve credit for grabbing that opportunity, even if they didn’t necessarily create it.

To what extent could we see the success of the COIN campaign (with the surge as the vanguard) as a catalyst for spreading the spirit of the “Anbar Awakening” and, at the end of the day, fundamental in triggering the Sunni tribal revolt-the Sons of Iraq movement?

I think that would be a mistaken interpretation. I would instead give primary agency to the Shi’a militias who defeat the Sunni insurgency in Baghdad, and then to the mid-level U.S. Commanders who are alert enough to work with this new dynamic. I don’t think battalion commanders like then-Lieutenant Colonels Dale Kuehl in Ameriya and Kurt Pinkerton in Abu Ghraib get quite enough credit. Again, they didn’t have agency and the answer essentially presented itself to them. But had they not been mentally agile enough to see the change in dynamic and work with it, they could have kept it from happening.

In your paper you warned against learning “the wrong lessons” from the Surge period (that a “COIN strategy + the surge in troops + enlightened leadership” is the silver bullet). Which are the right lessons that should be a critical part in waging future stability operations?

The right lesson is that you have to approach each problem as a unique one. I think there are almost no tactical and operational lessons to be brought forward from Iraq to Afghanistan, and the beginning of wisdom in a new “small war” is to realize that your experience in the last one may well be a handicap.

I would bring only a few very general geopolitical lessons. The locals have primary agency; if you don’t find a local trend to work with, you are unlikely to be successful; the intervening power and the local government have to want the same thing (more or less); the third party is not staying there forever and everyone knows this and factors it into their calculus; armies are only really good at building other armies.

You have served as a counterinsurgency adviser to U.S. forces in eastern Afghanistan. Does counterinsurgency work in Afghanistan? At least from what you have seen. It seems that in South, in Helmand and Kandahar, it really made a tactical difference.

I would say that counterinsurgency can work in some places in Afghanistan. Bing West’s magnificent new book *The Wrong War* looks at the Army trying to do COIN in the Korengal and the Marines trying to do it in Helmand and concludes that COIN doesn’t work. I would instead conclude that it doesn’t work in Korengal and Helmand. That doesn’t mean it can’t work in more fruitful areas where the local dynamics are more promising and where there are positive local trends to work with and accelerate.

“You can’t kill your way out to victory” became the hallmark of a military organization that until 2007 was perceived as being too conventionally minded, too kinetic and enemy-centric focused. Has the U.S. Military succeeded in balancing this culture of being too enemy-centric and becoming more comfortable with the drinking-tea and doing windows side of the spectrum? Or is it in the danger of going too much in the other side?

I think those who worry about the military losing its fighting edge discount the basic sociology of the military, and particularly the infantry forces of the Army and Marines. They join to fight, whether corporals or colonels, and that will always be their default option. When in doubt, they will revert to a kinetic, enemy-focused approach.

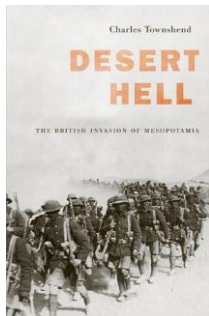
I'm generally of a pessimistic outlook, but I am just unable to understand the panic about losing combat skills. Doing coordination at a brigade level is doing coordination at a brigade level, and if you can coordinate multiple sources of development projects, I think you can coordinate multiple types of fires, with a few days refresher on the particularities of capabilities and systems. I am sensitive to some highly technical skill sets atrophying, but these can and should be preserved in the training base so that we have a cadre to retrain them when needed.

As a final thought on this point, I was in the Army of the 1990s that some seem so nostalgic for, and I don't remember it being all that. I recall entire exercises at III Corps being built around maximizing the deep strikes of Apache battalions, a tactic we have now learned is just silly. We had almost no air-ground integration. And soldiers had almost no experience with live ammunition, save in very controlled conditions on very rote ranges. I prefer battalions that have trained for and experienced real operations, however low in-

tensity, to those who have trained for just the NTC fight (which had its own peculiarities and peccadillos).

Douglas A. Ollivant is a Senior National Security Fellow with the New America Foundation. He most recently spent one year as the Senior Counterinsurgency Advisor to the Commander, Regional Command-East at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, returning to Washington this spring. He served in Iraq as the Chief of Plans for Multi-National Division Baghdad in 2006-2007 and he led the planning team that designed the Baghdad Security Plan, the main effort of what later became known as the "Surge." An expanded view of his thoughts is presented in Countering the New Orthodoxy-Reinterpreting Counterinsurgency in Iraq.

Octavian Manea is Editor of FP Romania, the Romanian edition of Foreign Policy.



Book Review: Desert Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia

by Charles Townshend

Published by Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. 2011, 624 pages

Reviewed by Youssef Aboul-Enein

Published online August 1, 2011

The history of Iraq and the United States has been linked for better or worse with America's removal of Saddam Hussein, and the placement of the country towards some form of multi-faction representative government. This is why books on the World War I intervention of British forces in what would become Iraq draw much interest among current military historical readers. Charles Townshend is an academic and Professor of International History at Britain's Keele University. His book delves deeply into the British involvement in Mesopotamia, and dissects the tactics, operations, and strategies from the decision to land a British Expeditionary Force composed of Indian infantry in Basra in 1914, to the surrender of General Charles Townshend (no relation to the author) in Kut in 1916. Following the Siege of Kut, British officers described Kut as the largest surrender of British arms since the Siege of Yorktown on the American continent in 1781.

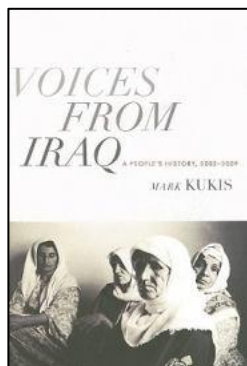
Britain, France, Germany, and Russia attempted to bully, influence, and outright annex the weakening Ottoman Empire. But within the weakness of the Ottoman Empire, internal potentates and despots, under its rule, would attempt to reach for increased autonomy. Tribal dynasties fought the Ottomans, and seduced the great powers, such as the British, for support. This was the state of the Ottoman dominions of Middle East in World War I. The book magnificently brings to life biographies of renowned Arabian figures such as Ibn Saud, Hussein ibn Ali of Mecca, and his sons Prince Feisal and Abdullah who all led the Arab Revolt, as well as lesser known Arab leaders like the Sheikh of Mohammara (located around what is Basra in Iraq), the Ibn Rashids (located in Northern Arabia today) who allied themselves with the Ottomans, and much more. Townshend also recreates the squabbles and virulent disagreements over Middle East policy among British officials in

Egypt, India, and England, which would have disastrous results on a tactical and strategic level. For example, the book describes pressure from London to take Baghdad, despite serious reservations expressed by British Officials in India about placing their troops in an overstretched position. London's demands led to the disaster in Kut, when Ottoman forces, commanded by Halil Pasha, took 13,000 British prisoners. It was British officials in India who initially convinced London to deploy an army into what is now Iraq, to address threats to its oil interests in Persia. The book presents the total misreading of culture among the British commanding their own forces comprised of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, such as contending with any religious issues about whether to eat horsemeat while facing starvation. I will let you discover the answer as you read the book.

Townshend uses primarily British archival sources, and does not include such Arabic sources as the late Iraqi sociologist Ali al-Wardi's whose eight volume, "*Glimpses of Modern Iraqi Social History*," is a seminal work published in 1969. Wardi has an entire volume dedicated to the Brit-

ish Mandatory period. However, I can excuse the author, as Wardi's work is not available in the English language. Those with an interest in Iraq and the Middle East will find Townshend's work a fine read.

Commander Aboul-Enein is author of "Militant Islamist Ideology: Understanding the Global Threat," (Naval Institute Press, 2010). He teaches part-time at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces in Washington D.C. Commander Aboul-Enein is working with Naval Institute Press to publish a book exposing American military readers to the work of the late father of Iraqi sociology Ali al-Wardi, it is scheduled for publication in April 2012. He wishes to thank his Teaching Assistant Mr. Michael Barry for editing this review and the National Defense University Library for providing the volume for review.



Book Review - Voices From Iraq: A People's History, 2003-2009

by Mark Kukis

Published by Columbia University Press (May 4, 2011),

240 pages, ISBN-10: 0231156928

Reviewed by Michael Few

Published [online](#) July 20, 2011

Ultimately, the American intervention in Iraq is one small trajectory along the arc of nation and state development in the land that claims the birthplace of civilization. As with every human endeavor, this arc is fraught with tragedy, triumph, violence, resistance, and hope. The current history of the intervention remains American-centric examining what United States forces and their allies did and failed to do following the regime change of Saddam Hussein. In [Voices From Iraq: A People's History, 2003-2009](#), Mark Kukis presents the Iraqi voice drawing from over seventy interviews conducted in 2009. This book is a must read as it adds to the comprehensive historiography of the past decade; moreover, through the personal narratives, the reader is given a glimpse into the emotional and physical costs of small wars.

Full disclosure, Mark and I are friends. We met years ago in Diyala Province when the violence peaked. He was there to observe and report. I was there to observe and intervene. While this book is neither about him or I, the story speaks to an endeavor that swallowed a portion of our youth.

For an American reading this book, the stories provide what we need to hear not necessarily what we want to hear. Behind the optimistic reports streaming daily from the Multi-National Force Iraq (MNF-I) Public Affairs Office (PAO), a savage small war raged that pitted brother against brother, tribe against tribe, and village against village. For every report of a successful well dug, clinic established, or school opening, there lies another story of a young teenage girl blowing herself up at a police checkpoint or village elder beheaded for the

crime of pairing the male cucumbers alongside it's female companion of tomatoes.

In trying to understand the darker side of the intervention, Kukis excels taking the academic explanations for why men rebel and placing them into vivid, real narratives. The sadness of this generation lost brings to question the role of American judgment in promoting democracy and capitalism abroad primarily through military might. These voices demand the reader to question the utility and efficacy of our foreign policy.

And this takes us to Ahmed Abu Ali. Kukis describes Ahmed as “a devout Shi’ite in his early thirties, poorly dressed and a little on the heavy side. His bare feet are covered with dust inside battered plastic slippers. He appears for the interview on a chilly evening in Baghdad, where he was a shopkeeper living a quiet life with a wife and two young daughters before the U.S. invasion.” Ahmed describes that life under Saddam Hussein was “hard for me because I had avoided my military service. But I was honestly afraid that Americans would do again what they did in 1991, when Shi’ites rose up against that butcher Saddam with U.S. encouragement only to be abandoned.” As the invasion force neared Karbala in March 2003, Ahmed recalls feeling hopeful,

As we moved back into the city you could see that Saddam’s government was crumbling. There were no Ba’ath party cars or army vehicles roaming the streets, for example. More importantly, you could sense it. Look, I am a Shi’ite. I know Saddam and his butchers. I had felt that tyranny and

oppression touching me every day of my life, and at that moment I could feel it all just melting away.

This hopeful feeling quickly dissolved as Ahmed and his neighbors gathered around the Imam Hussein Shrine to protect it from both vandalism and raiding by American forces. Ahmed describes a confrontation with American soldiers and questioning,

How could they have broken their promise by moving toward the shrine after they vowed they wouldn’t? What kind of people would force a standoff with unarmed civilians? How could they insult our dignity by threatening such a holy place right in front of us? We are human beings, after all. Aren’t we?

From one encounter, Ahmed shifts his anger from Saddam Hussein to the United States military. Kukis writes that “Ahmed Abu Ali later joined the Mahdi Army militia and came to consider himself a resistance fighter dedicated to ridding Iraq of the American occupation.” Ahmed still reels with anger and a sense of victimization. Is this the United States fault? Are we culpable for his feelings? Or, does Ahmed need to take ownership of his own emotions, actions, and future? Moving forward, what role if any does the United States share in helping other Ahmed’s?

Ahmed is just one story in [Voices From Iraq: A People’s History, 2003-2009](#). There are many others that should be considered. This book is necessary reading for any serious practitioner or student of small wars.

