From pyrrhic victory to combating an unknown quantity: matériel’s qualified utility during the Second Iraq War

by

Scott R. Goosenberg

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Political Science)

The University of British Columbia
(Vancouver)

March 2012

© Scott R. Goosenberg, 2012
Abstract

Lost in the Second Iraq War’s rancorous run-up was the reality that matériel primacy and a preponderance of personnel are beneficial for employing force effectively only insofar as they can be viably exploited via an appropriate doctrine and apposite tactics. U.S.-led Coalition forces lacked the requisite capacity to adopt these methods, however, and thus employ force efficaciously subsequent to Operation Iraqi Freedom’s (O.I.F.’s) conclusion on April 9, 2003. Securing the postwar peace after the Second Iraq War’s initial phase formally ended required the calibrated use of military might to shore up a host-nation’s government and win over the local population. Doing so became impossible in large part due to pre-invasion complacency and post-invasion confusion. Moreover, then-Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric K. Shinseki had, contrary to popular belief, countenanced then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s invasion strategy for the Second Iraq War in its run-up. The two had, I argue, merely disagreed over how to secure the peace and with what size footprint, not over the invasion strategy, despite the former being what really required a great deal of modifications. Distracted by prewar saber rattling over the war’s merits or lack thereof, the fact that Messrs. Shinseki and Rumsfeld each possessed flawed postwar strategies in the absence of a population-centric counterinsurgency element became papered over. Bureaucratic feuding also gave way to a closed and faulty assumption driven war-planning process, which, followed as it was by maladroit and ad hoc efforts post-O.I.F., further constrained U.S. Coalition forces’ efforts. Thus, a tenfold troop increase of conventionally trained soldiers, as suggested by Gen. Shinseki for pacifying postwar Iraq, would not have beneficially altered the war’s outcome. Absent knowledge of opponents’ methods and an applicable counterinsurgency doctrine, ceteris paribus, a troop augmentation of conventional forces would not have enabled a superior outcome.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................................. iii

Chapter 1: Introduction - Unknown Quantities and Misconceptions .................................................. 1

Chapter 2: Focus and Limitations ........................................................................................................ 8

Chapter 3: When Force Loses its Utility .............................................................................................. 9

3.1 An Overview of Relevant Actors .................................................................................................. 9

3.2 The Gradual Resurrection of Counterinsurgency ....................................................................... 13

3.3 Force Employment, Strategic Interaction and Internalizing War’s Lessons ................................. 19

Chapter 4: The Military That Could Not Spare a COIN .................................................................... 28

4.1 The Army’s Organizational Inertia Since the Vietnam War .......................................................... 28

4.2 A Moment of Clarity: From Cookie-Cutter Approaches to COIN ............................................. 30

Chapter 5: Two Transformative Efforts: Rumsfeld vs. Shinseki? ...................................................... 34

Chapter 6: Could Victory Have Been Attained Under the Given Conditions? .............................. 39

6.1 Additional Troop Preponderance Would Not Have Had a Decisive Impact ................................. 39

6.2 A Sustainable March 19, 2003 Invasion of Iraq Was Impossible .................................................. 43

Chapter 7: Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 49

Endnotes ............................................................................................................................................... 53

Bibliography ........................................................................................................................................ 69
I must tell you, when it comes to predicting the nature and location of our next military engagements, since Vietnam, our record has been perfect. We have never once gotten it right.” Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’s farewell address, delivered at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, NY, on February 25, 2011

“...Vietnam War, we purged ourselves of everything that dealt with irregular warfare or insurgency, because it had to do with how we lost that war. In hindsight, that was a bad decision. We have responsibility.” Army Vice Chief of Staff General (ret.) John Keane

Chapter 1. Introduction: Unknown Quantities and Misconceptions

The U.S. military has, at the Army’s behest, clung obstinately to a cookie-cutter approach vis-à-vis warfare. While rare by World War II, interstate industrial war—for which the U.S. Army had organized, structured and prepared wholly to combat—ceased to “exist” by the Cold War’s end in 1991. Civilian and military decision makers perilously failed to recognize this “paradigm shift” in warfare, and particularly since Vietnam. U.S. Army brass especially sought to avoid quagmires, disparaging “operations other than war” and thereby assuring that U.S.-led Coalition forces would not be adequately trained to fight their way out of one “The Day After” the Second Iraq War. And arrive one did after Operation Iraqi Freedom (O.I.F.), which began on March 19, 2003 and ended on April 9, 2003, and which was only the beginning of a much more protracted conflict. As a result, Coalition forces were incapable of proficiently waging the kind of prolonged, indecisive, “sub-strategic,” politico-military “war amongst the people” which arose during postwar—Phase IV—stabilization efforts after the Second Iraq War.

For the sake of clarity (more below), insurgents are revolutionaries seeking to overthrow a government and garner support for their political cause while largely remaining out of sight via engaging in subversive acts. Though differing over time and location, all insurgencies are initially weak, disorganized and easiest to dispatch in their infancy, as they still must gather resources and galvanize support. As such, foreign actors engaging in population-centric counterinsurgency must, after failing to head an insurgency off, accomplish the converse by
shoring up a host-nation’s government while winning over the local population and using *discriminate force* to neutralize the insurgency.

An eschewal of counter-guerilla techniques flies in the face of both historical reality and the admonitions of military strategists. *Inter alia,* Carl von Clausewitz, the preeminent military strategist, posited that *every* nation planning to invade another *must* anticipate an insurgency, “no matter how small or weak a state may be in comparison.”\(^9\) Indeed, technological might and/or sheer size can have little to no positive impact on the outcomes of contests between state actors and dramatically weaker but resolved revolutionary non-state actors. Absent the proper strategy and methods suited to a particular opponent and relevant theater’s context a resolute opponent can render matériel strength advantage moot.

Failing to anticipate or prepare to contest an insurgency illustrates decision makers’ misunderstanding of nothing short of the very ways and means to sustainably invade Iraq. No principal—i.e., relevant—opinion- or decision maker had anticipated the rise of an insurgency or suggest ex ante that counterinsurgency be implemented; and certainly not in the timely fashion necessary, in any case. A central misunderstanding therefore existed as to how to troops were to employ force efficaciously in the context of the Iraqi theater, which stemmed from an antiquated derision of counterinsurgency since the Vietnam War. Fundamentally, decision makers and scholars have tended to overlook the need for the non-material variable of force employment (F.E.)—i.e., the doctrine and tactics which guide a military’s behavior\(^9\) —to effectively utilize one’s matériel and personnel advantages. Instead of dredging on in (what would have been a futile) pursuit of a viable postwar strategy, neither the Army nor the Pentagon devised a Phase IV plan from which to work whatever.\(^11\)
A population-centric counterinsurgency-ready force, I argue, could have precluded a war amongst the people via seizing the initiative and marshaling collective goods for the population during a post-invasion “honeymoon period,” but timely reformations were rendered inconceivable. In the Second Iraq War’s run-up, decision makers completely underestimated how circumscribed the utility of a state actor’s technological primacy and relative troop preponderance are versus non-state actors in a war amongst the people. Stephen Biddle’s, John Nagl’s, and Ivan Arreguín-Toft’s work is used to support the proposed solution to the puzzle I pose: Would Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric K. Shinseki’s assessment that “several hundred thousand” troops, with all other conditions held equal, have significantly improved the outcome of the war? To which the answer is no: 400,000 to 500,000 additional troops—or 20-25 soldiers for every 1000 of Iraq’s 25 or so million citizens, as opposed to the 40,000 made available—could not have headed off an insurgency and thus secured the peace.

Gen. Shinseki touted a “transformative” vision of where warfare was headed which—in part because of its similarity to Secretary Rumsfeld’s own transformative strategy—did not present a road map for sustainably pacifying Iraq in March 2003. Instead, Gen. Shinseki, following those of his predecessors, had been focused upon mastering “decisive” conventional warfare and counterterrorism strategies—not counterinsurgency. Thus, neither Sec. Rumsfeld nor Gen. Shinseki understood the need to pivot strategically from conventional warfare to foreign-imposed population-centric counterinsurgency (hereinafter counterinsurgency or COIN) after O.I.F. To have achieved a superior outcome during the Second Iraq War, I argue that a non-coercive but hands-on counterinsurgency effort led by amply sized and sufficiently trained forces was necessary to secure the peace post-O.I.F., i.e., by April 9, 2003. Absent such a counterinsurgency doctrine, a sufficient footprint, and knowledge of Iraqi insurgents’ mode of
operation, *ceteris paribus*, an augmentation of inapplicably trained forces would have still failed to employ force efficaciously and, thus, achieve a superior outcome.

Gen. Shinseki and Mr. Rumsfeld both lacked an operationalizable doctrine or viable strategy with which to combat an insurgency, and not until 2004 was an interim counterinsurgency doctrine even distributed. For reasons dealt with at length below, Shinseki’s “plan” would have been surprisingly similar to Rumsfeld’s in nature and thus ineffective. My argument is vindicated in part based on a perfunctory glance of Army Maj. Gen. Anthony Zinni’s ominous 1999 war-gaming of a U.S.-Iraqi conflict, which involved a 400,000-strong conventional invasion and is essentially analogous to what Gen. Shinseki had advocated. In *Desert Crossing*, an insurgency flared up which could not be contained by mere attempts to seal the borders and install a modicum of order—the very issues Gen. Shinseki argued a troop augmentation could address—given the untenable nature of the status quo; one ripe for revolutionary upheaval.

Under Gen. Shinseki, the U.S. Army’s recurrent strategic myopia brought on a more fundamental failure to accommodate alterations in the war’s landscape as it shifted from decisive conventional battles to a protracted war amongst the people. Moreover, poor planning coupled with flawed policymaking and heavy-handed tactics helped to facilitate the ascendance of a Sunni-led insurgency. As Lieutenant Colonel Paul Yingling provocatively averred, however, it was the generals who had “failed to envision the conditions of future combat and prepare their forces accordingly” and thus “share culpability” for the war’s outcome. As such, optimized planning and coordination notwithstanding, Coalition forces’ configuration and disposition vis-à-vis twenty-first-century warfare severely hampered its capacity to attain politico-military goals.
There simply is no substitute for an applicable strategy, properly matched up doctrine and tactics, and sufficient troop size. Without a viable force employment capacity, no amount of technological supremacy, as explicitly argued by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, or sheer troop preponderance, as implicitly posited by Gen. Eric Shinseki, would have been adequate. I thus submit a corrective to the conventional wisdom that General Shinseki had not divined the future by virtue of his troop suggestion. “Real transformation” was impeded by Mr. Rumsfeld and Gen. Shinseki’s different but co-equally inadequate understandings of how to combat twenty-first-century insurgent threats proficiently. Rumsfeld falsely believed that a Revolution in Military Affairs (R.M.A.) had occurred, with which Shinseki essentially disagreed, hence the desire for more troops circa 2003 (much more below). A bureaucratic feud over resource allocation and Rumsfeld’s desire to displace attention away from postwar hostilities was, thusly, at the heart of their dispute.

Inter-cabinet bureaucratic infighting also severely hampered the war-planning process. Indeed, the war effort in many ways foundered in Washington before a single active-service officer had been deployed to Iraq in four overarching ways. In the war’s run-up, (1) counterproductive bureaucratic feuding over the war’s strategy and merits created (2) a groupthink-plagued decision-making process comprised of Pentagon-endorsed yes-men who shunned prescient advice. War planners staved off purportedly needless cynicism while silencing its critics by assuring the unpopular war’s launch, in part because the light footprint implied easy victory. As such (3) the Army’s “pathological” eschewal of COIN since the Vietnam War went unquestioned. Together, these conditions (4) helped thwart analysts from recognizing in time the imperative of training soldiers to arrest a budding insurgency’s growth.
John Nagl’s and Ivan Arreguín-Toft’s findings further bolster the importance of possessing the proper doctrine and tactics in order to strategize about the means by which to neutralize an opponent. Nagl posits that the U.S. Army is not a learning institution, having failed in Vietnam and again in Iraq to ascertain the importance of employing the counterintuitive methods of counterinsurgency. Arreguín-Toft, for his part, establishes why a strong actor has a mounting propensity to lose conflicts versus disproportionately weaker opponents. At base, Arreguín-Toft underscores the import of understanding an adversary’s methods to ensure match-ups that benefit the stronger actor. Having failed to anticipate an insurgency altogether, the ability to modify one’s methods to strike at an insurgent opponent’s center(s) of gravity is naturally impossible. Together, their findings buttress the argument that Gen. Shinseki’s suggested post-O.I.F. efforts were unlikely to be beneficial, irrespective of troops’ size.

Coalition forces, it is submitted, only stood a chance via direct but non-coercive COIN methods after O.I.F.’s onset,28 as even well-resourced and resolute insurgents are capable only of indirect guerilla warfare, e.g., placing improvised explosive devices (I.E.D.) on roads frequented by Coalition forces. Since insurgents hide among the population and lack the matériel capability for sufficient direct defense, responding to an I.E.D. with indirect aerial bombardments,29 for example, is counterproductive. Ivan Arreguín-Toft presents a neat typology which points out the importance of even match-up strategies, but deals less explicitly with insurgencies than desired for our purposes. It should also be made clear that in his schema, a “strong actor” and “attacker” are synonymous,30 so Coalition forces’ only viable move was to adopt hands-on counterinsurgency, coupled with precisely targeted reprisals and proactive measures to neutralize the insurgency. While I disagree somewhat with this—surely, Coalition forces had the matériel means for direct defense—this allows for the subordination of all but direct-direct approaches.
My analysis proceeds as follows. First, I elucidate the circumscribed focus of my analysis. Second, I introduce relevant characters of the analysis, which is followed by a literature review regarding counterinsurgency’s import vis-à-vis how force could have been employed effectively in Iraq. Splicing in the insights of Carl von Clausewitz, the preeminent Prussian military theorist, strengthens the notions put forth by Stephen Biddle, John Nagl and Ivan Arreguin-Toft. Third, I offer an historical overview as to the root causes undergirding the Army’s failure to recognize a paradigm shift in warfare. Also dealt with is the impact that the prewar debate had on the war’s execution. Fourth, relevant actors’ involvement in decision-making over the war is rehashed, with a particular focus on Gen. Shinseki and Sec. Rumsfeld. Their bureaucratic politics battle allowed many to miss that both actors agreed on the conduct of an invasion that the general had in fact countenanced. Thus, both lacked available strategies and tactics suited for the Iraqi theater. Fifth, I present my counterfactual argument(s).
Chapter 2. Focus and Limitations

A number of caveats and disclaimers are in order regarding my heavily circumscribed mission and argument, bolstered via empirical data and three particular scholars’ findings. Beyond the need for an inclusive war-planning process and a historically guided approach to warfare, the policy implications of this analysis are minimal. Despite addressing realist-liberal international relations theorists’ amorphous use of the term “power,” this analysis does little to address new concerns regarding the flawed lens such scholars employ. Instead, I present a one-shot, hypothetical scenario based on information available. The confines of counterfactual analysis preclude meticulously crafting an alternative strategy, but not an empirically robust argument.

Moreover, I do not use these theories merely to buttress my argument, and deal only with the “grand strategic” level of warfare vis-à-vis how this type of thinking impacts which tactics are utilized when and against whom. I also accept that the George W. Bush administration’s policy line and its idealist expectations for the intervention, while flawed, followed logically from their presuppositions. If Saddam could not commit credibly to the U.S. that his regime would not pose a progressively acute threat, then his nonexistent nuclear weapons would encourage, not deter, an invasion in 2003. This checks against the very plausible critique that postponing the preventative war was preferable and could have been victorious. Rather, I deal explicitly with one premise: An augmented conventional troop deployment on the order of Gen. Shinseki’s request would have, ceteris paribus, failed to stabilize Iraq. Proficient force employment required the capacity to adopt counterinsurgency after O.I.F., which an ex ante derision of counterinsurgency, inept postwar planning, and a light footprint made impossible.
Chapter 3. When Force Loses its Utility

Given the import of COIN’s omission in Iraq, its essentiality is explained clearly. My specific focus, however, is how these 3 scholars explain minimalistic and ill-equipped Coalition forces’ inability to uproot a proto-insurgency. Naturally, I will explain what counterinsurgency theory is and what it has to do with Coalition forces’ inefficacy in Iraq. But first, an overview of the relevant actors is required. Following that sub-section will be a more exhaustive literature review. This author’s hope is to extend Biddle’s logic to account for how force is used effectively in wars amongst the people, in virtue of the support provided by Arreguín-Toft’s strategic interaction thesis and Nagl’s insights regarding the U.S. Army.

3.1 An Overview of the Relevant Actors

When queried in 2005 as to whether the Second Iraq War “is [equivalent to the] Vietnam [War],” U.S. Army General David Petraeus noted how the “very interesting” elimination of counterinsurgency had precluded victory in both cases. Instead, a diminutively sized Coalition force was so unprepared for the task(s) at hand as to forgo one of “the most meticulous[ly]” planned and transiently successful invasions in history. Recognized experts’ contention that the imbroglio following Operation Iraqi Freedom’s dénouement on April 9, 2003 could have been avoided via an inclusive war planning process, which deployed ample troops versed in COIN doctrine, must be interrogated. As I argue, such was impossible in the war’s run-up.

It is worth quoting Gen. Shinseki at length. When Senator Carl Levin (D), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, asked for a range of the magnitude of Army force requirements necessary for the Phase IV reconstruction stage, Shinseki responded, after saying he “would have to rely on combatant commanders’ exact requirements,” as follows:

“I would say that what’s been mobilized to this point—something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers are probably...a figure
that would be required. We’re talking about post-hostilities control over a piece of geography that’s fairly significant, with the kinds of ethnic tensions that could lead to other problems. And so it takes a significant ground-force presence to maintain a safe and secure environment, to ensure that people are fed, that water is distributed, all the normal responsibilities that go along with administering a situation like this.”

The broad strokes of Shinseki’s hypothetical “plan” would have involved a troop deployment of roughly 400,000 conventionally trained soldiers. A technologically attuned and as minimally a mechanized force conceivable would have been used, but there would be a heavy tank presence because that is what was available at the time. Forces would be supported by embedded civilians and non-governmental organizations for humanitarian needs. Overriding would also be a concern about the eventuality of civil strife, carried out via a body-count-based counterterrorism strategy. “Terrorism may be embedded in and subordinate to insurgency,” however, and in the case of Iraqi insurgents seeking control of the Iraq this is certainly the case. As such, terrorist attacks can only cease and stability be obtained if the insurgent movements propagating the spread of terror are eradicated—ideally, at their genesis.

To understand Shinseki’s motivations and (dis)inclination towards COIN, one is left to infer the basis for his plan from his Army Manuals (FM-1 and FM-7), congressional testimonies, and his file from the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. These documents and his oral testimony set the stage for understanding the comparisons between the general’s “Objective Force” plan to be implemented over time, compared to Rumsfeld’s transformation thesis, which assumed an R.M.A. had occurred. Gen. Shinseki’s and Secretary Rumsfeld’s different bureaucratic visions placed them at loggerheads, but the dispute was ancillary to the larger problem: they were not actually arguing over the war plan, and nobody cared about COIN.
Gen. Shinseki sought to enhance Army troops’ capabilities, while the secretary wanted to minimize the use of Army troops altogether. For Rumsfeld, “transformation meant greater reliance on technology, not troops, to achieve goals; to Shinseki, it meant more intensified training, featuring highly mobile medium light brigades of mechanized infantry capable of a variety of missions.” Nevertheless, it is hard to discern vast differences in policy besides Shinseki’s request for a longer footprint for Phase IV. Thomas P.M. Barnett, chief analyst at Wikistrat, has rightly adduced that the discourse seized upon a “false dichotomy” which pinned “machines versus warriors.” What arose was an unnecessary dispute over “two sides of the same coin” which distracted actors from the topic of postwar stability operations. Indeed, “machines” and “warriors” work synergistically together in winning and securing the peace, respectively. However, the warriors did not do their job of cleaning up after the war, largely because of policy makers’ and soldiers’ policy and tactical blunders, respectively.

In contradistinction to Maj. Gen. Anthony Zinni’s ominous 1999 war-game, Desert Crossing, Shinseki’s own Field Manuals—FM-1 and FM-7—failed to note or accommodate for an insurgency’s rise (see below). Given Rumsfeld’s unprecedented handpicking of yes-men—particularly Gen. Tommy Franks, head of Central Command—it is reasonable to expect that Rumsfeld would have done more to marginalize Shinseki had he felt he posed much of a threat. Shinseki did raise the war’s prospect of failure, but largely internally. For example, Shinseki expressed his qualms regarding Phase IV: “The mission was huge,” he noted, and the Coalition “needed a lot of troops to secure all the borders and to do all the tasks you needed to do.” His omission of the finer details in this regard fuel more speculation in two respects: Rumsfeld left the iconoclastic general be until he began to potentially sabotage the war effort;
and, given FM-1, FM-7, his congressional testimony and the Army’s lack of Phase IV strategy, the general’s methods were ineffective for stabilizing Iraq.

Counterinsurgency’s absence in Iraq war planning therefore reflects more than an historical organizational failure to prepare forces for a war amongst the people and a failure to heed lessons from Vietnam. It also reflects the Army’s misunderstanding of its 1991 Gulf War victory as vindicating the R.M.A. As seen by Rumsfeld’s embrace of R.M.A., however, technology, special operations forces and precision airstrikes cannot offset the role that soldiers’ skill and preparation plays in enabling troops to employ matériel with utility. Convinced that the controversial decision to depose Saddam Hussein was sound and cost-effective, however, Rumsfeld had a goal that he narrowly pursued. He sought to fundamentally transform the “ways of war” and alter force structure as well as military doctrine to provide a “limited but heavy punch on the ground.” Gen. Shinseki instead took an “evolutionary approach”—while prizing technological advances, he understood that an R.M.A. had yet to occur, even if he thought it possible by 2008 or 2010, hence the emphasis on a heavy footprint in the meantime. The Army stood to lose the most through cuts proposed by the secretary given this airstrike- and special forces-heavy approach. Gen. Shinseki made it his goal to rectify this problem and raise the war’s opportunity costs to the public, but to no avail.

The first three phases under Rumsfeld went well—the buildup, covert preparatory actions, and air-ground attack—but Phase IV “was handled so badly that the downsides have now largely outweighed the virtues” of the invasion strategy. The Pentagon operated under quixotic assumptions about the intervention. These include a belief the war would cost $50 billion and not $6 trillion, would be easy and require few coalition deaths. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, however, made perhaps the most absurd claim. He argued that the
enterprise was self-sustainable and even profitable via oil reserves acquired in the process, thereby allowing Rumsfeld to test out his new transformative strategy to great effect. Believing only the most optimistic scenarios, Rumsfeld felt that going in with more than 140,000 troops was not necessary and had to be launched immediately, which the Brookings Institute’s Michael O’Hanlon, a noted Democrat and hawkish defense analyst, contends was a fatal mistake.

In line with Army brass’ antediluvian mentality vis-à-vis warfare, Shinseki also places himself in the Powell Doctrine camp, and noticeably omits Iraq in his testimony, despite it being clear the U.S. was preparing to invade. After all, that was why Congress questioned him in the first place. Notably, he championed a Global War on Terror (G.W.O.T) line throughout his testimony—employing the acronym throughout—which is consistent with his concern that Iraq did not pose an imminent danger. This further explains why his “plan” had it been implemented in Iraq would have lacked a counterinsurgency strategy. Shinseki thought “several thousand troops” and less laborious counterterrorism strategies would suffice. Thus, one cannot claim that the chief of staff possessed a plan to combat the root conditions that allow insurgencies to spread and thus defeat them.

3.2 The Gradual Resurrection of Counterinsurgency

Under the assumption that the Second Iraq War would be an easy task, no attention was paid to creating an actionable doctrine by which soldiers could glean appropriate tactics if Phase IV devolved into chaos. Instead, following in the footsteps of Antoine-Henry Jomini, a French military theorist, the U.S. Army cemented as early as 1940 its primary objective of utterly destroying an opponent’s forces. Field Manual 100-5’s antiquated approach—which leapfrogs over the import of Mao Tse-Tung’s injection of political ends to guerilla warfare—was also hard to shake. Much of this has to do with what Eliot A. Cohen notes are American “strategic
culture’s” 70 “two dominant characteristics”: a predisposition to vast amassments of “men and machines,” and a preference for “direct and violent assault.” 71 In Iraq, however, a highly lethal approach—such as direct bombing in retaliation to a terrorist attack—will merely enrage the population. If soldiers have a rapport with the population, on the other hand, an understanding can be made that Coalition forces are indeed seeking only the bad apples, and can ascertain what level of force is appropriate to achieve politico-military aims.

Policy makers’ certitude of victory had also left no room for debate about, or adequate time so soldiers could prepare for, such exigencies as an insurgency. Even if individuals had tried to implement COIN, culled intentionally 72 from U.S. military curricula and doctrine was COIN in order to “exorcise the ghosts of Vietnam.” 73 Unfortunately, a COIN-ready force could have precluded a W.A.P. via seizing the initiative and marshaling collective goods for the population during a post-invasion “honeymoon period.” 74 Instead, poor planning and Coalition forces’ counterproductive approaches accelerated the insurgency’s ascent. 75 COIN doctrine existed among Marines—e.g. a prescient Marine Corps “small wars” manual from the 1939—that stressed minimal force utilization to befriend the populace and convince them to appreciate the “revolutionists” over insurgents. 76

For our purposes, COIN refers to the doctrine laid out in Army Field Manual 3-24 (FM 3-24), which was written in 2006 as a corrective to Army strategy in Iraq. Again, an insurgency is an organized movement formed to overthrow a government, whereas counterinsurgency denotes an indecisive approach employed to defeat an insurgency while shoring up a host-nation’s government. 77 A proactive approach in countering an insurgency eager to fight a protracted war of attrition is essential, resting on the need, as Julian Paget attests, “to know the Enemy before the insurgency begins.” 78 They key to this of course is delineating “the Enemy” from non-
combatants; unfortunately, this is impossible when Coalition forces are barking orders from tanks at a disillusioned population with whom no personal relationship exists.

As the “antithesis” to interstate tank battles on the plains of Western Europe, there are no secluded battlefields or fronts in a war amongst the people in which COIN must be employed. Nor are there armies on both sides. Instead “the people in the streets and houses and fields—all people anywhere—are the battlefield,” and their support is the *sine qua non*. While not all terrorists are insurgents, the latter often engage in terrorist acts, and thus many rightfully attest that “terrorism cannot be defeated unless the insurgency in which it is embedded is successfully countered” via COIN. Such reification of the undefined “terrorism” notwithstanding, this is a valid point regarding the eventually powerful Iraqi insurgency, whose lethality is hampered if neutralized at its onset.

Soldier-scholars like General David Petraeus, for whom the paradigm shift to “people’s war” had been obvious in 1987, felt it incumbent upon the U.S. military to master counterinsurgency warfare, messy and intractable as such conflicts tend to be. However, Army Colonel Harry Summers’s 1989 aphorism that “A War is a War is a War” represents the Army brass’ static methods. Such a cookie-cutter approach to warfare did an enormous disservice to Coalition forces in Iraq. Whether via absolute destruction of an enemy’s forces, *a la* Summers, or through the barbaric and indiscriminate targeting of entire villages to stem their resolve, as William Rufus suggested, such actions are “risky” even when effective militarily (below). Counterinsurgency’s absence came as a logical result of a parochial U.S. Army’s refusal to fund, train and teach soldiers to operate under its precepts. Thus, the fundamental criterion for obtaining a superior outcome was COIN, and without it, force could not be employed efficaciously. This was particularly true without necessary civilian support from the Coalition
Provisional Authority (C.P.A.). Headed by Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, C.P.A.’s policy blunders—particularly the dissolution of Ba’athist government and military apparatuses—helped to fuel an insurgency that its military counterparts of the Combined Joint Taskforce Seven lacked the capacity and know-how to defuse. The U.S. Army’s demonstrable inability to embrace anything but “incremental” changes meant that implementing the necessarily revolutionary changes in policy as well as Coalition forces’ structure, doctrine, and prerogatives had been inconceivable circa March 2003.

Under COIN, military force is not useful in many contexts, a fact of which Coalition forces were unaware. They also underestimated how essential a civic focus is, since the ultimate goal is to garner legitimacy among the civilian populace by providing goods and security via a “unity of effort” among forces and civilian enablers. As David Galula notes, given the disproportionate strength between opponents at a revolutionary war’s outset, “strategic initiative” is the insurgent’s alone, because only it can begin a war. Befuddled as to what they should or should not do, and without a strategy by which to conduct themselves proficiently, efforts to play catch up in pursuit of momentum were ineffective. Indeed, the tactics used were wholly counterproductive, and civilian support was few and far between as a result of what was seen as ham-fisted and insensitive targeting of suspected insurgents. As such, force could not be proficiently used with any utility; rather, its use essentially doused a simmering conflagration with kerosene.

Moreover, when an insurgency is in its nascent stage and has yet to “reveal its intentions, [the insurgency] represents nothing but an imprecise, potential menace…and does not offer a concrete target that would justify a concrete effort.” As intimated above, by the time an insurgency begins to act like one, it is often too late. As if the counterinsurgent’s life was not
already difficult, there is much more involved than simply identifying “the Enemy.” Many of COIN’s lessons that must be learned are counterintuitive: overwhelming and indiscriminate force is counterproductive; high-tech airpower pales in comparative utility to cultural awareness and language skills; and, most importantly, the fact that the military campaign is peripheral to the political one. In order to be truly effective, however, soldiers must not simply possess a cultural and psychological skill set in order to adapt to their environment and sift out insurgents and win local noncombatants’ sympathies. All the while, they must strike the perfect equilibrium of carrots and sticks to accomplish tasks—difficult even for a sufficiently sized and trained force.

Indeed, one needs to view the population in terms of problematic “second- and third-order effects” which are exacerbated if soldiers do not understand that “the best weapons for COIN do not shoot.” Pause should be given to those under the misconception that victory was all but assured if Shinseki’s assessment had been followed. If 45,000 soldiers’ excessive lethality had in part galvanized disillusioned Sunnis to join their brethren in arms against U.S. “occupiers,” imagine the negative impact that thousands of additional troops would have had. Moreover, Sunni Iraqis, after having been expelled from their government or military jobs, had few alternatives other than taking up arms. Indeed, the value of rapport with the populace is essential. Human intelligence (HUMINT) or counterintelligence is not to be underestimated: for distinguishing “the Enemy;” finding their “center of gravity,” and cutting off their resources. Nor is the necessity of interoperability and collaboration that was so sorely lacking ex ante and post-O.I.F.

As such, fathoming the socio-cultural aspects of the local population is more powerful than killing insurgents, especially at the risk of provocative or otherwise needlessly lethal attacks. In chapter 5 of FM 3-24, the requirements for a successfully integrated—vis-à-vis
proper political, economic, psychological, civil, and military actions—COIN program are laid out: (1) restore government legitimacy, (2) control one area, (3) retain population centers, (4) expand control, and (5) employ information operations to influence the population and discredit the insurgency.\(^9\) Soldiers must know the population in order to differentiate insurgents from noncombatants and create a counter-cause through which prospective or reluctant insurgents can be won over.\(^9\)

What is required instead, as John Nagl argues, is an “indirect” COIN approach which, as he defines it, provides a rather direct and viable alternative to what Ivan Arreguin-Toft defines as a direct (offensive) approach. An indirect approach would involve hunkering down in the Green Zone, only to leave occasionally to strike targets from atop tanks or via armored cars, without engaging with the local population at all. This did not work. Instead, troops must be able to “divid[e] people from the insurgents [and] remov[e] their support that they require to challenge the government effectively” so adversaries can be forced to surrender \textit{with} the local populace’s support.\(^9\) Since insurgents must hide like ghosts, their safety can only be assured with the population’s support. If their sanctuary is taken away, insurgents are put at a disadvantage and are left using indirect methods with little tangible effect.

Though such ideas were well known in the U.S. Marine Corps since World War II, such appraisals were not so much unnoticed as purposely avoided by Army brass. Absent an “unformulated” adversary, industrial war’s incessant preparation\(^9\) blinded war planners from how and to what extent Phase IV strategizing vis-à-vis guerillas was necessary. Moreover, Rumsfeld’s Pentagon purposely de-prioritized reconstruction efforts, for neither the secretary nor President Bush cared for nation building, having eschewed its relevance during his campaign in 1999.\(^1\) O.I.F. efforts—both the civilian-led Coalition Provisional Authority and its military
counterpart, the Combined Joint Taskforce 7—were ad hoc and largely experimental in nature. Unsurprisingly, much remained desired.

3.3 Force Employment, Strategic Interaction and Internalizing War’s Lessons

Proficient strategy is predicated upon sufficient troop size and technological might, inasmuch as one can accommodate their methods in line with an opponent’s anticipated strategy, pressure points, geopolitical motives, etc. The efforts used to offset an opponent’s lethality drastically differ depending upon how actors match-up with one another strategically and tactically, i.e., beyond matériel strength differentials and relative technological supremacy. To square these ideas with my own arguments, I present an explanation of Stephen Biddle’s argument, which segues into an explanation of Ivan Arreguín-Toft’s and John Nagl’s contributions.

For the sake of space and given the similarity of their insights, the section is not compartmentalized into sub-sections. Carl von Clausewitz provides insights that are also spliced in when appropriate, but the focus is on the three particular scholars of note, whose notions help to fathom why the U.S.-led coalition could not familiarize forces in Iraq with COIN under similar conditions as Vietnam.¹⁰¹ To provide an entrée into this literature, however, Stephen Biddle’s work will first be drawn upon. Biddle does not focus on COIN, but Clausewitz’s work is used to further flesh out by Arreguín-Toft’s focus on the ability of the weak to defeat materially stronger adversaries. All three scholars focus on the necessity of utilizing the proper doctrine and tactics, along with sufficient troops, to neutralize a unique but weaker actor, at a distinct time and location.

Decision-makers’ misapprehension of the tasks required in Iraqi theater had two primary sources: (1) an Army focused on the alleged virtues of matériel supremacy troop size per se; and,
(2) the Pentagon’s insistence that technology had transformed warfighting and minimized risks to soldiers. Laid out in his 2004 book, Military Power, Stephen Biddle lays a systematic foundation for why “modern system” opponents can easily defeat a non-modern-system adversary. And his findings bore out vis-à-vis the invasion’s outcome. Force employment (F.E.) is a “theory of battle,” as pointed out by Sir Lawrence Freedman—though F.E. is a non-material variable, rather than a theory in and of itself. A change of gears—like General Creighton Adams’s pivot in Vietnam to COIN from 1968 to 1972—was integral for force to be utilized efficaciously after O.I.F.

Biddle also provides implicit grounding for why the U.S. failed to secure the peace. Helpfully, “operations”—“a series of interconnected battles resulting from a prior plan”—serve as his (and my) unit of analysis. Coalition forces’ modern system “capabilities,” defined as “the ability to succeed at an assigned mission,” help minimize force exposure and their vulnerabilities. Moreover, there is no single, undifferentiated definition of capability that remains constant over time, location and the given actor in question, thereby rendering the use of hard and soft power as essentially irrelevant absent the means by which to exploit such strengths. While difficult to achieve, states successful in amassing a modern system and exploiting these material resources have largely mitigated the impact of technological superiority and opponents’ weaponry since 1918. He also elucidates why the “mid-intensity conflict” against Saddam’s elite Republican Guards and feisty “Saddam Fedayeen” was swift, as they were “fully exposed to the firepower of modern weapons.” Biddle also identifies the root of policy makers’ and the defense establishment’s complacency. Having reduced exponentially its forces’ exposure to opponents’ increasingly lethality, policy makers—though not the forces on the ground—remained confident despite looting and mayhem post-O.I.F.
Since Phase IV—and not O.I.F.—is in question, however, Arreguín-Toft’s thesis, and Nagl’s insights are particularly useful. But before delving into their notions, it must be said that all doctrinal overhauls are not created equal, of course. *Contra* R.M.A. advocates such as Mr. Rumsfeld, radical doctrinal alterations are not required against other modern system armies, and would be counterproductive against all but the weakest of opponents.\(^{111}\) This would partially suggest why Shinseki would have stayed the course: why radically alter a doctrine in light of exigent circumstances? Put simply, modern-system opponents are bound to make hay of non-modern-system adversaries, but the same doctrine and tactics must be supplanted as the context shifts to a war amongst the people. Biddle also argues of the danger inherent in eschewing “direct-fire ground forces” in favor of Rumsfeld’s “air and deep strike missile systems,” particularly against hidden insurgents.\(^{112}\) Extending Biddle’s logic to a war amongst the people is thus quite simple: the same “hard-hitting force”\(^{113}\) that took Saddam’s elite Republican Guards to task cannot be used to win public support. Clearing neighborhoods in such a way was bound to exacerbate an insurgency’s rise.

A massive force, without the proper knowledge base and skill set, is useless or worse. Moreover, topographical factors can overcome the even best general’s forces’ “tenfold superiority”\(^{114}\)—not an insignificant factor with regard to the complicated nature of guerilla warfare in Iraqi cities. This cuts to the core of realist-liberal international relations (I.R.) theorists’ nebulous use of the terms “power” and “capability” by showing that asymmetric war outcomes are not merely “a matter of matériel” strength.\(^{115}\) Indeed, I.R. scholars either assume optimal utilization of matériel, as in the case of Charles Glaser and Chaim Kaufman’s influential dissection of the “Offense-Defense Balance”; or address it non-systematically, as John Mearsheimer’s “attrition-maneuver” schema does vis-à-vis conventional deterrence. Also, *contra*
realists whom view self-interest as overcoming moral principles, methods’ moral or ethical nature is ancillary—the goal, instead, is to take instrumental action in the interests of the Coalition force and host-nation. A military’s capability actually reflects how “much” and in what “way” states “use” their matériel resources and troop size, and decision makers hazardously overestimated Coalition forces’ capabilities while underestimating insurgents’.

Through four case studies—one being the Persian Gulf War of 1991—Biddle importantly cuts out the legs from under military planners’ and academics’ materialist assumptions of warfare. He also echoes Clausewitz in terms of accounting for qualitative factors like morale and leadership under the “friction” of war. As Clausewitz argues, “dogmatic simplifications” of war—e.g., the side with the most forces or best technology will win—only serve to “falsify[ ] reality.” The strongest of actors can and will lose asymmetric conflicts with the wrong strategy and tactics relative to those of their opponent’s. Chance is also inevitable due to the friction imposed by real-time battle conditions, but its impact can be mitigated somewhat via the proper “operational and tactical doctrine.” However, contra realist and liberal views of warfare, hard factors like GDP, its industrial base, or population size to mobilize relate little to power, as “superior numbers can be decisive or almost irrelevant” without the proper doctrine and tactics. This is essentially why Shinseki’s view was incorrect. As a result, Biddle presents a particularly appropriate framework for comparing Shinseki’s hypothetical “plan” with the one Rumsfeld implemented for the invasion.

Biddle and Clausewitz are both explicitly clear about why strong actors can lose to an insurgency, insofar as matériel may “may be little better than blind guesses” that lead one to “underestimate poorly equipped but well handled armies,” as in the case of Vietnam. Indeed, as Arreguin-Toft mentions, an opponent’s resolve can allow even the longest of shots to
persevere, hence the importance for a state to head off or quickly dispatch an insurgency. Moreover, protracted war amongst the people favor the weak. Wars waged by a democracy versus a non-democracy favor the latter, given that domestic considerations including intolerance for casualties\textsuperscript{122} impede violence from uncontrollably escalating. Hence the import of taking drastic measures, such as patrolling by foot and placing soldiers in harm’s way; doing anything that could help to more quickly win over the population.

Arreguín-Toft offers insight as to how Coalition forces could have secured the peace in theory, but the necessary steps would have been impossible in time. He also provides a simplistic framework that is particularly useful in the context of non-state actors’ in conflict with nation-states. Counterinsurgency’s use was imperative for F.E. in Iraq: while preponderance and technology can help determine capability, solely focusing on them or their root causes is insufficient for understanding an opponent or one’s own military “capability” in the absence of “force employment.”\textsuperscript{123} In \textit{How the Weak Win Wars}, Arreguin-Toft furthers this line of thought in arguing that “weak” actors—non-state entities which are 1/5\textsuperscript{th} as strong as state-based opponents—have ably bested such state-based actors by offsetting their relative materiel and personnel advantages.\textsuperscript{124}

Despite asymmetric actors’ “weakness,” victory has been obtained over the “strong” 29.2\% of the time in a span between 1800-1998, and in an astounding 45\% of asymmetric conflicts between 1950-1998.\textsuperscript{125} Indeed, Coalition forces lacked an applicable doctrine and thus the knowledge base circa March 2003 with which to deduce the proper tactics whereby force could be \textit{employed}—i.e., proficiently—in a war amongst the people. While “no general can accustom a [non-combat-ready force] for war,”\textsuperscript{126} as Clausewitz adduced, an applicable doctrine which provides guidelines vis-à-vis how matériel should be employed by personnel can be
successful over time in obtaining operational objectives. Thus, even if a sufficiently sized force were handed a COIN doctrine and a book of guidelines, without “combat experience” or knowledge of their opponents methods troops are bound to face a great deal of friction.\textsuperscript{127}

Protracted wars favor the weak, and are so because of the insurgents’ disadvantages, despite playing to their medium- and long-term benefit.\textsuperscript{128} Arreguin-Toft builds on this idea by supplanting Andrew Mack’s flawed but instructive power asymmetry theory from \textit{Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars}. In an asymmetric\textsuperscript{129} bilateral “conflict relationship,” matériel imbalances and resolve are both adducible a priori, and irrespective of its relative material strength a “weak” but resolute force can win.\textsuperscript{130} Mack posits that barring an existential threat an actor’s strength relative to an opponent is inversely proportional to its political vulnerability and irresoluteness regarding a particular “small war’s” outcome.\textsuperscript{131} While nominally logical, Mack’s “interest asymmetry” thesis is flawed in two important ways, however, despite explaining why Al-Qaeda has more at stake in Iraq than the U.S., for example.

First, relative power—assuming it could be accurately quantified based on “hard” material factors like GDP, demography, military-industrial capacity, etc.—is a poor predictor of relative interest/resolve in peace or war.\textsuperscript{132} Moreover, methods will differ decidedly depending on whether one is fighting a state actor of a transnational terrorist group like al-Qaeda. For example, the “domino theory”\textsuperscript{133} led U.S. forces to Vietnam as well as Cambodia and Laos on a fatal fool’s errand.\textsuperscript{134} This also ties back to Biddle, who ridicules IR theorists’ use of “power” without a “system of force employment.”\textsuperscript{135} Second, if relative power is held constant, weak actors should not have fended better over time,\textsuperscript{136} which they manifestly accomplished in post-O.I.F. Iraq. In not prizing the political, forces will fail in acclimating to evolving tactics when necessary, as it is impossible against an unforeseen and unfamiliar opponent. Also, the
inextricable link between political strategic\textsuperscript{137} ends and means is also acknowledged by Arreguín-Toft—something Shinseki understood in theory, but not in practice.\textsuperscript{138}

Arreguín-Toft then breaks down interactions into four ideal-type strategies: strong actors can attack directly and via barbarism (e.g. killing prisoners of war or using concentration camps) strategies, while weak actors can use direct defense and guerilla warfare. After calculating the combinations, he reaches three relevant conclusions. First, strong actors tend to lose opposite-approach strategic interactions, which lends credence to Nagl’s non-coercive and indirect, but still very involved and risk-acceptant COIN approach. Second, opposite-approach interaction conflicts are the most drawn-out, which further cements Coalition forces’ need to accustom one’s grand strategy and tactics with knowledge of one’s opponent’s as to preclude if possible an insurgency at all. Third and finally, more strong actors have lost over time given an uptick in opposite-approach interactions.\textsuperscript{139}

Barbaric tactics, or a “repression-based ‘crush-them’ approach” such as “collective punishment” is counterproductive, and only “win[s] phases, not cases.”\textsuperscript{140} For example, in 30 cases of insurgeries fought by state actors in such a way between 1978 and 2008, there were only 2 victories, which came via “positive COIN practices” that offset the former.\textsuperscript{141} Fortunately, indirectly guerilla attacks do not pose an existential threat to Coalition forces, but insurgents’ inability to directly defend themselves implies that a direct approach to strike at its weakest points is essential. Thus, to employ force efficaciously, it is essential to employ Nagl’s version of direct offense versus the insurgents’ weak direct defense.

“Victory” in Iraq ultimately required an amalgam of Nagl and Arreguín-Toft’s definitions of direct offensive COIN approaches against insurgents’ attempts at direct defense by clearing and holding land insurgents once had, and thus securing the population and host government.
While indirect guerilla attacks can be deadly, they are unavoidable. That is, unless direct counterinsurgency efforts are utilized in order to create a counter-cause which is strong enough to co-opt locals and win over reconcilable insurgents, thereby neutralizing the revolutionists. If counterinsurgents can enmesh themselves directly in a community and instead employ measured and discriminate force, as Nagl advocates, the insurgency could have been put at risk of losing their momentum, sanctuary, and eventually the war effort.

To accomplish this, I argue that what is required is well represented by Nagl’s idea of an “indirect”—which is actually quite direct, just not in comparison to Jominian scorched earth tactics—counterinsurgency-infused effort. This would have involved non-coercive and risk-acceptant behavior to gradually neutralize insurgents and win over the population. To be clear, a direct counterinsurgency effort does not mean a lack of fighting; lethality, however, is used instrumentally and minimally. Arreguín-Toft’s “direct attack” approaches resemble what actually occurred post-O.I.F., thereby encouraging would-be insurgents to take up arms against Coalition forces. Therefore, this leaves only a direct COIN versus direct insurgent defensive stance as the ideal scenario, given the other approaches’ downsides—an impossibility given the faulty misconceptions war planners had operated under ex ante.\(^\text{142}\) Clausewitz and Arreguín-Toft’s theories explicitly—and Biddle’s logic implicitly—help to explain why the U.S. needed to change gears to COIN after deposing Saddam.

Such an “indirect”—but what I deem direct and place within Arreguín-Toft’s schema in place of “direct attack”—COIN approach involves cutting out insurgents’ external sources of income and their sanctuaries, thus sapping their strength and countering their cause by providing collective goods for the population. This direct approach has the highest prospect of success versus a materially weaker insurgent opponent that cannot defend itself, beyond hiding.
Assassinating the entire deck of high-value targets in an indiscriminate fashion, as Arreguín-Toft direct attacks allow for, mirrors the approach used and was shown to be ineffective. Nagl’s best insight relates to the Army as an institution, however, and explains why all of this was impossible. While bureaucratic changes are never easy, Nagl shows how the U.S. Army’s culture rendered its commanders uniquely unwilling to learn from their own mistakes. The U.S. Army’s organizational inertia has long induced among its brass a negative habit of internalizing the wrong lessons from prior mistakes, thereby leading the Army to train only for conflicts that play to its strengths. That is, rather than the conflicts they encounter most often.

Therefore, in the context of the Second Iraq War the Coalition’s matériel advantage was rendered moot by (1) the absence of COIN, (2) a failure to match its tactics with its opponents’, and (3) a resulting inability to proficiently employ force. Logically, an absence of COIN ipso facto means that Messrs. Rumsfeld and Shinseki had plans that were not up to the task of sustainably pacifying postwar Iraq. Strictly speaking, this is axiomatically true. But an inability to obtain a superior outcome reflected numerous intervening factors as well, which collectively hampered Coalition troops’ ability to employ, and not just deploy, force. Though in an ideal case, proper matching up is important, I argue that the foundation simply was not there for understanding that this was necessary until well into the war.
Chapter 4. The Military That Could Not Spare a COIN

4.1 The Army’s Organizational Inertia Since the Vietnam War

The Army told itself that the failure in Vietnam was the fault of an overweening civilian leadership, a timorous high command, a feeble domestic base of support, a hostile press, and the sheer impossibility of the task. These judgments were grounded in reality, but the Army’s institutional failures deserved no less attention.146

The U.S. Army wasted decades futilely preparing for an interstate industrial “World War III”147 after the United States’ ignominious withdrawal from Vietnam on August 15, 1973. It was long argued that the North Vietnamese had prevailed because domineering U.S. politicians and the media prematurely ended the war effort—not as a function of an improperly (i.e., conventionally) trained Armor Corps. This consensus is false, however, as it disregards the Army’s culturally embedded doctrinal and organizational gaps vis-à-vis low-intensity conflict (L.I.C.)—the most likely form of battle post-1991148—and COIN.149 What plagued the Vietnam War is eerily reminiscent of postwar Iraq. Institutional failures that had played a large part in foiling U.S. military efforts in Vietnam had yet to be vitiated circa March 2003, thereby exacerbating an already flawed postwar stabilization effort. Namely, sclerotic brass’ overestimation of conventional war’s utility against a resolved insurgency and a disregard for COIN’s utility imperiled the whole enterprise.

Military brass has historically been inclined to ignore or refute the import of Vietnam’s “policy-relevant analogies…ambiguities and paradoxes,”150 although its lessons permeate any re-conceptualization of the Iraq War.151 Further compounding the invasion’s troubles, the appropriate lessons were never drawn from others nation-states’ experiences and those of the United States’ in Vietnam.152 By forcing the U.S. Army to go against the grain in altering its “repertoires”153 at its own expense, the Pentagon’s post-hoc attempts to tailor a “program”154 for
the “critical instance”\textsuperscript{155} of an Iraqi insurgency had been ill fated all along. Army high command had other ideas. Bureaucratic torpor is its own force of nature,\textsuperscript{156} as exhibited by the Army’s self-preservation driven clinging to an outdated mentality. So ingrained had been the Army’s culture that counterinsurgency became a “forgotten art,”\textsuperscript{157} even after losing to Vietnamese insurgents and well into the Second Iraq War.

Every civilian and military bureaucracy is plagued to different degrees by organizational inertia. Individuals are resistant to modify capabilities which are viewed as “essential to their [organization’s] essence” while remaining “comparative[ly] indifferent to functions not viewed as essential.”\textsuperscript{158} “Given “imperatives” that military branches must avoid,\textsuperscript{159} “success” is reflected by members’ compliance with “pre-established routines”\textsuperscript{160} with which Secretary Rumsfeld could not abide. Anthony Downs has also adduced that organizational inertia is perpetuated by two prime factors. First, an awareness that scrapping old projects would bring about enormous “sunk costs” via wasting significant prior investments in time and money.\textsuperscript{161} This explains Shinseki’s efforts to secure the ramped up procurement requirements in the face of Rumsfeld’s attack on the Army’s relevance. Second, “self-interest motivate[d] officials” whom oppose change to programs they favor may minimize resources wrested under others’ control,\textsuperscript{162} as Gen. Shinseki sought to avoid occurring to the Army. Given the debilitating cuts to the Army that Rumsfeld had desired, Gen. Shinseki’s efforts to aggrandize the Army should be seen as defensive in nature. Since his massive troop proposal followed similar Army logic and organizational decision-making, however, Shinseki’s plan logically lacked a counterinsurgency strategy and thus the chance for success.
4.2 A Moment of Clarity: From Cookie-Cutter Approaches to COIN

This section’s principal purpose is to explicate the derivation and impact that the Army’s eschewal of counterinsurgency had on the inefficacy of Coalition forces following Operation Iraqi Freedom (O.I.F.) in securing the postwar peace.

“No one in his senses,” notes Carl Von Clausewitz, “starts a war…without first being clear…what he intends to achieve…and how he intends to conduct”\(^{163}\) the operation proficiently. Every strategist must also await an insurgency and train its forces accordingly, “no matter how small or weak a state may be in comparison.”\(^{164}\) Given Army brass’ disparaging attitude towards counterinsurgency, however, this logic was prematurely and fatefuly relegated to the dustbin of history. The U.S. experience in Vietnam and afterwards highlights this reality. Vietnam also underscored how a resolved and misunderstood enemy can outweigh economic and technological supremacy.\(^{165}\) Retrenching instead, Army high command redoubled efforts to master conventional warfare. In so doing, the “institutional memory” of counterinsurgency “lapse[d],”\(^{166}\) rendering its troops unable to conduct asymmetric warfare proficiently in Vietnam and then again in Iraq.\(^{167}\)

Indeed, a desire to evade asymmetric warfare and organizational procedure led Army brass to view the Vietnam War as an “aberration” which was “irrelevant” to the enacting of necessarily “drastic organizational changes,”\(^{168}\) such as adding counterinsurgency’s counterintuitive lessons to soldiers’ repertoire. As Gen. Petraeus noted in his 1987 Ph.D. dissertation, U.S. involvement in counterinsurgency is “more likely than most other types of conflict.”\(^{169}\) Thus, one cannot wish away reality. Perhaps worse, the Powell-Weinberger (P.W.) Doctrine—by which wars are limited to decisive conflicts with clear exits—no longer applies,
given the shift to wars amongst the people. Created as an “intervention test”\textsuperscript{170} to prevent future quagmires, the dogmatism of P.W. advocacy creates a constraining threshold for war. It places decision makers in the paradoxical position of being forced to downplay COIN’s use when “argu[ing] for the creation of more forces suitable” for industrial war. However, they must “simultaneously realiz[e] they may advise against the use of those forces unless very specific circumstances hold.”\textsuperscript{171} Such a doctrine, which Gen. Eric Shinseki had countenanced, is problematic for other reasons as well. It seeks to define events that can only be foreseen retrospectively, and impedes utilizing military force by predicing the decision to invade on the capacity to achieve a “decisive” victory.\textsuperscript{172}

Disparagement of “operations other than war”\textsuperscript{173} like nation building in an L.I.C. environment so permeated the Army that nothing could effectuate organizational change. Unlike the U.S. Army in Vietnam, the British in Malayan Emergency successfully adapted over time to a war amongst the people, emerging victorious via an innately protracted COIN campaign. As noted above, the U.S. Army cemented by World War II\textsuperscript{174} its primary objective in war: the “decisive” destruction of an opponent’s forces.\textsuperscript{175} Recognizing the acute threat posed by revolutionaries and focusing solely on conventional warfare, President John F. Kennedy became the first U.S. commander in chief in history to comprehensively prepare forces to conduct COIN in 1961.\textsuperscript{176} By 1964, however, Pres. Kennedy had been assassinated and the clocks were turned back to their Jominian focus on absolute war for every circumstance.\textsuperscript{177}

Gen. Earle Wheeler, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (J.C.S.)—whose opinion, according to Harvard historian Lewis Sorley, was “often flat out wrong”\textsuperscript{178}—expressed a consensus among Army brass that “Any good soldier can handle guerillas.”\textsuperscript{179} This mentality, though proven patently wrong in Vietnam, resonated nonetheless among Army brass. In an
influential monograph, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, Army Col. Harry Summers argued that the Army had erred in its inadequate mastery of conventional warfare. In other words, the Col. convinced his Army colleagues that counterinsurgency was wholly unnecessary—even against insurgents. Blinded by confirmation bias, Army high command rejoiced at Summers’s findings. As a result, the U.S. military has failed to “see the true nature of war” since Vietnam.

*Contra* Summers’s supporters, however, astute veterans intent on assigning blame accordingly opened the door to a comprehensive rethinking of the Vietnam War and counterinsurgency in general. Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., a retired Army major and defense analysts, makes a “strategy of tactics” argument in his 1986 classic, *The Army and Vietnam*. Krepinevich argues that the U.S. Army’s stubborn refusal to adopt COIN and eschew conventional war doomed the Vietnam War effort. Moreover, the Army’s lack of proper training and organization by which to conduct COIN delimited forces’ efficacy. Lewis Sorley extends Krepinevich’s line of argument to accentuate the utility of counterinsurgency’s precepts in combating an insurgent adversary. In an argument eerily reminiscent of the Second Iraq War, Sorley states that General William Westmoreland “lost Vietnam” through the counterproductive over-implementation of force. According to Lewis Sorley, such methods “did nothing to win the [Vietnam] war.” This precluded insuring that no direct-matchups occurred, given the failure to anticipate the brewing war amongst the people in the offing, thereby rendering force employment impossible.

On the other hand, Sorley argues that Gen. Creighton Adams, who succeeded Gen. Westmoreland as head of Military Assistance Command Vietnam from 1968 to 1972, attained a fragile victory via counterinsurgency, which could have been sustained despite flagging support
had we backed South Vietnam after 1973.\textsuperscript{188} These lessons were lost, however, until Baghdad began to resemble the remnants of Saigon, but the Army was so heavily invested in conventional warfare as to never reconsider Summers’s and Wheeler’s adages.
Chapter 5. Two Transformative Efforts: Rumsfeld vs. Shinseki?

Shinseki’s logic and the roots of his inspiration to modernize the military follows logically, albeit a bit divergently, from conventional Army thinking. Thus, his notions were enough to both rile conservative members of the Army and inspire the Bush Administration’s rejection of his transformative plans. Had Rumsfeld actually read Shinseki’s plan, however, one must imagine that he would have been quite supportive. The general waxes eloquent about Network-Centric Operations (N.C.O.)—essentially, informational supremacy via technological advances, used to defeat an opponent—and about the value of technology in a way the secretary should have appreciated.

Secondary sources and politicking aside, Shinseki’s testimony reads like a plan to aggrandize and augment the Army for the Army’s sake, rather than to win the war in Iraq. It is clear he was not overly concerned with the kind of insurgency that in fact gained traction in Iraq. Indeed, when one actually reads the written testimony, Shinseki comes off as an odd mix of Jominian and Rumsfeldian—a recipe for disaster. The general was fascinated by an outdated theory of war and the prospect of nascent leaps in technology, rather than focusing on the actual reality on the ground. In this way, Shinseki “missed the forest for the trees” by wasting the Army’s time in preparing for the last war without taking necessary precautions to prepare for “operations other than war.”

Some pundits and defense analysts alike heap praise upon Shinseki for “challenging the administration” in an attempt to save the Army. But bureaucratic warfare to shore up the Army and arguing for a new strategy are quite different things. His constant concern about the Army retaining enough troops to conduct a Global War on Terror (G.W.O.T.) immediately raises a
red flag. Would a man whose only white paper reflects the need for massive reserve forces deployable globally and whose Field Manuals follow those of its predecessors’ really have agreed to deploy 400,000+ troops to one place, as required by counterinsurgency in Iraq? Unlikely. Shinseki also makes clear his preference of avoiding a Second Iraq War for bureaucratic reasons, knowing full well that the Army “would get stuck with the peace.”

Indeed, the general had long downplayed the threat of irregular warfare while supporting “high-tempo, conventional” battle, seemingly showing insufficient concern for war’s political dimension, despite Naval officer Christopher Kolenda’s emphasis to the contrary.

The backlash to Shinseki’s transformational plan can be explained as follows. Army brass resisted any changes that involved cutting tank procurements to fight mechanized war; one of the few capabilities of the Army not rendered redundant by other military services. That said, Shinseki called for combat readiness, beginning with a categorization of older weapons and equipment as the “legacy” force—such as heavy tanks and mechanized divisions—and planned for them to be modernized or scrapped, which many in the Army saw as hampering the nation’s capacity to engage in conventional ground warfare that Shinseki knew had grown less and less useful. His debates with other military brass and the Pentagon over items he desired are indicative of Shinseki’s desire to de-mechanize much of the force, prevailing instead through a less discreet “presence.” That is, as opposed to screaming commands from a tank’s loudspeaker. However, this is not to be confused with a concerted COIN strategy. Even after Rumsfeld’s “successful” invasion, Iraqis were not “shocked and awed,” nor did they greet their “liberators” with open arms. When Coalition forces proved incapable of instilling a sense of law and order after purging the (Sunni) Ba’athist apparatus, their actions aggravated an already volatile sectarian dispute.
While Shinseki was busy ensuring the Army’s relevancy, his fellow comrades viewed his plans with suspicion, subsequently digging their heels in and ensuring a confrontation with Rumsfeld. Gen. Shinseki pushed the Army’s bureaucracy “at a fanatical pace to ensure the force evolved rapidly yet logically.”\textsuperscript{197} His divisive moves necessitated the restructuring of five programs and the cancellation of four others to ensure $16 billion would be allocated for a “transformation,”\textsuperscript{198} whereas his colleagues were content with the status quo. Shinseki then planned the creation of an “interim force” which would transition into “lighter and more mobile brigades and divisions” over time, towards the development of an “Objective Force”\textsuperscript{199} via Stryker Brigade Combat Teams (light armored cars) to “further mitigate operational risk.”\textsuperscript{200} Such methods allow soldiers to evade dealing directly with the population: the exact opposite of what was required, and indeed, it was shown that such light armored cars were disastrous in Iraq.

Damon Coletta finds that while Rumsfeld did “blindly dismantle the old army” and prepared massive missions with smaller forces than suggested to “prove his point,” Army officers have defended the secretary, who eventually compromised and sent 145,000 troops for the invasion.\textsuperscript{201} When philosophy met the stage of policy, however, Rumsfeld touted a “lighter, faster force” capable of employing high-tech shock-and-awe air strikes, given his mentality that the days of close combat, the Army’s *raison d’etre*, was a thing of the past.\textsuperscript{202} And indeed, why not cut Army programs to save money that can be allocated to enhance space and air power? What Rumsfeld proposed could have led to at minimum the trimming of the Army’s budget, and at worst, the path to Army’s demise. But based on his actions, it is shown that Shinseki was clearly more concerned with shoring up the Army than an implanted Shi’ite Iraqi government.\textsuperscript{203}

Even when Gen. Shinseki speaks of his Future Combat System, he reads similar to Rumsfeld and Co. Shinseki employs the terms “decisive lethality”—an industrial warfare term,
to be sure, with no bearing on inconclusive wars amongst the people.\textsuperscript{204} Shinseki also goes on to advocate “networked, precision weapons” employed by 10 unmanned weapons systems capable of hitting-and-running without dealing with the local population.\textsuperscript{205} This is a far cry from advocating soldiers patrol villages by foot and drink tea with tribal elders in order to win their support and gain information about “the Enemy.” Indeed, the general even speaks of reducing the risk to soldiers by “reduce[ing] the logistics footprint of the force” and “embracing the ongoing [Department of Defense]… reform efforts to achieve revolutionary capability.”\textsuperscript{206} How an advocate of Shinseki could read this approval of Rumsfeld’s methods and think that the general perceived the Secretary as wrong is beyond the realm of this author’s comprehension.

Indeed, the debacle, which many claim led to Shinseki’s forced retirement, was really a sideshow of a larger bureaucratic game that had been going on since before Shinseki’s appointment. Political expediency was also involved, of course: The last thing Rumsfeld wanted was potential allies to perceive that the war would be more difficult than expected. Such a political motivation was heavily masked by the highly politicized discourse that followed Shinseki’s troop assessment, which Rumsfeld’s deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, stated was ‘wildly off the mark.’\textsuperscript{207} Fundamentally, the substantive difference between the Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz line and Shinseki’s rests on the latter’s correct notion that the occupation would be harder than conquering Iraq, and not vice versa, thus requiring many more troops.\textsuperscript{208} However, this assessment is a far cry from a disagreement over a viable postwar strategy. Interestingly, Wolfowitz later stated pointblank that Shinseki lacked a “sensible counterinsurgency strategy,”\textsuperscript{209} and disputed U.S. troop requirements.\textsuperscript{210}

Unquestioning policy makers assiduously courted like-minded analysts’ assessments while shunning skeptics who foresaw a number of the invasion’s unintended consequences.
Moreover, Ahmed Chalabi, of the Iraqi National Congress (I.N.C.)—a bearer of falsehoods and hand-picked heir-apparent to the Iraqi throne—accentuated tensions further between policy makers. Colin Powell’s State Department led a multi-agency charge against the I.N.C., who had fed the Pentagon misinformation that falsely confirmed its biases and helped marginalize skeptics. After obtaining war-planning primacy, Rumsfeld and Co. consequently operated under only the rosiest of assumptions, as policy makers’ ideological predilections and mistrust of one another alone circumscribed heavily any chance of victory. As such, the relevant actors were unsurprisingly reluctant to eschew an allegedly viable and risk-averse plan for a risk-acceptant one that could jettison the war effort.

There is a larger civil-military issue at stake here, which I will go over briefly for the sake of inclusion. Generally speaking, Rumsfeld’s time as Defense Secretary led to a major civil-military relations problem wherein the Shinseki debacle was only the most public. While the Constitution provides civilian leaders with the final say because “military affairs are too important to be left to the generals”—i.e., their conservative, battle-hardened mentality provides a different calculus than a civilian without combat experience, the opposite applies as well. The 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act exists to protect high-ranking military officials and allow them to provide their professional opinion, however unpopular, without rebuke. As such, Shinseki was well within his rights to speak out on more than the two occasions in which he is known to have questioned Rumsfeld’s desired troop deployment. However, it would not have made a difference.
Chapter 6. Could Victory Have Been Attained Under the Given Conditions?

For the meat of my argument, I develop upon the aforementioned historical reality and the noted military theorists to answer two counterfactual arguments. First, had 400,000-500,000 troops been deployed at Shinseki’s request, a failure to proficiently employ force was assured, absent strategic interaction considerations and a viable doctrine with accompanying tactics. Having failed to anticipate an insurgency and without an up-to-date COIN doctrine to apply, I argue that no troop addition would have been effective. Second, did the state of play underway in Washington prewar, with all things considered, ensure that the conditions had not been available to sustainably pacify Iraq circa March 2003? Indeed, given the bureaucratic wrangling, it is astonishing the war was launched at all, let alone with such a (transiently) successful invasion. In so doing, I tie up loose ends and paint an ominous portrait of the decision makers’ inexorable fall into a war amongst the people necessitating counterinsurgency which they did not understand.

6.1 Additional Troop Preponderance Would Not Have Been a Decisive Factor

Any viable plan required a rapidly deployable force steeped in counterinsurgency’s precepts, which was impossible at the time Shinseki’s “plan” became public. Shinseki’s oral and written testimony, as well as his Field Manuals (above) intimate that his plan rested on a “boots on the ground,” stability-and-support approach emphasizing a minimized but still extant mechanized “troop presence.”214 But of course, troop presence itself can be highly counterproductitive if the forces lack the proper ways and means to conduct themselves in a war amongst the people.215 It is important to note that that an extended “presence” is part of what breeds the perception that forces are foreign occupiers,216 something Shinseki recognized but had little way of avoiding. His testimony, however, does not even allude to protecting the population, let alone the importance of prizing the value of “winning the population.”217 Importantly, it is not
being argued that Shinseki did not think an insurgency was impossible. Rather, the general had
discounted the imminence of an insurgency and therefore lacked any plausible means of
employing a COIN strategy in time, i.e., at the end of O.I.F.

This is baffling, given his own experience in Vietnam and the Clausewitzian notion that
“in popular uprisings it [the center of gravity] is the personalities of the leaders and public
opinion…[and] it is against these that our energies should be directed.”218 Having falsely
believed that the center of gravity was the Ba’athish apparatuses, decision makers misidentified
their targets, falsely assigned duties to soldiers, and failed in general. More troops were
required,219 but only for a COIN-infused strategy. 500,000 conventional forces would not have
been useful, in the absence of an applicable counterinsurgency strategy, which was the case. It is
wholly implausible that soldiers, unconcerned with insurgents in themselves, could or did draft
and employ a direct COIN approach versus insurgents direct defense efforts. Indeed, the match-
ups are only applicable in theory: without understanding Iraq at all or anticipating one’s
opponents, surely one cannot match their tactics to their opponents’. As recognized earlier,
Arregui-Toft’s version of direct approaches for strong actors—e.g., indiscriminately targeting
buildings in densely populated Baghdad—would do little to sift out insurgents who are busy
engaging in indirect offensive tactics like terrorism.

Shinseki did not anticipate an insurgency, and thus logically could not have had a viable
counterinsurgency strategy prepared or a means of administering it.220 Nor would have Shinseki
engaged directly in war planning as Army chief of staff,221 so it is a stretch to assume that a
cohesive COIN-infused plan could have been implemented had it actually existed. It is, after all,
more conceivable that Shinseki would not have changed the war plans at all. Gen. Shinseki had
kept silent when asked collectively with the joint chiefs if they “had any concerns about the plans
before they went to the president.” Shinseki later admitted that he “failed to push to stop Rumsfeld from going into the war with too few troops,” but it has been noted that Shinseki also “was a very private leader…if he had concerns…he kept them to himself.” Either way, even if he had a COIN strategy tucked away somewhere—which seems highly unlikely—he passed up multiple opportunities to implement it.

For example, Shinseki’s Summer 2001 Directive deals with fighting conventional wars and preparing for a “prompt sustained army force on land” to combat a broad spectrum of threats. But again, he never mentions the word “guerilla,” “insurgency” or “revolutionary.” Shinseki, although prepared to look at a variety of scenarios, was more discomfited by “a potential conflict in the Caspian Sea than Iraq” as a result of his war-gaming of the conflict.

On the other hand, Maj. Gen. Anthony Zinni’s comprehensive and ominous 1999 war-game, *Desert Crossing*, explicitly envisaged a postwar Iraqi insurgency following a U.S. invasion of Iraq. Gen. Shinseki’s omission of COIN is quite odd, given the similarities with *Desert Crossing*, which also dealt with 400,000 troops to “take and occupy Iraq.” Gen. Zinni’s game took into account “humanitarian, security, political, economic and other reconstruction issues,” as well as potential sectarian conflict scenarios—“Shia versus Sunni, Kurds versus the other Iraqis, Turks versus Kurds and the power vacuum that would surely follow the collapse of the regime.” As is clear and according to Gen. Zinni, “There was no interest in Washington in pursuing” strategies for post-Saddam Iraq, including by the Army chief of staff.

Specifically, achieving “relative superiority” and thus victory over the most unique opponents can only be gained “at the decisive point, on suitable planning from the start…which leads to appropriate disposition of the forces.” Coalition forces, however, lacked any knowledge of their opponents, which hamstrung efforts for years to come. Only by “match[ing]”
one’s tactics to his “powers of resistance”—(measurable) material strength and (approximate) “will”—can one counterbalance an adversary. Thus, asymmetric actors easily overwhelmed Coalition forces. This Clausewitzian point is unsurprisingly the bedrock of Biddle’s and my own argument. Armies must be able to ascertain which technology and how many troops are required, but that is only the beginning. An army must also understand how to utilize sufficient materiel via apposite doctrine and tactics, depending on the distinct theater and opponent in question.

Gen. Shinseki—with his focus on a G.W.O.T. and an antiquated obsession with decisive warfare—fell far short of achieving this goal. Indeed, significantly shorter his advocates contend.

A few scattered references to “asymmetric threats” do not amount to a counterinsurgency-themed state-building mission. The general thus fired a shot across the bow toward the Pentagon in an ill-fated attempt to avoid what transpired from happening: i.e., a miniscule troop deployment under the Army’s responsibility, highly susceptible to being bogged down in a protracted reconstruction mission a la Bosnia. Thus, various post-hoc assessments, which categorically assert that Shinseki’s plan would have been effective, cannot be taken at face value. When General Abizaid assessed that “General Shinseki was right that a greater force contribution…should have been available immediately after major combat operations,” he was not saying that the tides of the insurgency could have been turned as a result; this would have been truly significant. Acknowledging that more troops would have been helpful is all together different than saying that Shinseki actually had a plan which would have eviscerated an inchoate insurgency before it gained momentum.

Gen. Shinseki no doubt loves the Army and is supportive the institution, which leads one to logically assume that counterinsurgency was naturally not a large part of his decision-making. Unfortunately, this bears out in his testimony. Counterfactually, the biggest problem with the
claim that “Shinseki was right” is the fact that the best display of his internal calculus is showcased in FM-1 and FM-7. Written by Shinseki and his deputy in 1999 and 2002, respectively, neither provides a doctrine with which soldiers could institutionalize counterinsurgency by 2003 and thus lacked the necessary guidance to successfully win legitimacy among the population. For all his references to “human interaction” as “the basis of our warfighting doctrine,” his “rules of thumb” are positively Jominian in nature: maintaining the offensive and wresting the initiative from revolutionaries by intimidating opponents, maintaining momentum, and winning “decisively.” Gen. Shinseki may as well have rewritten the 1940s-era Army doctrine that supplanted the Marine Corps’ nuanced approach: nothing about this is revolutionary, and there is no indication of lessons learned from Gen. Zinni’s Desert Crossing war-game.

Moreover, the U.S.’s “modern system” thoroughly insulated forces from changes in technology, thereby rationalizing the Army’s and the Pentagon’s complacence vis-à-vis low-intensity conflict. Given Arreguin-Toft and Biddle’s emphasis on the need to match the proper strategies and tactics with an opponent’s, however, any assumption that forces could act accordingly without the proper doctrine and tactics to do so is problematic. It appears that an idealistic complacency about prospective threats precluded a whole-scale reinvention of the military’s doctrine and force structure that went against almost a century of warfighting. As such, Shinseki was not so iconoclastic after all.

6.2 A Sustainable March 19, 2003 Invasion of Iraq Was Impossible

In an attempt to avoid repetition, this final section will essentially consist of the laundry list of reasons as to why experts who contend that the Iraq War had been winnable circa March 2003 were mistaken. Indeed, so insurmountable and numerous were the obstacles which,
juxtaposed with one another, made an already herculean task impossible. Indeed, the war was in many ways lost in Washington before March 19, 2003.

General Petraeus ominously noted in 2005 “how many sort of key ideas are common” to both Vietnam and the Iraq War vis-à-vis contemporaneous strategy and management of the interventions.237 Much of this is because forward-thinking assessments had anticipated post-conflict mayhem but were ignored.238 For example, the U.S. Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute (S.S.I.) released an exhaustive analysis in February 2003, which had been deemed “Top Secret” by the Pentagon due to its portentous nature—not security concerns.239 It detailed a 135-point plan for post-conflict operations in Iraq, taking into account the country’s “violent political culture,” as well as “Ethnic, tribal and religious schisms [which] could produce civil war or fracture the state.”240 War planners, however, ignored essentially all of these concerns. The study also lays out the importance of a speedy handover to Iraqi forces, and it goes even further, stressing the high likelihood of “winning the war and losing the peace” in Iraq while arguing against entirely eliminating the Iraqi Army.241 Such prescience is astounding, but decision makers had no time for such dystopian scenarios, however. After all, why scare away potential allies with ostensibly unwarranted fears of a protracted war?

The Defense Secretary and his coterie’s subsequent avoidable failures—three in particular, which led to a fourth by aggrandizing the unpopular Iraqi émigré Ahmed Chalabi and Co. while ignoring the inception of an unanticipated insurgency. The most acute errors involve the (1) deliberate paucity of post-combat planning and ground force—which has been dealt with at length—(2) pro-consul Ambassador L. Paul Bremer’s de-Ba’athification policy, and (3) particularly, the Iraqi military’s dissolution.242 Ambassador Bremer implemented undersecretary of defense for policy Douglas Feith’s de-Ba’athification plan, followed by an order to dissolve
Iraq’s military without a viable means for its reconstitution. While pro-de-Ba’athification was to be followed by the installment of a Transitional Authority, the State Department’s Future of Iraq study opposed the Party’s “total abolition” of its 2 million members, lest its absence facilitate the breakdown of social order and political vacuum that indeed followed.

Ambassador Bremer allegedly mistook the Study’s findings to suggest that an unrestrained “de-Baathification [process] absolutely ha[d] to happen”—a decision Bremer later conceded had been wrongly implemented given how little Iraqi input was involved; Rumsfeld expressed only mild regret about the decision in his memoir. The State Department’s exhaustive study had pushed for “halving” the Iraqi Army to aid in fighting terror and drug smuggling. But in an even worse decision later denounced by President Bush, the 400,000-strong Iraqi military was completely disbanded—most likely at Vice President Dick Cheney’s request—at a time when 60% of the populace was unemployed and the military, whose help was integral to any exit strategy, was still prepared to aid the coalition. Despite being a centerpiece of plans to shape postwar Iraq, a “de-Ba’athification” campaign led by the Coalition Provisional Authority had never been discussed at a National Security Council principals meeting, according to C.I.A. director Tenet, nor with National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice or Secretary of State Colin Powell.

After having failed to create a “national reconstruction force” and with the help of Walter B. Slocombe, the U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith eventually dissolved an already disassembled Iraqi Army; this was also done without even consulting with the State Department, C.I.A., or Ms. Rice. Moreover, Tenet’s suggestion that any individual below the rank of lieutenant colonel could apply for reinstatement had been deliberately omitted from the order, unleashing approximately one million angry and armed Sunni Iraqis. Given the
attempted installation of Chalabi’s Shi’ite I.N.C. and an unwillingness to install Sunnis in positions of control, a Sunni-led insurgency essentially became an eventuality.

Indeed, the sheer gravity of what “victory” in Iraq would have required is dizzying. The entire war process—from phase I to an extrication strategy—and the military’s structure would have to have been overhauled. Moreover, egos would have had to have been tabled, fences mended and long-held ideas reversed diametrically—and all on a hunch. This was impossible anyway, but particular so due to policy makers’ contrasting ideologies and bureaucracies’ organizational routines. The chain of events would have had to have begun with the need for Secretaries Colin Powell (State Department) and Rumsfeld to forsake literally decades of distrusting one another while reining in their sprawling bureaucracies. While neither is an easy task under the best of circumstances, both jobs were made impossible by the dynamic at the time. For example, the Pentagon ignored Powell’s State Department’s perceptive but “understaffed and underfunded” Future of Iraq War study; indeed, Feith publicly admitted in June 2002 that the Pentagon was essentially “at war with the State Department.”257

Rumsfeld had so challenged Powell’s leadership that the former Chairman of the J.C.S. claimed he was forced to “spen[d] more effort struggling with other government departments than plotting Saddam’s downfall.”258 This state of play, particularly with respect to the animosity held by Vice President Cheney and Rumsfeld with Powell, precluded unity of effort to such an extent as to doom the war effort prior to launch.259 According to Ken Adelman, a dissenting administration official, “not only did each [member of the national security team] individually, have enormous flaws, but together they were deadly, dysfunctional.”260 If only the list ended there, however. Indeed, absent an oracle with Rasputin-like agenda-setting prowess within Rumsfeld’s coterie, it is hard to fathom how the operation’s failures could have been rectified.
A non-existent official would have had to possess the capacity to convince Rumsfeld that he must entirely reconfigure his strategy. And to add insult to injury, such an operational plan would have resembled General Petraeus’s so-called 2007 “surge” strategy, i.e., a troop augmentation of forces well versed in counterinsurgency well before it was obviously necessary.\textsuperscript{261} In so doing, a Rasputin incarnate would, moreover, have also had to convince conventionally predisposed brass to re-conceptualize nothing short of the art of war and adopt an unorthodox strategy while also somehow persuading Rumsfeld to scrap his “transformational” plans entirely. Fashioning such an alternative plan, however, had required convincing the defense secretary that he literally misunderstood twenty-first-century warfare and should step aside; naturally, no small feat.

As should be clear, this would have required not just an overhaul of an already revolutionary strategy. For force to be used proficiently, one must not just grasp an opponent’s grand strategy. In order to employ military might effectively, one must possess an applicable doctrine and apposite tactics for a given theater and its distinct opponents. Such are prerequisites to accustoming forces to complete particular tasks against specific opponents one day, and via other methods against new belligerents the next. This fluid transition from war to means by which to sustain a modicum of peace was inconceivable, however, without a guidebook from which to judge one’s progress, such as the counterinsurgency doctrine published in 2006.\textsuperscript{262} Moreover, had Rumsfeld acceded to fundamentally modifying his preferred war plan, there still remains the imperative of constructing a readily accessible and applicable doctrine by April 9, 2003, essentially out of thin air. Finally, Coalition forces needed to have been inculcated and psychologically prepared post-haste to employ said doctrine’s counterintuitive precepts through peacetime preparation alone. What should be obvious is that completing a few of these tasks, let
alone every single one proficiently and before the war’s outset, was made impossible.
Chapter 7. Conclusion

The question of whether Shinseki’s plan was “right” or would have “worked” is principally predicated upon his anticipation of an insurgency and a plan to eradicate it at its inception. Herein lies the problem. Shinseki’s troop sizing is conducive to a viable counterinsurgency effort, and one retrospective analysis testifies that Shinseki’s strategy would have been superior to Rumsfeld’s. A military’s capacity to employ force can compensate for a relative disadvantage in matériel but not troop preponderance, however. Therefore, Coalition forces’ shortage of forces did present a significant impediment to victory. Few analysts have questioned how Shinseki’s plan could have possibly been implemented in a short-enough order, but that has not stopped many from considering his suggestions downright prophetic. As Shinseki himself attests, however, even in the best of circumstances many of the changes he suggested would not have been in place by 2008 or 2010 at the earliest.

Army brass’ downplaying of irregular conflicts, in seeing them as “beneath” the military, failed to prepare soldiers for post-Saddam Iraq. Already constrained by the absence of helpful civilian institutions and assistance, the short shrift given by the military to COIN and irregular war training prior to Petraeus’s “surge” left troops with a counterproductive skill set. Indeed, while the surge’s strategy was on point, its framework would have only been effective if implemented at O.I.F.’s conclusion. Acrimonious relations between policy makers and military decision makers also affected planning and how force is applied. Thus, the deterioration of civil-military relations in the War’s run-up reflects both entities’ misunderstanding of the proper purposes and manner by which force can be effectively utilized vis-à-vis non-state insurgent actors. In so doing, I challenge realist-liberal contentions of power’s import per se absent a means of systematizing it, but admittedly offer little new for the field at large. This analysis—
while elucidating the incapacity to war-game a conflict based on the hard and soft power resources that realist and liberal I.R. theorists have lent too much credence—has little bearing on policy, given its highly specific focus. That is, beyond the need for war planners to possess a more nuanced understanding of one’s opponents ex ante than did those pre-O.I.F. and think twice about going to war, this case study remains unique.

There is admittedly a paucity of information regarding how Shinseki would have handled the occupation, which leaves many questions unanswered, e.g. whether Shinseki would have left some Saddam loyalists in power, reconstituted the military or not purged it to begin with, etc. Gen. Shinseki, however, never put forward a comprehensive strategy or divulged any strategic or tactical details to this effect. This further problematizes the presumption that Shinseki had a different plan at all. Based on what is available, the general would have most likely conducted the war in a similar manner as did Rumsfeld if given the chance, only with more—inproperly trained—ground forces for Phase IV. Having been ingrained institutionally to downplay the importance of counterinsurgency, Shinseki’s plan, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, assuredly lacked this essential criterion for victory. It is prima-facie understandable why many individuals felt Shinseki was prescient: the general was sympathetic to more alarmist analyses and less Pollyannaish about the postwar occupation than Secretary Rumsfeld. But one man’s philosophy and experience does not constitute a viable plan, let alone an executable approach within the first few months of the occupation when it would have been most effective. Had troops been inculcated in COIN’s precepts as well as proper doctrinal guidance and socio-cultural knowledge of Iraq’s geopolitics, Coalition forces could have very well employed force more effectively.
In a war amongst the people against ghost-like adversaries, a modern system strategy and its tactics are ineffective and the system’s overall value is rendered moot, thereby requiring a strategic pivot to population-centric counterinsurgency post-O.I.F. In such a conflict, a viable operational strategy is predicated upon possessing an applicable doctrine by which successful tactics can be derived and which applies to a particular theater’s geopolitical dynamics. Given Gen. Shinseki’s prerogatives, his hypothetical plan would have been wholly insufficient. This notion is supported by Arreguín-Toft’s typology.

While Coalition forces have only the option of direct but non-coercive COIN offensive methods after O.I.F.’s onset, even well resourced and resolute insurgents are only capable of indirect guerilla warfare. What would ideally be required is what Nagl called “indirect” COIN methods in the place of Arreguín-Toft’s “direct” offensive approach post-O.I.F., by dint of the fact that the insurgency is most susceptible when forced to directly defend itself. Only by matching one’s tactics with those one’s opponent’s could the war’s outcome have been improved on a battle-by-battle basis, but the information required to do so was unavailable ex ante. Thus, a direct counterinsurgency approach in the face of an insurgency’s innately weak direct defensive approach was the only viable option, albeit in theory, given the practical impossibilities of accomplishing this feat.

The vast array necessary factors and conditions under which decisions were made ex ante all but ensured that a viable invasion strategy could not have been crafted in early 2003. From the bureaucratic feuding and closed communication channels, to the cocksure decision makers and complacent Army brass, a successful war was simply not meant to be. The Army as an entity and not Gen. Shinseki nor other war planners should be blamed for the lack of a counterinsurgency doctrine pre-invasion. Its absence however, is a sticking point for anyone who
may claim that the general’s approach would have been effective. This analysis thus offers a corrective in that war planners, regardless of their allegiances, lacked the ability to discern which armaments and strategy were required for the Iraqi theater given the absence of a contemporary counterinsurgency doctrine. Thus, contrary to popular belief, Gen. Eric Shinseki’s recommendation would not have had a critical impact per se on the war’s outcome because even the application of surplus force would “lack utility.”

Indeed, under the hurried and rancorous conditions leading up to the war, no official had the capacity to prepare for direct, population-centric counterinsurgency approaches. Despite abundant knowledge of its use over time, the method was eschewed entirely until it was too late. By extension, checking indirect guerilla attacks with an indirect and indiscriminate offensive approach heavy on collateral damage was counterproductive. In providing the force that took Baghdad through military might, Shinseki’s actions leads one to strongly question the notion that he had felt impelled to adopt an objectively more risky and heterodox strategy. Without doing so, however, force could not be employed discriminately and efficaciously, thereby precluding the sustainable stabilization of Iraq.
Endnotes

3 Smith, Rupert. The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World. London: Penguin Books, 2005: 3-5. Given the bandwagoning underway as a result of superpower conflict between the U.S. and Soviet Union, conventional wars were on the rise. Decisive interstate industrial warfare aimed at the utter destruction of an opponent’s armed forces and will, however, became relatively rare. As General Rupert Smith notes, the last interstate tank battle occurred during the 1973 Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur War.
4 Smith. The Utility of Force: 5
6 In his theory of scientific revolutions, Thomas Kuhn defines a “paradigm” as “universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners.” Smith explains that obsolete interstate industrial wars—in which “war as a massive deciding event in a dispute in international affairs—have been replaced because a “paradigm shift in war has undoubtedly occurred (p. 5).” General Rupert Smith adduces that this new paradigm is one of “wars amongst the people,” which reflects a shift “from armies with comparable forces doing battle on a field of strategic confrontation between a range of combatants, not all of which are armies, and using different types of weapons, often improvised” (p. 5).
8 Metz and Millen. “Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century”: 3; Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare: 3-5.
12 Barnett, Thomas P.M. The Pentagon’s New Map: 11 -- As such, utilizing COIN’s tactics at the war’s onset could have uprooted a nascent insurgency.
13 Department of the US Army/US Marine Corps. The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. Chicago, Ill.: University Of Chicago Press, 2007: 1-67 – “The conditions of the operational environment and the approaches insurgents use vary too widely. A better force requirement gauge is troop density, the ratio of security forces (including the host nation’s military and police forces as well as foreign counterinsurgents) to inhabitants. Most density recommendations fall within a range of 20 to 25 counterinsurgents for every 1000 residents in an AO [area of operations]. Twenty counter-insurgents per 1000 residents is often considered the minimum troop density required for effective COIN operations; however as with any fixed ratio, such calculations remain very dependent upon the situation.” --
Although, probably as a result of “sticker shock,” this number was omitted from the Chicago University Press version.


15 McIntyre, Jamie “Myth of Shinseki Lingers,” CNNPolitics. 8 December, 2008.


21 Cohen, Eliot A. Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime. Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2002: p. 204-5. Cheney’s role is largely unknown, but his relationship with Rumsfeld led to the latter’s initial higher and it is thought that much of the war’s planning that occurred outside the Pentagon happened in the Vice President’s office. According to Eliot Cohen (p. 235), there were five major players involved in war planning outside of the Vice President’s office and the Oval Office. They were: Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld; his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz; the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force General Richard Myers; Deputy Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Peter Pace; and General Tommy Franks, the head of Central Command (CENTCOM). Rumsfeld, however, is the focus of concern because under the U.S. Constitution, he led the chain of command and effectively held the role of a five-star general. President Bush, who supported Rumsfeld into his retirement in 2006 despite holding rank as essentially a six-star general, was all but absent from the nitty-gritty aspects of war planning.


24 Secretary Rumsfeld was concerned about losing the war in Washington, not Iraq, in the event that the Pentagon’s push for decision-making primacy was circumvented. In fact, the “war was lost”—to use his terminology—partially because the Pentagon received what it desired, i.e., war-planning primacy, as well as because of exogenous reasons relating to the U.S. Army’s culture and Iraq’s complex geopolitical and sectarian dynamics.


28 Excessively lethal acts that fall far short of barbaric acts nonetheless riled the Iraqi populace and helped to support the insurgent’s cause.

indiscriminately targeting insurgents. As Arreguín-Toft points out, strategic bombing in which noncombatants are targeted meets Pape’s definition of barbarism. Thus, O.I.F. was a barbaric attack, and given its spurning of an insurgency, I further suggest using indirect methods during O.I.F. and a direct COIN approach after O.I.F. While this goes beyond my point, I argue that every day of O.I.F. was not created equal and that the U.S.-led forces should have quickly pivoted from an indirect barbaric approach to a direct but non-coercive COIN-led one.

30 Arreguín-Toft. How the Weak Win Wars: 100.
31 Taking seriously force employment, i.e., what doctrine and tactics govern a military’s behavior, in crafting war strategy; how the U.S. Army’s inability to learn from its mistakes, and by extension, an unwillingness to utilize proper counterinsurgent precepts, hamstrung the war effort; and the import of strong actors matching their approach with weaker opponents’.
32 Barnett. The Pentagon’s New Map: p. 15 - Or, that the general and secretary had actually agreed with one another about the invasion’s strategy.
33 That is, a plan involving the deployment of 500,000+ COIN ready troops.
34 This is not a “theory” paper. In no way do I provide an abstract, theory-based inquiry into what motivated the war itself or the insurgents who helped prolong its duration. I also deal not in the moral and ethical miscarriages of justice; neither the strategic merit of invading nor the issue of “Weapons of Mass Destruction,” concern me; and the alleged ulterior motives and/or lobbying, which may or may not have facilitated the war’s initiation, are wholly irrelevant to my argument.
35 Since Gen. Shinseki would have utilized the same failed conventional strategy and similar tactics save a troop augmentation, the specifics of an inefficacious and hypothetical plan would be a waste of time.
36 Indeed, my argument would have been remarkably similar, thought not as specific, in the absence of both theories’ existence. In an unpublished final essay for Professor Chowdhury’s Core Course in Security Studies, I echo Biddle’s force employment theory without having had any knowledge of the theory at the time the paper was written. Also, to be clear, I do not claim to be supplanting, improving, or utilizing these theories in their entirety. These redoubtable analysts’ overall findings are applied in a fair but selective manner that suits my overall point.
37 “Operation” is used with respect to simply indicate a codename of the invasion itself, Operation Iraqi Freedom. However, while not used explicitly, its meaning is far more specific. There are four levels of war: grand strategy/political objectives (how and what instruments of power are available for defense, and their military implications regarding policy); strategy (“the plan of action”); operational (coordination of tactics with strategic goals); and tactical (the techniques employed vis-à-vis the enemy).
38 Lake, David A. “Two Cheers for Bargaining Theory.” International Security. 35, no. 3 (Winter 2010/11): 3. The war was justified based on the the perception that Saddam Hussein posed an acute hazard, given the United States’ incapacity receive credible commitments that Saddam would not pose a bigger threat in the future.
39 O.I.F. could have lasted much longer and been deadlier down the line; and, given decision makers’ fundamental misreading of Iraq’s geopolitical map circa March 2003 as well as dearth of extant COIN doctrine, an improved Phase IV strategy—or one at all—would assuredly remain wanting.
40 Naturally, without the dataset of exact battles and a quantifiable means of identifying the proto-insurgents’ development—as I address below, insurgents tend to fly below the radar during their incipient stages—I cannot pick an exact date. What is clear, however, is that once the Saddam Fedayeen and the elite Republican Guards were rolled back and nation building became the task at hand, conventional warfare was counterproductive. Thus, Shinseki’s plan to engage in a Bosnia-like humanitarian mission with roughly a half million non-COIN-trained troops at hand could have only been successful if plausible means existed for an earlier transition to COIN. Given COIN’s total lack of consideration, however, such a “pivoting phase” was not in the offing.


Department of the US Army/US Marine Corps. *The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2007), chap. 1, p.1-2. – Counterinsurgency comes in various formations, but the acronym COIN is used to refer to population-centric counterinsurgency. As defined in FM 3-24, “counterinsurgency” or “COIN” refers to “military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.”


McIntyre, Jamie, “Myth of Shinseki Lingers.”


Barnett, *The Pentagon’s New Map*: 8-10. Barnett defines “machines” as members of the air community (the Air Force and the Navy’s carrier aircraft, known as the “flyboys”) that favor Network-Centric Operations (NCO), which became a popular buzzword for describing how an alleged R.M.A. had “transformed a force.” On the other hand, “warriors” consist of the infantry “ground-pounders” from the Army and Marine Corps who subscribe to a converse view called Fourth-Generation Warfare (4GW), which stresses the essential quality of soldiers over technological advances.


United States Army Field Manual 1, June 14, 2001 (St. Louis, Mo.: U.S. Army Publications Distributions Center, 1999), p. i.

Lang, W. Patrick. “Drinking the Kool-Aid.” *Middle East Policy*. 11, no. 2 (Summer 2004): p. 40. In a PBS Frontline special, the Washington Post’s Thomas Ricks states that after a while, Gen. Franks “drank the Kool-aid,” which is to say, he began to buy that Rumsfeld’s “transformative” strategy would actually work.


Helmuth von Moltke falsely attributes the position to the inestimable Prussian military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz. As Nagl notes, Clausewitz was far too nuanced to make such a definitive statement, although a cursory perusal of his famous work, *On War*, could lead one to such a conclusion. In *Makers of Modern Strategy*, a reference book, John Shy states that “If there can be such a thing as a joke in military, surely [the misapplication of such a notion to Clausewitz] is it” (p. 177). Moreover, as Nagl notes, the Jominian argument is wholly incompatible with Clausewitz’s emphasis that “war must always be subordinate to the political goals for which it is fought (Nagl, p. 31, fn. 11).”


Barnett, *The Pentagon’s New Map*, p. 11 -- As such, utilizing COIN’s tactics at the war’s onset could have uprooted a nascent insurgency.

Insurgency is an organized, protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control. Counterinsurgency is military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.

Sources:

77 Department of the US Army/US Marine Corps. The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2007), Chp. 1, 1-2, p. 1-1. “Insurgency is an organized, protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control. Counterinsurgency is military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.”
79 Smith. The Utility of Force: i, 3.
80 Gompert and Gordon IV, War by Other Means: 7.
81 Which is to say, no agreed upon, connotation-free definition.
88 Candidly, exchanging “Cobra II” with a riskier, COIN-based invasion plan opposed by every relevant decision maker ex ante on the basis of skeptics’ hunches, is downright absurd.
90 Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare: Pg. 5-6.
91 Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare: Pg. 6.


As addressed above, Realist and Liberal IR theorists’ notions of power and capability are challenged as ephemeral concepts requiring a non-material variable like force employment. And indeed, IR theory only matters insofar as their concept of these two items is flawed. Concerns of an academic nature had very little currency in the groupthink-driven atmosphere during the Iraq War’s run-up, and are thus hardly worthy of note. Realist and Liberal IR theorists’ notions of power and capability are challenged, however, as ephemeral concepts requiring a non-material variable like force employment.

“Modern system force employment” requires a "tightly interrelated complex of cover, concealment, dispersion, suppression, small-unit independent maneuver, and combined arms at the tactical level" (the level of combat at which battles are fought) and "depth, reserves, and differential concentration at the operational level of war" (the level of war concerned with the conduct of campaigns).


Biddle. Military Power: 5.

Biddle, Military Power: 28.

Biddle, Military Power. p. 3. Arreguín-Toft’s match-ups are utilized in lieu of Biddle’s model (which focuses on the wrong form of warfare in any case); not just because the model is more parsimonious and accessible, but because it deals with the case in question—a strong state versus weak non-state actors. I do not go into Biddle’s different strategies or case studies because frankly, it has no import on the analysis, given that the Coalition forces’ victory over Saddam’s military is certainly not in dispute. However, as noted, his overall logic is quite fitting for my analysis, as he intimates in his book.


Kolenda, Christopher D. “Courageous Leader in Rocky Times.” The Naval Institute: Proceedings (August 2003), http://www.military.com/NewContent/0,13190,NI_Leader_0803,00.html

Clausewitz. On War: 228-232, and 229-230 in particular.

Whether hard or soft, “power” does not ensure a state’s military success, and every state assesses its capability differently, even with regard to the same type of forces. On p. 11, Biddle brings up the question of whether war is so unique as to render materiel factors incapable of predicting anything per se, which he argues in a follow up in chapter 2. While this is not an IR theory paper, Realists and Liberals are disparaged for their assumptions regarding “power” and the pursuit of national interest, irrespective of moral considerations. Generally speaking, classical realists view materiel itself as an important variable. Biddle, Arreguín-Toft and Clausewitz, on the other hand, view both power and capability as a reflection of how ably one can match their doctrine and tactics to neutralize their insurgent adversary’s guerilla warfare. Without the capacity to “test” power or preponderance, Biddle argues further that empirical databases do not explicate how military resources were used or how capability is addressed. To the point, however, I diverge from classical Realists and Liberals whom view power as a variable on its own that reflects constraints imposed by the international system as a reflection of material—hard power, such as industrial, economic, political, and military strength—as well as soft power, like prestige. As stated on p. 19 by Biddle, “while force employment is believed to be important, few analyses thus account for it in any systematic way.” While I cannot account entirely for it either, such a finding places me on solid footing to make my overall argument regarding Shinseki’s “plan.”


Clauswitz, Carl Von, *On War*: 141.

Clauswitz, Carl Von, *On War*: 141. That said, even if “peacetime maneuvers are a feeble substitute for the real thing,” familiarity breeds war-time capability by “train[ing] officers’ judgment.”


Arreguín-Toft, Ivan, “How the Weak Win Wars.” A-T defines “asymmetric” conflict as one between a state that is greater or equal to five times stronger in terms of materiel strength than its non-state opponent. I see no reason why this metric should belie my argument, but I do not explicitly use it. Indeed, most Western militaries are orders of magnitude stronger than opposing transnational terror groups in materiel and personnel resource base. That is not to say that relative materiel strength and/or sheer mass can and have been irrelevant on innumerable occasions, e.g., in the case of the Vietnam War, in which the North Vietnamese possessed a weaker but more resolute conventional and guerilla army.


Mack, Andrew J.R. “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict.” *World Politics*. 27, no. 2 (January 1975): 175-200, esp. p. 181. Mack’s general argument is that power asymmetry has explanatory power regarding one’s interest asymmetry. If the gulf in power is large, the stronger actor is less resolved and therefore more vulnerable to politically induced sup-optimal ceasefires. Elites’ capacity to compel their regimes to halt a war short of victory is similar, though not equivalent, to
stable democracies’ battles in far-flung regions of the world. The same logic applies to countervailing elites” in an essentially stable autocratic state.

133 Arreguin-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars”: p. 98.
134 Or the Monroe Doctrine, which ensured any belligerent actor a war with the U.S. for operating in the Western Hemisphere.

135 IR theory is not a matter of debate for this essay. In this context, the only import the realist/idealist divide is their use of the nebulous term “power” as a relevant variable per se. Biddle argues that power is meaningless on its own, with which I agree.

136 Arreguin-Toft. “How the Weak Win Wars”: 98-99. Moreover, political vulnerability is given too much play by Mack, whose presupposition that rationality undergirds every decision to remain in a conflict completely neglects the prestige the U.S. seeks to hold onto for having doubled-down in Afghanistan, for example. Given the skewed views of the war provided by policy makers and the media, Mack is also a bit overly sanguine about the ability of war protestors to end a conflict that policy makers seek to continue.

137 Arreguín-Toft. “How the Weak Win Wars,”: 99-100; and Mearsheimer, John, Conventional Deterrence (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 28–29. Mearsheimer defines strategy simply as the “plan of attack,” but the above definition is more apt in the given circumstances, while Toft defines it as “an actor’s plan for using armed force to achieve military or political objectives.” By also defining specifically “grand strategy”—the entirety of an actor’s political, military and economic resources—and “tactics,” the art of using materiel at their disposal, A-T underscores a la Biddle and Clausewitz the import of tactical and strategic know-how to achieve socio-political goals.

138 Kolenda. “Courageous Leader in Rocky Times. General Shinseki announced in his departing address that 10 divisions of forces had been sent to achieve the job of 12 divisions.


I therefore employ Arreguín-Toft’s typology while replacing what the former deems a “direct attack” approach with what Nagl dubbed an “indirect” counterinsurgency approach. Nagl’s tactful techniques are required, and not via bombing an opponent into submission as Arreguín-Toft’s “direct attack” methods seek to achieve. The optimum match-up is thus direct-direct. However, this “direct” strategy is based on what Nagl calls an “indirect” COIN strategy, which is used within Arreguín-Toft’s schema and in place of the latter’s version of a “direct” offensive strategy. Thus, this direct counterinsurgency strategy a la Nagl, if done properly and at the right time, would largely involve a “charm offensive” to win the population, but involve the use of force versus insurgents’ comparatively weaker direct defense (below). These three scholars, with support from Clausewitzian insight, illustrate why the methods actually employed failed while providing a theoretical and empirical basis with which to extrapolate suggestions as to what could have stemmed the tides of war.

143 Stroup, Jr., Theodore G., “Leadership and Organizational Culture: Actions Speak Louder than Words”:
144 Stroup, Jr., Theodore G., “Leadership and Organizational Culture: Actions Speak Louder than Words”: 66; Wilson, James Q. Bureaucracy: 91; and Nagl, John, Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife, xxii.

145 For my argument, Arreguín-Toft underscores the import of at least possessing a COIN strategy, given the likelihood that revolutionaries are prone to arrive in a number of exigencies and which require unique and adaptive fighting styles. The U.S. Army’s recalcitrant attitude to change made this impossible, however.

146 Cohen, Eliot et al.. “Principles, imperatives, and paradoxes of counterinsurgency—four of the Army’s


151 “MilTerms: Glossary,” *COMBAT: the Literary Expression of Battlefield Touchstones*. http://combat.ws/S4/MILTERMS/MT-L-HTM. “Low-intensity conflict” or L.I.C. is defined as “a protracted confrontation between contending states that ranges from subversion to armed outbreaks, employing a variety of instruments, from political and economic to informational and military, during an ideological opposition that is generally localized while containing global implications; being the restrained and selective application of military force that’s employed to enforce compliance with the states political policies of one or more disputing nations.” The U.S.-led coalition’s stability and reconstruction mission was a peacemaking operation in which low-intensity conflict was recurrent, as explained most cogently in the last sentence of L.I.C.’s definition.


153 Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*: 178-9. The authors define “repertoires” as material “developed by parochial organizations for standard scenarios,” which a pre-emptive war on Iraq naturally was not, “that the organization has defined [and therefore] the programs available for dealing with a particular situation are ill suited to it.”

154 Graham and Zelikow. *Essence of Decision*: p. 178 Graham and Allison define a “program” as “a complex cluster of SOPs...rarely tailored to the specific situation in which it is executed. Rather, the program is (at best) the most appropriate in the existing repertoire.”


159 Allison, Graham and Philip Zelikow. *Essence of Decision*: 169. -- The authors spell out the military’s constraints its branches impose upon themselves to retain relevance, irrespective of their redundancy. G & A point to six “imperatives to avoid”: (1) a reduction in budget allocations—which Rumsfeld’s strategy implied for the Army; (2) cutbacks in manpower—another point of contention for an Army used to large invasion forces versus Rumsfeld who sought the opposite; (3) a decrease in specialists—the Army and the
Pentagon both retrospectively focused on the wrong forms of specialists, despite their focus on special operations forces (S.O.F.s); (4) any budgetary cutback vis-à-vis other branches—the Army’s biggest problem, given Rumsfeld’s focus on air power and SOFs; (5) ensure other services avoid overlapping objectives—the Army’s growing redundancy aside from obsolete mechanized tank battles was perhaps the former’s biggest problem; and (6) loss of qualitative military edge vis-à-vis adversaries.

Graham and Zelikow. Essence of Decision: 162.

This first point helps to explain why the Army, despite evidence to the contrary, focused on preparing for and allocating resources towards obsolete interstate industrial wars.


Liang, Lim Tuang. “Ingredients for Change: A Recipe for Transformation,” Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces. 29, no. 2 (Apr-Jun 2003); and Owens, Thomas Mackubin. “Transformation: The changing requirements for victory on the battlefield,” The Weekly Standard, 11, no. 18. 23 Jan. 2006. Other factors are necessarily involved, according to the Clausewitzian notion that "military activity is never directed against material forces alone; it is always aimed simultaneously at the moral forces—fear, danger’s affect on soldiers, physical and cognitive prowess—which give it life, and the two cannot be separated."


Petraeus, David “American military and the lessons of Vietnam,” p. 308; Barnett, The Pentagon’s New Map, p. xv. Barnett defines “asymmetrical warfare” quite simply as “a conflict between two foes of vastly different capabilities…[which] meant that much smaller opponents would seek to negate its strengths by exploiting its weaknesses, be being clever and ‘dirty’ in combat.”


Smith, The Utility of Force: 311-312. There is no such thing as a “decisive” protracted C.O.I.N. campaign in which a population’s support is the objective.


177 Given his support for COIN, a world in which Kennedy had not met his demise in 1963 and instead won a second term presents a fascinating alternate reality. Counterfactually speaking, had Kennedy pressed for COIN at Vietnam War’s outset, victory may have been had, as Andrew Krepinevich Jr. and Lewis Sorely contend, inter alia. Going a step further, however, if the U.S. military had won the Vietnam War via COIN, its use would surely have not been relegated to history’s dustbin. If this had occurred, the doctrinal infrastructure and perhaps even battle-hardened, COIN-ready troops would have been capable of being deployed to Iraq to great effect.


189 Shinseki Testimony: 27, 36, 40.

Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003: 6, 58–62, 65–66. On the other hand, Damon Coletta has (erroneously) argued that in principle, a civilian has a “right to be wrong” and therefore Shinseki’s “inflated” and “inflammatory estimate” allegedly approach what Peter Feaver dubbed “military shirking” of his responsibility to abide by Rumsfeld under a principal (Rumsfeld)-agent (Shinseki) framework.

Record, Jeffrey. “Bounding the Global War on Terrorism.” Strategic Studies Institute (December 2003): v. Though there is no precise definition for the global War on Terror, most of the G.W.O.T.’s declared objectives, which include the destruction of al-Qaeda and other transnational terrorist organizations, the transformation of Iraq into a prosperous, stable democracy, the democratization of the rest of the autocratic Middle East, the eradication of terrorism as a means of irregular warfare, and the (forcible, if necessary) termination of WMD proliferation to real and potential enemies worldwide, are unrealistic and condemn the United States to a hopeless quest for absolute security.”

Barnett. The Pentagon’s New Map: p. 15.


Kolenda. “Courageous Leader in Rocky Times.”


Cohen, Eliot, Supreme Command, 235-6; Noah, Timothy. “Meet Mr. ‘Shock and Awe,’” Slate Magazine. 1 Apr. 2003; and Kaplan, Fred. “The Flaw in Shock and Awe.” Slate Magazine. 26 March. 2003. As will be established below, Donald Rumsfeld led a cadre of conservative idealists for whom invading Iraq was a high priority, which led to a deliberate absence of postwar planning pre-invasion. Any effort that could have jettisoned the war effort was therefore nipped in the bud. As a pre-emptive war, the administration lacked a resolved commitment to the war which, beyond disagreeing philosophically with its necessity anyway, incentivized Rumsfeld to: avoid deploying such a large force that any withdrawal would harm U.S. interests, while deploying enough troops ex ante to give troops a “Running Start” and try to rally nations’ support; prevent Iraq’s sabotage of oil wells (which it succeeded in doing); minimize potential casualties via a shock-and-awe air campaign (which did not shock-and-awe anyone, including the doctrine’s creators, who called it “Shock-and-Awe lite”), inter alia.


Herspring. Rumsfeld’s War: 30.


Coletta. “Courage in the Service of Virtue”: p. 118. When Shinseki’s comments were made, Rumsfeld had already convinced General Franks to countenance his plans, and therefore Shinseki was publicly “judg[ing] that Franks’ CENTCOM strategy was not going to work.”

General Eric Shinseki Testimony: 27,36-37, 40.


The panel, consisting of members of George W. Bush’s administration, including Paul Wolfowitz, Peter Rodman, and Dan Senor, conceded that the Bush Administration lacked a counterinsurgency strategy. Douglas Feith’s inability to answer a pointed question led him to mumble that he could not even speak about the administration’s lack of counterinsurgency strategy. Indeed, Feith’s response made it crystal clear that the war planners lacked anything resembling a counterinsurgency strategy or contingency plan. Wolfowitz implicitly agreed. The deputy defense secretary is quoted as follows: “I think a sensible counterinsurgency strategy would not have been to flood the country with 300,000 Americans, but rather to build up Iraqi forces to be able to protect the population much more quickly.” This statement is of course absurd, considering that the Pentagon (under his partial control) dissolved the Iraqi military and failed to reconstitute it quickly, but he was right about Shinseki lacking a COIN strategy.

Miller, Laura. “Our Man in Iraq: The Rise and Fall of Ahmed Chalabi.” The Center for Media and Democracy’s PR Watch. 11, no. 2 (Second Quarter 2004).


Clausewitz. On War: 595-596.


Since this plan never was actualized, it is not clear what Shinseki had intended beyond what is available for public record, so for the sake of argument, it is assumed that his plan consists of his oral and written statements, as well as corroborated source material available to him pre-invasion.

McIntyre. “Myth of Shinseki Lingers.”

McIntyre. “Myth of Shinseki Lingers.”

McIntyre. “Myth of Shinseki Lingers.”

McIntyre. “Myth of Shinseki Lingers.”


Clausewitz. On War: p. 86.


United States Army Field Manual 1, June 14, 2001 (St. Louis, Mo.: U.S. Army Publications Distributions Center, 1999), p. i.


Coalition Provisional Authority. “Order Number 1: De-Ba’athification of Iraq.” CPA/ORD.16 May. 2003; “Order Number 73: Transfer of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps to the Ministry of Defence.” CPA/ORD. 22, Apr. 2004; and Tyler, Patrick E. “U.S. to Form New Iraqi Army and Pay Soldiers of Old One.” New York Times. 23 June. 2003. The order had been premised on the model of “de-Nazification,” wholly disregarding the fact that many Ba’athists were not Saddam Loyalists; they merely sought work and could only do so as a member of the Party, a la Communist Party membership.


Kaplan. “Who Disbanded the Iraqi Army?”


Herspring. Rumsfeld’s Wars: 143-147.

Tenet. At the Center of the Storm: My Years in the CIA, (Harper Collins, April 2007) p. 427


Herspring. Rumsfeld’s Wars: 139-152, esp. p. 148.

Tenet. At the Center of the Storm: 428.


It is imperative to note that Petraeus’s strategy is brought up merely as a real-life example of what could have worked according to my logic, had it been implemented post-O.I.F. Given the Army’s inability to accustom its troops to engage in counterinsurgency absent a viable doctrine, however, the surge was too little too late. And naturally, a plan comparable to Petraeus’s was inconceivable in theory and practice until well into the war; essentially, once soldiers and Marines had internalized FM 3-24’s lessons. Nevertheless, it represents a superior strategy than Shinseki’s, while the latter’s strategy was marginally better or potentially even worse than Rumsfeld’s. Thus, I removed what was a transitive argument used to show how Petraeus’s plan (A) was > to Shinseki’s (C), because it grows convoluted in the face of my argument that the only viable strategy was Petraeus’s but with an additional 250,000 troops, had it been implemented 4 years sooner.


Excessively lethal acts that fell far short of barbaric acts nonetheless riled the Iraqi populace and helped to support the insurgent’s cause. Thus, Arreguín-Toft’s direct attacks as well as barbaric acts—the latter of which are illegal under international humanitarian law—were sub-optimal methods per se, and particularly without an even match-up against opponent’s modus operandi.

Bibliography


