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Mitigating Munitions: The Consequences of using Technology during Counterinsurgency

Campaigns

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

American counterinsurgency in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan relied on conventional warfare methods than counterinsurgency warfare methods. These methods proved detrimental to operational success and put members of the military at risk. To find this, I used after-action reports from Vietnam by the 1st Cavalry, 4th Infantry, and 25th Infantry Divisions. I used oral histories by the Veterans History Project and the Cantigny First Division Oral Histories to reveal their experiences while conducting these campaigns. The primary method began in Vietnam with Arc Light (B-52) strikes, artillery strikes, and napalm as preparatory strikes. American units then used search-and-destroy maneuvers to root out the Viet Cong. Not only did these air power methods fail to kill large numbers of Viet Cong, it led to the Viet Cong controlling the population's support that is so vital to counterinsurgency warfare. During the Global War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan, the American military implemented similar methods with negative effects. House-to-house sweeps in Iraq resembled Vietnam's cat-and-mouse game with insurgents in the jungle. Afghanistan's mountains granted the insurgency its fluidity, which the U.S. was unable to effectively counter. The only viable solution that the military saw was to continue its reliance on American technological superiority.

The ineffective practices in Iraq led to the Surge in 2007. Army General David Petraeus sparked doctrinal and operational change that acknowledged the population and used it to undermine the insurgency. However, the Surge came too late in Afghanistan in 2009 to make a difference. A change in presidential administration in 2008, paired with an exhausted American public that grew wary of the validity of these campaigns, which is the greatest vulnerability of counterinsurgency operations. The Obama administration

prosecuted the war in Afghanistan the only way it could realistically do so, through drone warfare. This enabled the killing of insurgents without putting servicemembers at risk. The reversion back to this conventional, traditional mentality from methods like the Surge revealed how the U.S. viewed counterinsurgency warfare.

Introduction

In Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, the American counterinsurgency method was tested, questioned, distorted, and in Iraq, transformed. Russell Weigley correctly asserted that “evidently the great world wars and the American military history that had preceded them had so conditioned American military thought that their influence could not be escaped however different the circumstances of new combat might be.”¹ In Vietnam, the military emphasized force mobility, and technological superiority over the enemy, but lacked doctrinal and organizational flexibility. The lessons from Vietnam hardly affected counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The reliance on superior weaponry, coupled with operations that resembled more search-and-destroy missions that typified the war in Vietnam, created a bleak picture for Iraq and Afghanistan. However, American counterinsurgency shifted in 2007 when new military doctrine reformed operational approaches, and emphasized population-centered counterinsurgency missions. That shift demonstrated that the military acknowledged the problems that occurred during the Global War on Terror (GWOT), and provided a different approach to the counterinsurgency problem. However, executives in Washington and the American public failed to realize the prolonged nature of counterinsurgency conflicts. 2009, the Obama administration’s first year marked a significant operational shift. Instead of utilizing the progress in Iraq from 2007 to 2008, this change forced the U.S. to resort back to superior technology as a hunting mechanism through drone warfare.

¹ Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973), 466.

When exploring American counterinsurgency efforts in my research, I noticed the approach in Vietnam emphasized superior weaponry, mostly through B-52 Arc Light strikes, helicopters, artillery, and napalm strikes. Additionally, the same conclusion emerged for Iraq, and Afghanistan, though in different forms. Iraq, and Afghanistan created problems for the same reasons that Vietnam did, because the military viewed offensive operations as the most effective counterinsurgency method. The U.S. military, like Weigley argued, conditioned itself to fight wars the way it wanted to fight. Between 2003-2006, operations in Iraq showed examples of poor counterinsurgency operations. Operation Iraqi Freedom utilized U.S. firepower capabilities, which focused more on killing insurgents. When the U.S. committed itself to Afghanistan, it did so with the same mentality. The nation building effort in Afghanistan complicated counterinsurgency missions, because it attempted to establish government authority in regions of eastern Afghanistan that historically opposed government control. A large portion of problems originated from neglecting the most vital tool a guerrilla fighter, or insurgent, has against a larger, more powerful opponent: the population.

Iraq received more attention due to the contentious debate over whether Saddam Hussain possessed weapons-of-mass-destruction. Nevertheless, combat in Iraq illustrated some of the most intense firefights from the Global War on Terror. 2007 marked a cornerstone year for progress in Iraq. Commander of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, General David Petraeus, and a cohort of counterinsurgency experts gathered to restructure the U.S.'s counterinsurgency outlook. The group created U.S. Army and Marine Corps, Counterinsurgency Field Manual *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5*. This field manual emphasized

counterinsurgency approaches from French counterinsurgency theorist David Galula, and consumes a large part of my analysis.²

The goal of this thesis is to track counterinsurgency doctrine, analyze counterinsurgency methods, and conclude with battlefield outcomes. Many sources used in this thesis fought in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and explained that the outcomes produced extremely difficult situations. Furthermore, my goal is to describe what counterinsurgency meant to the those conducting the operations, and how the military brass failed to consider their battlefield experiences until after 2007. The doctrinal reformation of 2007 exemplified qualities that the U.S. military never promoted during the Vietnam War. Petraeus and his counterinsurgency specialists at Fort Leavenworth sparked change within that endorsed flexibility in Iraq. However, Field Manual 3-24 failed to break away from the American way of war when conducting counterinsurgency warfare. Instead of house-to-house operations that resembled the archaic search-and-destroy missions of Vietnam, two alternative counterinsurgency methods dominated the operational outlook in Iraq. Clear-hold-build and Combined Action helped secure the human terrain which denied the population from the insurgents.³

Field Manual 3-24 advocated for two methods on the counterinsurgency battlefield: clear-hold-build, and Combined Action. Clear-hold-build focused on expanding into insurgent controlled areas once a presence was established. That presence enabled counterinsurgents to use the population as a weapon against the insurgents, while

² For David Galula's counterinsurgency theory, see Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*.

³ U.S. Army and Marine Corps, Counterinsurgency Field Manual *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 174, 184.

simultaneously creating more favorable opportunities to engage with the insurgents. Clear-hold-build operations staged from combat outposts inside the area of operation helped ensure there was no longer a commute to the fight. Additionally, these operations combined American and indigenous forces. This method is offensively minded, and kinetic. In Iraq, this method was used to take Baghdad. The Sunni Awakening occurred simultaneously with the introduction of the surge, and clear-hold-build method which helped tremendously. The two events distorted the U.S. military's view on the success of clear-hold-build operations. Combined Action displayed defensively oriented operations that combined both population security and the training of indigenous forces. Combined Action allowed for the population to see their police/military force protect its citizens. These two methods were juxtaposed in the field manual, but clear-hold-build operations aligned more with the way the U.S. military wanted to wage counterinsurgency warfare.⁴

Counterinsurgency warfare invokes a complex set of definitions. The first is a counter to insurgent warfare, or a more historically accurate definition, guerrilla warfare. For this thesis, I use Mao's definition from *On Guerrilla Warfare*: "the essence of guerrilla warfare is...revolutionary in character." Guerrilla warfare finds its niche in warfare because it "derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and cooperation."⁵ In that sense, a counter to guerrilla warfare would be counter-revolutionary warfare. French counterinsurgency theorist David Galula contended against that definition because it assumed that counter-revolutionary warfare must react to guerrilla warfare, providing

⁴ Field Manual 3-24, 175, 185.

⁵ Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 43, 44.

more advantageous positions for the guerrillas.⁶ Throughout the thesis, I use insurgent, and guerrilla to describe groups like the Viet Cong, Taliban, al Qaeda, though they employed different guerrilla warfare tactics. The qualities and characteristics of guerrilla warfare is best explained by Mao: “it is a weapon that a nation inferior in arms and military equipment may employ against a more powerful aggressor nation.” This is how my thesis utilizes guerrilla warfare, not as a universal method, but as a flexible type of warfare during revolutionary conflicts.⁷

The second complex set of definitions applies to counterinsurgency practices. The doctrinal publications I use in this thesis all define counterinsurgency warfare the same: “counterinsurgency is military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic action taken by a government to defeat insurgency.”⁸ The difficulty with this definition is that it failed to impact how the U.S. military viewed the difference between conventional warfare approaches, which emphasize physical occupation, and destruction of enemy forces, from counterinsurgency warfare. The goal for counterinsurgency begins with the population, through its security and support. Without the support of the population, the counterinsurgent relinquishes the initiative to the insurgent. This method of warfare directly positions the battlefield in the hearts-and-minds, homes, and government of the people, rather than conventional warfare which places them along the periphery of the battlefield. Additionally, it puts a large target on their backs, making

⁶ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York, New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1964), xii.

⁷ Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 42.

⁸ Department of the Army, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Forces, Field Manual 31-22* (San Francisco, CA: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1963), 4; Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (Washington D.C., Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1963), 7; U.S. Army and Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5*, 2.

them vulnerable to both parties jockeying for control over their support. Like Weigley stated, the previous world wars conditioned the U.S. military to fight conventionally. Thus, counterinsurgency illustrated a less appealing picture to the U.S. military.

Counterinsurgency cannot be perceived in the same manner as conventional warfare, because the battlefield space is drastically different. Conventional warfare relies on physically occupying enemy territory, and destroying his capabilities of continuing hostilities. Counterinsurgency warfare depends on the population's support, and the counterinsurgent's ability to protect the population. Spatially, the battlefield is abstract, and less tangible compared to conventional warfare. The intangibility of counterinsurgency warfare can cripple a nation if it fails to acknowledge this, the U.S. in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan are good examples. These are the definitions I use throughout my thesis. The terms guerrilla and insurgent are synonymous, and I use them as so. A terrorist, in the context of chapters two and three, is a guerrilla that uses terror as a method of violence against the population to undermine counterinsurgent progress. Field Manual 3-24 designated terrorism as a tool that insurgents use against the counterinsurgent, but that failed to recognize that terror is also a form of guerrilla warfare, though Mao's implementation of guerrilla warfare argued differently. This form of guerrilla warfare followed Ernesto "Che" Guevara's guerrilla warfare theory.⁹

⁹ U.S. Army and Marine Corps, Counterinsurgency Field Manual *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5*, 8; For my thesis, insurgent and guerrilla are the two terms I use primarily. I do not use terrorist, because it denotes that terrorism is a separate entity from guerrilla warfare. Partisans, which I do not use, show support for a political cause, and sometimes take up arms against an invading military force. This term, in this manner is synonymous with guerrilla, insurgent, resistance fighter, and revolutionary fighter.

Guevara's guerrilla warfare stance differed quite drastically from Mao's. Guevara insisted on acting, rather than Mao's theory of waiting until advantageous situations presented themselves. In *Guerrilla Warfare*, Guevara noted the differences between his form of guerrilla warfare and Mao's. He contended that "popular forces" can defeat a superior army, and that it is unnecessary to "wait until all conditions...exist; the insurrection can create them." He continued by stating that these points contradict "the defeatist attitude of revolutionaries or pseudo-revolutionaries who remain inactive and take refuge in the pretext that against a professional army nothing can be done, who sit down to wait until in some mechanical way all necessary objectives are given without working to accelerate them." Guevara's guerrilla warfare fits the framework that the Taliban, and al Qaeda waged its type of warfare against the United States and coalition governments in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁰

Each chapter of my thesis assesses counterinsurgency theory and practice. The structure of each chapter follows three specific templates. Chapter one is structured by analyzing B-52 Arc Light strikes, artillery strikes, and napalm/tactical air strikes through 1st Cavalry, 4th Infantry, and 25th Infantry Division's operations. This exposed a quantifiable reliance on superior weaponry in Vietnam. Each search-and-destroy operation is examined by its purpose, usually noted in the beginning of after-action reports that were vital for this analysis. Chapters two and three are more complex than chapter one. Chapters two and three analyze the genesis of each counterinsurgency operation, but seek to expose the overreliance on conventional methods. Much like what

¹⁰ Ernesto Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 47, 48.

occurred in Vietnam, U.S. forces during pre-2007 operations emphasized using superior weaponry in two manners: deterrents, or interdicting the enemy. This analysis places Iraq ahead of Afghanistan, solely because the executives in Washington D.C. focused on Iraq over Afghanistan. Iraq also provided a better transitional period of counterinsurgency methodology than Afghanistan. This thesis merges these three conflicts together to explain how, and how well the United States military conducted counterinsurgency operations during the Cold War, and the period that followed.

Chapter one focuses on the military's fixation on traditional approaches to warfare. The chapter discusses how the military used its superior military as a coercive, deterrent against the North Vietnamese. I question whether this type of method was actual counterinsurgency warfare. If it did not conduct counterinsurgency, then what was the method the military opted for? What were the outcomes of that method for those soldiers, marines, and South Vietnamese forces on the ground? These questions are applied to chapters two and three. However, I add an important question seeking to find whether the American military learned from Vietnam. These questions frame chapters two and three within the context needed to discuss American counterinsurgency methods from the Cold War, into the Global War on Terror. These chapters provide a top-down analysis of how the American military conducted counterinsurgency warfare. However, it focuses on how top military officials failed to recognize the impact of their decisions through the experiences of ground troops.

Interviews conducted by the Library of Congress's Veterans History Project, and the Cantigny First Division Project III Oral Histories, at Ball State University provided the thrust of my analysis for both Chapters two and three. These interviews revealed that

warfare was extremely difficult when military leaders failed to understand battlefield realities. The heavily saturated historiography on the Vietnam War questioned the American way of war. Three works profoundly shaped my thesis. Andrew Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam* provided the best argument on the failure in Vietnam, because the American army focused too much on air mobility. H.R. McMaster's *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* trenchantly questioned the executive power that President Lyndon Johnson and Robert McNamara exerted to control the way the Vietnam War was waged. *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*, by Gian Gentile, attempted to quell the counterinsurgency narrative that a strong figurehead during counterinsurgency operations produced a winnable situation.

Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam* argued that the "Army concept" severely hindered success on the battlefield. The "Army concept," Krepinevich stated, was "a focus on mid-intensity, or conventional, war and a reliance on high volumes of firepower to minimize casualties- in effect, the substitution of material costs at every available opportunity to avoid payment in blood."¹¹ *The Army and Vietnam* argued that the framework that the U.S. military operated under in Vietnam was a superficial counterinsurgency strategy, and was mired by incessant reliance on the newly created air mobility. Krepinevich devoted a meager three pages to the employment of Arc Light strikes, artillery, and napalm. The first chapter takes Krepinevich's argument a step further, and describes the consequences of using these methods of conventional warfare

¹¹ Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 5.

in a counterinsurgency situation. Most publications on counterinsurgency fail to bring a critical analysis that provokes changes that differ from doctrinal, theoretical changes to counterinsurgency. Except for multiple Combined Arms Center, Army War College, etc. publications all pushed a biased agenda when discussing battlefield realities. My thesis seeks to fill the void that bias created, by offering a critique of historical, and current counterinsurgency practices without polemic analysis that drastically excoriates the military.¹²

H.R. McMaster's *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* delivered a cutting argument into Vietnam's failures. Like Krepinevich, H.R. McMaster maintained that the executives in Washington created insurmountable problems, but added that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were virtually invisible to Johnson, and his "oracle," Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.¹³ The Joint Chiefs took a backseat to the Wiz-kids, primarily McNamara and his advisors, who gave the president answers that he wanted to hear. Due to the unwavering method in Washington, the role of Joint Chiefs no longer meant military advising, but of capitulation to Johnson and McNamara's policies. Consequently, "graduated pressure" communicated to the enemy that would ultimately end hostilities, or "to alter his behavior."¹⁴ Operation Rolling Thunder attempted to coerce the North Vietnamese to the bargaining table under graduated pressure's influence. *Dereliction of Duty's* argument aids my thesis in developing the animosity between the executives in Washington and the Joint Chiefs. Additionally, my thesis uses McMaster as the

¹² Krepinevich used the same operations during Vietnam that I use in chapter one.

¹³ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York, New York: HarperPerennial, 1997), 61.

¹⁴ McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 62.

framework for analyzing the administrative deficiencies that beset the American military in Vietnam from a strategic standpoint.

Keeping pace with the concentration of higher decision makers, Gian Gentile tersely argued in *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* that “the idea of counterinsurgency works is wrong.” *Wrong Turn* analyzed four different counterinsurgency campaigns: the British in Malaya from 1948 to 1960, the U.S. in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Despite Gentile’s heated animosity towards counterinsurgency warfare’s influence over restructuring the American military into a nation building military, his argument warrants needed attention. The counterinsurgency narrative Gentile fervently opposed promoted a false sense of leadership. Gentile argued “the idea that COIN (counterinsurgency) works as long as the right general is in charge will not go away.” Gentile felt that the enlightened counterinsurgency experts generated a “cult of counterinsurgency,” that distorted the nature of soft force during warfare. Though Gentile’s argument leaves little room for any grey areas, he exposed the limitations of counterinsurgency. By protecting the population, which the surge in Iraq attempted to accomplish, counterinsurgency warfare tends to put a target on the backs of the population.¹⁵

Other secondary literature provided deeper analyses into the American military’s way of war. John Nagl’s *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* juxtaposed the American and British militaries during the Cold War. Nagl argued that the American military failed to promote a flexible, learning

¹⁵ Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New York, New York: The New Press, 2013), 3, 6, 8.

military organization in Vietnam like the British did in Malaya.¹⁶ Thomas Ricks asserted in *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2003 to 2005* that counterinsurgency principles in Iraq, most notably from David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Practice and Theory* were "almost unknown within the U.S. military."¹⁷ Ricks took the middle ground when he assessed the surge of 2007 in *The Gamble: General Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq*: "the surge was the right step to take, or more precisely, the least wrong move in a misconceived war."¹⁸ These books served as supplementary literature to the three main books above. However, they lack any concrete results from the theoretical mistakes of either strategic planning before conflict or during. The driving question that surfaced was: what did all this counterinsurgency knowledge, and subsequent creation of doctrine, materialize into on the battlefield? What did it mean for those soldiers and marines conducting these missions?

The historiography focuses on the theoretical aspects of counterinsurgency, apart from Krepinevich's two pages on battlefield outcomes in Vietnam. My thesis develops those battlefield realities farther through pre, and post-doctrinal changes. Weigley's "American Way of War" must extend into the twenty-first century, and include a proper analysis on the incessant reliance on superior weaponry during counterinsurgency campaigns. Subsequently, that analysis must be driven by assessing the consequences of using superior weaponry during counterinsurgency operations. My thesis adds to

¹⁶ John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 11.

¹⁷ Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2003 to 2005* (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 265.

¹⁸ Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 295

Weigley's argument from *The American Way of War*, and describes in detail where Krepinevich's *The Army in Vietnam* lacked. The American military failed to understand counterinsurgency in Vietnam, because of its reliance on air mobility, and its reliance on Arc Light, artillery, and napalm strikes. That same methodology carried over to Iraq and Afghanistan during the Global War on Terror. These two counterinsurgency wars changed after Petraeus' doctrinal reformation. New counterinsurgency doctrine fed off old counterinsurgency methods, but enabled the U.S. military to understand counterinsurgency better. Not completely, but better.

Barrack Obama's victory in the 2008 election marked a pivotal year for U.S. counterinsurgency. Instead of capitalizing on the successes of the surge, the Obama administration opted for troop drawbacks in Iraq. In Afghanistan, it applied a similar troop increase, but reverted back to employing precision munitions and drone strikes. The American public had an influential role in this shift. The home front lost its motivation to support the counterinsurgency wars by 2011. Even as the troop withdraw in Iraq approached in late-2011, the Global War on Terror lacked public support. The Obama administration proceeded into 2012 with its hands tied. Committing more ground troops in the same manner as the Iraq Surge was out of the question. The alternative was to implement drone warfare to hunt for al Qaeda and the Taliban. From a strategic perspective, drone warfare fails in the long term. Drone warfare's place in Afghanistan is vital to understanding how the American military was forced to implement similar tactics from Vietnam.

Chapter One

“The foot soldier has a special feeling for the ground. He walks on it, fights on it, the ground shelters him under fire; he digs his home in it. But mines and booby traps transform that friendly, familiar earth into a thing of menace, a thing to be feared as much as machine guns or mortar shells.” Philip Caputo’s words from *A Rumor of War* resonated among marine and army infantrymen during the Vietnam War. “It was not warfare. It was murder,” Caputo continued, “walking down the trails, waiting for those things to explode, we had begun to feel more like victims than soldiers. So we were ready for a battle, a traditional, set-piece battle against regular soldiers like ourselves.” Guerrilla war in Vietnam presented conditions that the American military struggled to manage, but they failed to create an effective counter that eliminated both enemy units and prohibited them from using the tactics that Caputo feared. The result was a strategy that maintained traditional, conventional tactics like those used during World War II. The Army and executives in Washington approached Vietnam with an artificial counterinsurgency strategy that stressed an overreliance on massive firepower and superior weaponry, which proved detrimental to battlefield success in counterinsurgency operations.¹⁹

Events in 1954 spun South Vietnam into a turbulent downward spiral. The United States took a much larger role in Vietnam after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the threat of communist expansion into Southeast Asia. Western influences provoked a further split in Vietnam socially, as well as politically. During the time of the split, the United States inserted Ngo Dinh Diem as South Vietnam’s president to bring Vietnam

¹⁹ Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York, New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1996), 288-299.

together under the aegis of American advisory groups. After two years of instability, Ho Chi Minh and the South Vietnamese government jockeyed for political viability. The Viet Cong, formerly the Viet Minh, and the irregular fighting cadre increased their fight against American involvement in hopes for a unified Vietnam, free of western influence.²⁰ The successful coup by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam generals, and assassination of Diem, pushed South Vietnamese to the edge. President Lyndon Johnson decided that more forceful action was necessary after the Gulf of Tonkin incident and after Viet Cong units attacked Pleiku air base in 1965, killing eight Americans and wounding over 100. Philip Caputo's experience explained the general strategy that executives in Washington and the military brass favored throughout the entirety of the Vietnam War.

American strategy in Vietnam focused on conventional aspects of warfare, rather than counterinsurgency methods. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara reflected on the United States strategy in Vietnam in his book *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*: "Our objective, our strategy," he wrote "is to convince the North Vietnamese that their Communist-inspired, directed, and supported guerilla action to overthrow the established government in the South cannot be achieved, and then to negotiate for the future peace and security of that country." Carl Von Clausewitz explained strategy as "the use of engagements for the object of the war." Thus, strategy is

²⁰ The terms used here hold significance for the United States military. Per the United States Army Field Manual 31-15, *Operations Against Irregular Forces* (1961), "the term irregular, used in combinations such as irregular forces, irregular activities, and counterirregular operations, is used in the broad sense to refer to all types of nonconventional forces and operations. It includes guerrilla, partisan, insurgent, subversive, resistance, terrorist, revolutionary, and similar personnel, organizations and methods;" Department of the Army, *Field Manual 31-15, Operations Against Irregular Forces* (Washington D.C. Headquarters, Department of the Army, May, 1961), <https://archive.org/details/FM31-151961>, 3.

primarily focused with the end goal of military operations. Tactics are the methods with which war is waged. What resulted from the strategy created by a pressured Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) and the executives in Washington was a plan that favored large scale bombing campaigns that imitated World War II operations and used military weaponry which the North Vietnamese did not possess. The tactics that they enforced took two shapes; through the air with a heavy bombing campaign and on the ground through search-and-destroy methods.²¹

The egregious relationship between Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff contributed to Vietnam's failures, as H.R. McMaster argued in *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam*. McMaster assertively argued that the Johnson/McNamara paralysis effect on the JCS created a system of "acquiescence and silent support for decisions already made." Those decisions severely hindered the Johnson administration from assembling any semblance of a flexible response to Vietnam. Furthermore, the administration's approach to Vietnam wanted to avoid a ground war at least before 1965, promoted gradual bombing campaigns to coerce the North Vietnamese to the bargaining table. This graduated pressure, McMaster correctly stated implemented military action in the form of disrupting North Vietnam's ability, and to "dissuade him from a particular activity." The situation in Vietnam looked grave from the time Johnson, and his administration failed to utilize the abilities the JCS offered them.²²

²¹ Robert McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York, New York: Time Books, 1995), 190; Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 128.

²² H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York, New York: HarperPerennial, 1997), 329, 326.

Strategic bombing in North Vietnam began with Operation Rolling Thunder in 1965. The coercive bombing campaign had two primary objectives: “the air war against the North was launched in the hope that it would strengthen GVN confidence and cohesion, and that it would deter or restrain the DRV from continuing its support of the revolutionary war in the South.” After the Viet Cong attack in 1965 at Pleiku located in I Corps Tactical Zone (I CTZ), Rolling Thunder turned into more of a reprisal campaign. When Viet Cong attacks occurred, the United States retaliated with pre-selected bombing of strategic facilities and key infrastructure locations in North Vietnam. Lines of communication (LOC) targets and petroleum, oil, and lubricant (POL) storage facilities were emphasized in Rolling Thunder strikes. However, the psychological effect that the Joint Chiefs hoped Rolling Thunder would have on North Vietnam did not coerce Hanoi to the negotiation table. Rolling Thunder instead increased instability in South Vietnam because of increased guerrilla attacks on government controlled territories.²³

Conventional strategies of eliminating the enemy through massive bombing and its ability to wage war by destroying strategic resources did not coordinate with the strategy that guerrilla fighters implemented. Guerrilla warfare in Vietnam followed Mao Tse-Tung’s three phase plan. Protracted war, or prolonged war, was what Mao explained as the abstract means to wage guerrilla war. Since the enemy in most cases has the technological advantage in weaponry, the guerrilla unit must take that element of the enemy’s arsenal out of the battlefield. Mao’s influence on the North Vietnamese strategy

²³ *The Pentagon Papers*, “Evolution of the War. Rolling Thunder Program Begins: January-June 1965,” Part IV (National Archives: Washington D.C.), <https://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-C-3.pdf> (Accessed 11, November 2015), i; James William Gibson, *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam* (Boston, Massachusetts: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 327.

provided a basis from which the Viet Cong acted as the first and second phase force and the regular army acted as the third phase: conventional force. What this meant for the American infantry units was that their enemy dictated what phase they were in based on advantages and what happened on the battlefield. American military executives glibly ignored this, even after President John F. Kennedy ardently supported the military's focus on counterinsurgency after reading Mao.²⁴

Early in the war, President Lyndon Johnson pledged American forces to an enclave strategy that held large areas and denied key areas to the Viet Cong. However, General William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, and the Joint Chiefs insisted that offensive minded operations that both denied the Viet Cong access to areas in all South Vietnam and destroyed the insurgents were the key to winning in Vietnam. Military historian Russell Weigley argued that “evidently the great world wars and the American military history that had preceded them had so conditioned American military thought that their influence could not be escaped however different the circumstances of new combats might be.” Retaining the strategy that worked during World War II created a losing situation in Vietnam with no room for flexibility on the military's part to counter the Viet Cong's guerrilla war.²⁵

²⁴ Mao Tse-Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare* Translated by Samuel B. Griffith (New York, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, *Publisher*, 1961), 20-22; Mao's plan began for the Vietnamese during the First Indochinese War, and carried over during the war against the United States. Phase I consisted of subversive insurgency that sought control over the population without direct violence. Phase II was the use of violence in organized coordination against the oppressive authority. Phase III was the coordinated assault of both the guerrilla army and the regular conventional army for overthrowing the government only when phases I and II effectively established advantageous situations for the guerrilla fighters.

²⁵ Russel Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973), 464-466, quote taken from 466.

Not only did the military brass and Joint Chiefs mismanage the nature of warfare in South Vietnam, but the military married itself to conventional methods. Through mismanagement and committing a conventional strategy, the military hierarchy included military doctrines that surreptitiously brought forward the way American forces should fight. These doctrines, accompanied by military guides, failed to incorporate three necessary components: flexibility, transparency, and an organizational willingness to change when problems arose. Acknowledging battlefield problems, creating a logical replacement of method, solicitation of that new method, and implementing that method never materialized for the United States military in Vietnam. Counterinsurgency took a secondary role in doctrine, and later took a secondary role on the battlefield. The army's appeasement of Kennedy's counterinsurgency emphasis in the early 1960s created doctrines that correctly defined the nature of guerrilla warfare and its methodology, but the Army failed to follow through in practice.

Military brass neglected to acknowledge guerrilla warfare on the battlefield, while military doctrine addressed it. Field Manual 31-15, *Counter guerrilla Operations* offered the best synopsis of irregular war. The manual elaborated:

“An irregular force is the outward manifestation of a resistance movement against the local government by some portion of the population of an area. Therefore, the growth and continuation of an irregular force is dependent on support furnished by the population even though the irregular force also receives support from an external power.”²⁶

The acknowledgement of the population's importance is encouraging for counterinsurgency success, as the people allow the guerrilla fighter's movement. Field

²⁶ Department of the Army, *Operations Against Irregular Forces* (1961), 3.

Manual 31-15, *Counter guerrilla Operations* (1963) contended that for the guerrilla force “it is on these individuals the movement depends for the majority of its support.” Of all the field manuals published before the Vietnam War, 31-15, 31-22 and 100-5 *Operations* (1962) all created analogous and, frankly, redundant responses to counterinsurgency’s growth. *Operations* served as a stepping stone to a broader, multifaceted approach to warfare during the Cold War. Field Manual 31-22, *Counterinsurgency* (1963) ambiguously defined counterinsurgency as “military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.” This multifaceted definition fit within the military’s misconception of the war in Vietnam. Doctrine that offered a counter to guerrilla warfare consistently emphasized the population’s importance, but was hardly used on the battlefield. Population centric operations remained in the background, despite doctrinal efforts to increase knowledge of guerrilla warfare.²⁷

Other manuals and guides served as supplementary works that provided more substantive analysis of counterinsurgency warfare. These manuals and guides correctly classified the objectives, terms, and importance of both guerrilla warfare and counterinsurgency. However, the army’s way of waging war in Vietnam did not resonate in these manuals and guides, and ultimately larger concepts of conventional operations and air mobility dwarfed the counterinsurgency methods laid out in these documents. The *Counterinsurgency Planning Guide*, created at Fort Bragg for the United States Army Special Warfare School emphasized a non-conventional approach. The guide stated “the

²⁷ Department of the Army, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Forces, Field Manual 31-22* (San Francisco, CA: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1963), 4; Department of the Army, *Counter guerrilla Operations* (Washington D.C., Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1963), 7; See Andrew J. Birtle *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976*, pgs. 195-196.

primary responsibility for conducting counterinsurgency operations must rest with the local government” because “insurgent warfare, by its nature, is an intimate affair normally fought between antagonists of similar ethnic backgrounds.” Responsibility for suppressing the insurgency was delegated to the local government, and the United States was in an advisory role and offered its military prowess, as a supplement to local forces. But, what separated the guide from the field manual is the overemphasis on population centered operations and the importance of the indigenous government and army to counter insurgent activity. This is due to the insurgent’s fluidity. They are reliant upon the people. Mao stated that there is a distinct relationship between the people and the troops. “The former,” Mao wrote, “may be likened to water the latter to the fish who inhabit it.”²⁸

By focusing on conventional methods, the United States military committed an egregious error that translated into failed counterinsurgency efforts on the battlefield. “Counterinsurgency operations,” the planning guide stated, “seek to create an environment of security and popular trust which will permit orderly progress toward achieving national and popular goals, and therefore, consists essentially of constructive efforts while conventional conflicts are essentially destructive in character.” The problem with these doctrines and guides was that they all necessitated a different philosophy that the army developed in 1965. Retired Lieutenant Colonel John A. Nagl, author of *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, correctly argued that, institutionally, the United States military failed to use

²⁸ United States Army, *Counterinsurgency Planning Guide*, Second Edition (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army Special Warfare School, 1964), viii; Mao Tse-Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 92-93.

lessons as a learning process in counterinsurgency. Nagl wrote that the United States military was “in fact organizationally disposed against learning how to fight and win counterinsurgency warfare.” The disposition in the minds of the military hierarchy created an inflexible military force that relied solely on its conventional firepower.²⁹

Adding to Nagl’s argument, as inflexible as the army was institutionally, its composition arrogantly trained and neglected counterinsurgency methods. Historian Andrew Krepinevich explained in *The Army and Vietnam* that “simply stated, the United States Army was neither trained nor organized to fight effectively in an insurgency conflict environment.” Poor counterinsurgency training and the Army’s organizational structure craved the conventional fight on the conditions of regular warfare. Krepinevich’s “Army Concept,” argued that the army “focused on mid-intensity, or conventional, war and a reliance on high volumes of firepower to minimize casualties.” That does not say that doctrine and manuals neglected counterinsurgency, although Krepinevich would argue against that. Many army doctrines acknowledged counterinsurgency as a type of warfare, however, only as a blemish in the overall conventional capabilities possessed by the United States. Those doctrines and manuals made insincere strides in pleasing the counterinsurgency trend running through Western nations during the Cold War.³⁰

Doctrine aside, American firepower brought a sense of invincibility and security to many infantrymen. James McDonough from the 173rd Brigade operated in Binh Dinh

²⁹ United States Army, *Counterinsurgency Planning Guide*, 21; John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 11.

³⁰ Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 4; 5.

province, north of Saigon. Reflecting on commanding his platoon in Viet Cong-dominated territory, McDonough recalled that after helicopter gunships made attack runs on Viet Cong positions:

“The overwhelming advantage of firepower and mobility available to U.S. forces in Vietnam was impressive. We could concentrate power on any enemy who chose to stay and fight it out. If an American could survive the first minutes of fighting, normally it could survive the battle. Consequently, the enemy attacking us was forced to face an unpleasant but simple decision: stay and die, or break contact.”

Stay and die, or break contact. McDonough’s reference to the consequences the Viet Cong faced when meeting the Americans is revealing. Viet Cong units did not rely on their military prowess, though some units did maneuver better than their American counterparts. The Viet Cong relied primarily on its mobility. Mao’s guerrilla warfare emphasis on mobility made the Viet Cong deadly for these infantrymen in the bush. McDonough’s platoon met up with armored relief in pursuit of the fleeing enemy and wrote: “the rifle squad and I felt invincible. Something about all that steel made us feel secure.”³¹

In army after action reports from Vietnam, the 1st Cavalry Division, and 4th and 25th Infantry Divisions engaged the Viet Cong in instances that showed not only how the Viet Cong fought, but how the United States used superior firepower through air, artillery, and napalm strikes to kill and deter the guerrillas. The 1st Cavalry and 25th Infantry Divisions operated in II and III CTZs and were integral during the Pleiku Campaign of 1965. The 4th Infantry Division also operated in II CTZ and incorporated the same type of tactics to eliminate Viet Cong in the crucial central highlands of South

³¹ James R. McDonough, *Platoon Leader* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1985), both quotes taken from pg. 88.

Vietnam. The concluding reports almost always quantified success by the number of dead Viet Cong, whether distinguishable or not. What remained after these operations into the jungle in search of the Viet Cong was an inadequate method of killing communist guerrilla forces. This trend continued after Westmoreland was promoted and General Creighton Abrams assumed command in 1968.

The 4th Infantry's operations along the Cambodian border in the central highlands of South Vietnam provided a glimpse of how massive firepower produced inadequate counterinsurgency results. Operation Paul Revere IV hunted Viet Cong forces in 1966 through search-and-destroy missions. The after-action report classified the concept of operation: "involved crossing the Se San River to exploit B-52 bomber strikes and to gain contact with the enemy," followed by committing units to intercept withdrawing forces. Arc Light strikes³² failed to supplement counterinsurgency missions because in many cases the Viet Cong heard the aircraft and left before infantry units air assaulted the area. During the early stages of Paul Revere, the report explained that up to sixteen B-52 strikes occurred in Viet Cong areas. However, the report continued, "the effectiveness of the strikes can best be judged by the fact that after the strikes the 4th Infantry Division units moved into the area with little or no resistance." The Army's logic assumed that since communist forces were not in the area after air strikes or search-and-destroy sweeps, then the countryside was pacified. The report also claimed during one assessment

³² Arc Light strikes first developed during Vietnam, which deployed the B-52 Stratofortress as close air support bombers. These strikes provided ground forces with the immense firepower capabilities of the B-52. Load capacities as the Vietnam War progressed increased. For the B-52F, the first to fly in Vietnam, the armament capacity totaled 51 bombs. By 1966, the replacement for the B-52F, the B-52D's capacity drastically increased to space for over 100 500-pound bombs, stored both internally and externally. See Robert Kipp's "Counterinsurgency From 30,000 Feet: The B-52 in Vietnam," *Air University Review*, January-February 1968, <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1968/jan-feb/kipp.html>, (Accessed February 26, 2017).

that “although not definitely established, these enemy dead were probably the result of one or more of the B-52 strikes.” The report concluded in its “Air Support” section that “no positive evidence of the success of these strikes was apparent after ground units entered the area; however, there were indications that enemy personnel had previously been in the strike area.”³³

Superior firepower and force mobility took precedence during the 25th Infantry Division’s search-and-destroy operations during mid-1970 in Cu Chi province, bordering the northwest corner of Saigon. The Army’s feigning reference to search-and-destroy missions as counterinsurgency warfare operations buttressed the conventional mindset. For example, during this mission, reconnaissance duties were delegated to Company F of the 75th Infantry. The information gathered by Company F, as noted in the after-action report, “will permit the application of superior fire power and mobility against VC/NVA forces.” The philosophy of the Army persisted as the war dragged on well into Creighton Abrams’ command, and showed no signs of changing. Whenever guerrillas and North Vietnamese regulars met U.S. firepower, they either retreated to their sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos or avoided contact altogether. United States forces played a cat and mouse game in the jungle. This method benefited the Viet Cong because if United States forces were out searching for them it made the villages easier to access.³⁴

³³ U.S. Department of the Army, *Operation Paul Revere IV: Combat After Action Report, 28, January 1967*, Headquarters 4th Infantry Division (San Francisco, CA: 1967), U.S. National Archives, College Park, Maryland, Research Group 472 (hereafter NA RG 472), U.S. Forces in Southeast Asia, 1950-1975, Container 22, 35, 14, 14.

³⁴ U.S. Department of the Army, *Operations Report-Lessons Learned, 25th Infantry Division, Period Ending 31 July, 1970*, “Combat Operations Ranger Company, 28, June 1970,” Headquarters 25th Infantry Division (San Francisco, CA: 1970), George C. Marshall Foundation, Lexington, Virginia, 25th Infantry Division Collection, Operational Reports, Department of the Army (OR)/Combat After Action Reports, Department of the Army (CAAR), Box 14, 123.

The Army Concept that Andrew Krepinevich used in *The Army and Vietnam* held true for the 4th Infantry Division, which aided the 1st Cavalry Division during Paul Revere. The 25th Infantry used eleven B-52 strikes during Operation Attleborro between November 11 and 23, 1966. Attleborro was a designed search-and-destroy mission in the Tay Ninh province, located north of Saigon. A total of 1029 sorties were flown and over 70,000 high explosive artillery rounds fired. However, the total number of body count deaths because of “tactical airstrikes” hit a mediocre four, with 115 “possibly killed during action.” The inconsistent airstrike numbers are dwarfed by the artillery numbers. When artillery was used during Attleborro seventy were killed and confirmed by body count, and 132 were possibly killed. Counting enemy dead bodies was the Army’s way of determining success. McNamara’s “neophyte political scientist” policy of Planning, Programming, and Budget System (PPBS) supplied and set the foundational principles of how Vietnam was waged through “systems analysis” and body counts fit within the parameters of managing the war.³⁵

To make matters worse, the Army and Air Force’s method of determining success of Arc Light strikes drastically inflated and distorted battlefield realities. The report cited killing 650 Viet Cong, but later it revealed that those numbers were inflated. On December 19, 1967, significant contact occurred for United States and ARVN forces.

³⁵ Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York, New York: Presidio Press, 1995), 44; Krepinevich’s Army Concept, explained in-depth in the introduction, was the unwavering use of superior weaponry and firepower while also eliminating troop casualties. It speaks to the managerial outlook developed in McNamara’s PPBS during the early stages of the war; U.S. Department of the Army, *Combat Operations After Action Report*, Headquarters 25th Infantry Division, “Operation Attleborro,” George C. Marshall Foundation, Operational Reports, Department of the Army (OR)/Combat After Action Reports, Department of the Army (CAAR), Box 11, 2, 4; PPBS was implemented to ensure that the American military was in the best possible situation in Vietnam. McNamara’s policy, as Harry Summers claimed, supplied the army well but ultimately failed due to the strategic pitfalls that a management focused strategy created during Vietnam.

After constant tactical airstrikes and artillery barrages, the report claimed that “a true assessment was impossible but many casualties were undoubtedly inflicted.” Throughout many of these after-action reports, constant gloating and boasting revealed exaggerated body counts. The 4th Infantry’s role in Operation MacArthur exemplified both the overestimated body counts and the reliance on Arc Light strikes. The operation lasted slightly longer than a year and produced a staggering number of NVA/VC forces killed at 8,137 from January 1968 to January 1969. Consequently, during the middle of December 1968 a bomb damage assessment (BDA) mission was conducted by two companies to determine if two Arc Light strikes from the previous day produced any successful effects. Two days later they were extracted reporting “no substantial findings or contacts.” On 5 January, 1969, another damage assessment mission reported that from four B-52 strikes it concluded that after five days of patrolling but found only two enemy bodies.³⁶

BDA missions accomplished what the military wanted to find on the battlefield, dead bodies. The continual use of body counts as a measurable mechanism impacted several important factors in Vietnam. First, as Douglass Kinnard revealed in *The War Managers*, the Measurement of Progress Report constructed a system of effectiveness, unit competition, and promoted careerism in the Army.³⁷ Consequently, competitive effectiveness between units, combined with careerism, distorted body counts in favor of the U.S. This method extended beyond the field, and infected the Joint Chiefs, the Central Intelligence Agency, as well as the executive administration from having an objective

³⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, *Combat After Action Report*, “Operation Binh Tay MacArthur,” Headquarters 4th Infantry Division, (San Francisco, CA: 1967), NA RG 472, After Action Reports: 1966-07/31/1970, Container 27, 45, 30-31, 34

³⁷ Douglass Kinnard, *The War Managers* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2014), 73-75; Careerism generated officers, that Kinnard argued, focused less on asking critical questions, and more on following orders.

view of Vietnam. Sam Adams' memoir, *War of Numbers*, exposed this mentality, and egregious method of excluding important information. Adams worked as a CIA analyst in the Southeast Asian Branch, and discovered that the Order of Battle (OB) drastically undercut the number of communist forces in Vietnam by *half*, to a total of 240,000 countrywide. Body counts failed to account for enemies vaporized from Arc Light strikes, and bodies extracted from the battlefield. This method relied on the American way of war, but failed to accommodate for the nature of measuring battlefield successes during counterinsurgency operations.³⁸

The 1st Cavalry's part in Paul Revere presents the largest amount of superior firepower used with hardly any results. Elements of the 1st Cavalry Division searched the vicinity of fifteen B-52 Arc Light strikes that targeted a large concentration of enemy bunkers and foxholes in early November. From these fifteen B-52s, 540,000 pounds of ordinance were dropped on the position. However, when the bomb damage assessment mission saw the results, only "one VC body" was found along a trail. During other search-and-destroy operations the same methods produced similar outcomes.³⁹ A perfect example are the results from the 1st and 2nd Brigades of the 25th Infantry's search-and-destroy mission titled Operation Wahiwawa during mid-1966. 101 air strikes were used in coordination with the two brigades to take out VC supply lines. With only "10 VC KBA (BC), and "29 KBA (poss.)," along with many buildings, the after-action report

³⁸ Sam Adams, *War of Numbers: An Intelligence Memoir* (South Royalton, Vermont: Steerforth Press, 1994), 214-217; My thesis does not seek to provide an alternative method for measuring success in Vietnam. The intention here is to uncover the blatant misuse of American assets on the battlefield to translate into successes on the battlefield.

³⁹ U.S. Department of the Army, *Combat Operations After Action Report*, "Operation Paul Revere IV," 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), (San Francisco, CA: 1967), NA RG 472, After Action Reports: 1965-1971, Container 21, 13, 10, 31.

triumphantly explained that it destroyed 7,100 pounds of rice. Destroying supplies meant that the enemy was limited in its ability to fight. Arc Light strikes used along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and in sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia resulted in the same outcome. Strikes along the trail were intended to cripple the Viet Cong supply chain but hardly produced effective results.⁴⁰

Logistically, North Vietnam supplied its forces in South Vietnam quite easily despite B-52 strikes pummeling the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The web of trails ran from North Vietnam, into Laos, then cut into Cambodia with distributary pathways that infiltrated into South Vietnam. “During peak periods in the late 1960s,” wrote historian George C. Herring, “North Vietnam could move an estimated 400 tons of supplies per week and as many as 5,000 soldiers a month into South Vietnamese battle zones.” Bombing the trail was incorporated during Operation Rolling Thunder. Each time the United States Navy and Air Force bombed the trail with B-52s the damage was immense. However, the results did not effectively prevent North Vietnamese supplies from coursing down the trail. Beginning in 1966, MACV’s Studies and Observations Group (SOG) ran operations into Laos and Cambodia to assess bomb damage. United States Special Forces operators and trained South Vietnamese soldiers conducted these missions, but if captured these men had no affiliation with either country.⁴¹

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of the Army, *Combat Operations After Action Report*, “Operation Wahiawa,” George C. Marshall Foundation, 25th Infantry Division, Operational Reports, Department of the Army (OR)/Combat After Action Reports, Department of the Army (CAAR), Box 11, 3.

⁴¹ George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, fourth edition (New York, New York: McGraw Hill, 2002), 184; During 1970 President Richard Nixon authorized the invasion of Cambodia up to eighteen miles by US and ARVN forces. Bombing never ceased along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

SOG operator, Major John Plaster (ret.), described these Arc Light strikes as an “unforgettable experience, a withering spectacle almost too complex to visualize.” Plaster explained in his book *SOG: The Secret Wars of America’s Commandos in Vietnam* about these BDA missions. Plaster explained that:

Each Arc Light involved an entire formation of the swept-wing bombers, anywhere from three to twenty-four aircraft- up to 2616 busting bombs- a man-made maelstrom consuming as much as 2 miles by 6 miles, with the bombs bursting close enough to overlap each other, a rippling carpet of concussion, geysers and falling greenery that resembled the path of a tiller upturning a swath of thick grass.⁴²

The SOG operators, and the military hierarchy, thought that these strikes would cripple the archaic method of logistical supply along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. “Unless the bombs caught the NVA aboveground,” Plaster countered, “this was not the case.” Thus, some strikes did not find targets. Others did connect with roadways and pathways along the trail, but North Vietnamese engineers worked diligently to repair the trail. The engineers worked at such a rapid pace that, as noted by Plaster, “the Air Force sometimes found it hard to believe SOG reports of renewed use” in areas previously hit. Its effectiveness was limited, and the use of bombing along the Ho Chi Minh Trail met staunch criticism.⁴³

In April of 1965, Director of the CIA, John McCone reported that “the strikes to date have not caused a change in the North Vietnamese policy of directing Viet Cong insurgency, infiltrating cadres and supplying material. If anything, the strikes to date have hardened their attitude.” The strikes continued even after SOG and McCone’s reports claimed their ineffectualness. McNamara received a report titled “Proposal for an Anti-

⁴² John L. Plaster, *SOG: The Secret Wars of America’s Commandos in Vietnam* (New York, New York: Nal Caliber, 1997), 31.

⁴³ Plaster, *SOG: The Secret Wars of America’s Commandos in Vietnam*, 30, 31, 33.

Infiltration Barrier.” The report’s “Present Military Situation in North Vietnam” section assessed the overall success of the bombing campaign against the will of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong:

- (1) Bombing may or may not- by destruction or delay- have resulted in net reduction in the flow of men or supplies to the forces in the South; (2) Bombing has failed to reduce the limit on the capacity the DRV[Democratic Republic of Vietnam, or North Vietnam] to aid the VC to a point below VC needs; (3) Future bombing of North Vietnam cannot be expected physically to limit the military support given the VC by the DRV to a point below VC needs.⁴⁴

Despite the proposal’s efforts to persuade the technophiles in the military and Washington, the bombings continued in the North Vietnamese sanctuaries of Cambodia and Laos. If ground units in heavy contact did not have air strikes readily available, they used supporting fire through artillery.⁴⁵

“The battery expects to fire its 600,000th round very soon,” GI Reporter Conrad Leighton wrote after he interviewed Bravo Battery Captain Randall Grigsby in 1970. Grigsby commented during the interview that, “we fired 1200 rounds in three days” in support of 2nd Battalion 7th Cavalry. Artillery was the second way the United States used superior firepower. Artillery was used by these three divisions and the rest of the United States military in three different ways: preparation strikes, support for troops in contact, and striking Viet Cong bunker and exfiltration routes. Philip Caputo of the 9th Marine Expeditionary Force recounted the ineffectiveness of excessive artillery use: “Amazingly, there were only four of them. *Four*[sic]. We had fought for an hour and a half, expended hundreds of rounds of small-arms ammunition, twenty mortar shells, and

⁴⁴ George C. Herring, *The Pentagon Papers*, Abridged Edition, “Proposal for an Anti-Infiltration Barrier,” (New York, New York: McGraw Hill, 1993), 141.

⁴⁵ George C. Herring, *The Pentagon Papers*, “CIA Assessment of Air War,” 119.

a full concentration of 155s to kill four men.” Army divisions fell prey to the same problems. The 1st Cavalry and 4th Infantry used artillery during Operation Paul Revere and reported inconclusive results. The 4th Infantry After Action Report implausibly concluded that “there is no doubt as to the success of the H&I (Harassment and Interdiction) programs, particularly along the Cambodian border...in destroying and demoralizing the enemy throughout the area of operations.”⁴⁶

Operations Paul Revere, and MacArthur exposed the ineffectiveness the 4th Infantry’s use of artillery in a defensive posture or for enemy destruction and harass and interdiction strikes. Not only did these missions fail to block and deter the enemy from sanctuary into and out of Cambodia, but the central highlands, which consisted of Kontum and Pleiku provinces remained the heaviest Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army controlled territories. Between November 12 and 18, 1966, elements took constant attacks from two North Vietnamese divisions. During these engagements, “all available artillery...was used,” and a total of seventy-three tubes of artillery used between 105mm, 155mm, 8 inch guns, and 175mm guns. The failure resulted in over twenty friendlies killed. C Company found itself utilizing artillery and air strikes during the Tet Offensive of 1968 on February 8. After suffering heavy contact, the company called in strikes on enemy bunkers and covered positions, which failed to relieve pressure on C Company. On February 21, 1968, A Company of 1/12 made contact with enemy forces estimated at company strength. Artillery and air strikes ordered on enemy positions proved futile to

⁴⁶ Conrad M. Leighton, *War Stories: A GI Reporter in Vietnam, 1970-1971* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2016), 55; 4th Cavalry Division, Operation Paul Revere IV, 74; Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York, New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1977), 126.

help A Company, and “was unable to seize the objective,” and a sweep later revealed only five North Vietnamese killed.⁴⁷

1st Cavalry artillery strikes experienced the same type of shortcomings during operations Crazy Horse, and Pershing. During Crazy Horse on May 28, 1966, as per the usual for search and destroy operations when 1st Cavalry elements air assaulted into the area of operations, while an artillery prep fired beforehand from 12:55 to 1:05. The search and destroy mission conducted by 2/8 Cav after this prep contributed nothing in terms of intelligence other than the enemy fled the area. During Operation Pershing, between December 9 and 11, multiple United States and ARVN forces utilized artillery strikes before landing and engaging with the enemy. But, just as on May 28 during Crazy Horse, sweep operations after these heavy artillery strikes turned up nothing significant. Despite the “intensive artillery preparation,” the lack of enemy turnout in these instances revealed the North Vietnamese regulars and Viet Cong fled the fight. Artillery also failed to prohibit passage between the central highlands of South Vietnam into Cambodia. The lack of enemy in areas of search and destroy operations revealed that the enemy left that area to avoid contact with 1st Cavalry units. Lack of enemy contact did not lead to the conclusion that the area was pacified or impregnable to future communist infiltration, but it also meant the North Vietnamese wanted a fight on their terms.⁴⁸

In Operation Wahiawa, the 25th Infantry experienced similar situations and responded in a similar fashion. Three batteries, which consisted of two 105mm howitzers,

⁴⁷ 4th Infantry Division, Operation Paul Revere IV, 13-14, 19; 4th Infantry Division, Operation MacArthur, 17, Chapter Two labeled “Tet Offensive,” 17.

⁴⁸ 1st Cavalry Division, Operation Crazy Horse, NA RG 472, Container 21, 7-8; 1st Cavalry Division, *Combat Operations After Action Report*, Operation Pershing, NA RG 472, Container 2, 6-7.

a 155mm howitzer and one eight-inch gun, fired over 27,000 rounds in support of ground troops. Units from 2nd Battalion 27th Infantry made heavy contact on May 19, 1966, where the enemy made it difficult for companies A and C to make any advance. On two separate occasions “a heavy volume of artillery fire” and “heavy artillery fire” sought to help suppress enemy advancements. Five days later, the same type of maneuvering occurred. 1st Battalion 27th Regiment called artillery strikes on enemy position “resulting in five (5) NVA KIA (poss[*sic*]).” Strikes on Viet Cong locations hardly resulted in actual figures that provided facts for further operations because of the exaggerated numbers given in the report, most of which were not confirmed. Estimations led to inflated numbers, which fueled the use of voluminous artillery strikes for future operations. The Army’s steadfast artillery use reinforced superior firepower and contributed to the inflexibility of ground units that conducted offensive assaults.⁴⁹

Enemy units exploited Vietnam’s geography and heavy vegetation and forced the Army to use its third method of superior firepower, napalm. The United States gladly capitulated. Tactical air strikes and napalm helped break contact with the enemy and in the Army’s mind, saved American lives. Conrad Leighton recalled napalm strikes while embedded with the 2nd Battalion 7th Infantry: “It was serious business but pure poetry in motion. The enemy on the ground couldn’t have been more remote. This certainly wasn’t the more personal face-to-face war of the infantry.” The 1st Cavalry Division used napalm in direct support for the first time on November 17, 1965. When the after-action report explained the enemy situation, it asserted that “only a handful of the original force remained organized in a combat posture,” because of “the sheer weight of US artillery,

⁴⁹ 25th Infantry Division, Operation Wahiwawa, 2-3

aerial rocket, and tactical air strikes.” In almost an exact replication of with B-52 strikes, the reliance of napalm and tactical air strikes failed to coerce the communist forces to surrender. Philip Caputo’s marine unit assaulted a heavily contested Viet Cong area on January of 1966 during Operation Long Lance. After encountering heavy resistance, artillery and air strikes were called on enemy locations. Caputo remembered the enemy halting their attack and encountered limited enemy resistance as the operation proceeded. The air strikes aided the marine units in contact, but failed in two areas: it destroyed the countryside and allowed the enemy to disengage and fight another day.⁵⁰

During Operation Pershing, napalm was used by 1st Cavalry units to “destroy enemy personnel” and “proved very effective.” That effectiveness was deemed successful when high drag bombs were used to destroy bunkers, while the napalm runs finished off the fleeing forces. The 1st Cavalry Division utilized 260 fighter sorties during Operation Crazy Horse, which included napalm aircraft. During the operation, the after-action report proclaimed that pursuing Viet Cong forces “should be done with caution and with sufficient firepower.” The 1st Cavalry Division is most known for its operations throughout Pleiku in late 1965. The history of those search-and-destroy missions produced the popular movie “We Were Soldiers” that was based on Colonel Harold Moore’s book *We Were Soldiers Once...And Young*. Napalm was used during Landing Zone Albany’s hard fought battle against Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regular units. American units were surrounded, in a similar manner as Operation Crazy Horse and others that followed, tactical airstrikes, which included napalm and heavy ordinance

⁵⁰ Leighton, *War Stories*, 27; U.S. Department of the Army, *Combat Operations After Action Report*, Headquarters 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), “Operation Long Reach, Pleiku Campaign” (San Francisco, CA: 1966), NA RG 472, Container 21, 93-94; Caputo, *A Rumor of War*, 297-299.

bombing runs to soften enemy forces in fortified positions. Other Army divisions operating in South Vietnam used the same offensive superiority approach.⁵¹

Operation Shenandoah II was conducted by the 25th Infantry to control the route along Highway 13 that runs north and south into Saigon. This operation from September 1967 to early 1968 incorporated the use of prepping strikes before units were committed to the area of operation. “All landing zones scheduled for air assault by infantry battalions were elaborately ‘prepped’ with bombs, napalm, and CBU. The fact that no ships were lost or casualties sustained,” the report boastfully claimed “during these aerial assaults testifies to the effectiveness of the tactical air and the soundness of the practice.” The practice it is referencing is the dogmatic Army hell bent on fighting through air mobility and weapon superiority. On October 11, elements of 1st Brigade were attacked by the Viet Cong. The immediate response the after-action report noted nine sorties that resulted in a body count of twelve Viet Cong. On October 13, tactical airstrikes were called as troops continuously broke and reengaged with the enemy but progress was never made. When final contact was broken, American units went back to their fire support base and left the area unopposed for the enemy. The use of airstrikes from October 11 to October 13 contradict what the report initially claimed the effectiveness of these strikes.⁵²

⁵¹ 1st Cavalry Division, Operation Pershing, 15, 19; Operation Crazy Horse, 3, 11; Colonel Harold Moore (Retired), and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once...And Young* (New York, New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 28-285; The F4C Phantom, F105 Thunderchief, and F100 Super Sabre aircraft dropped napalm in South Vietnam. However, the A1 Skyraider is perhaps the most widely known for its slower air speed maneuverability and thus better equipped for napalm runs. These aircraft and napalm are found in many after action reports from the 1st Cavalry, 4th Infantry, and 25th Infantry Division.

⁵² U.S. Department of the Army, *Combat Operations After Action Report*, “Operation Shenandoah II,” Headquarters 25th Infantry Division (San Francisco, CA: 1967), George C. Marshall Foundation, 25th Infantry Division, Operational Reports, Department of the Army (OR)/Combat After Action Reports, Department of the Army (CAAR), Box 13, 4, 12, 14.

During Operation Attleborro in late-1966, 1029 sorties flown for the 25th Infantry consisted of fighter bombers, and heavy bombers. Tactical airstrikes included a large group of fighters and an even larger group of bombs. High drag bombs, napalm, and bunker busters buttressed the continuation of the army method in Vietnam. Most of the references to napalm strikes are either condensed into tactical airstrikes, or explicitly stated. Other ways that napalm can be found in the after-action reports is by examining the aircraft used during tactical air strikes. 4th Infantry Division Lieutenant Frederick Downs recalled in his book *The Killing Zone: A True Story* where a jet outfitted with napalm canisters was ordered to drop its bombs on a sniper location that harassed his base. This jet, as Downs wrote, “needed a target to get rid of his unexpended bomb load.” Increased collateral damage in heavily vegetated areas of South Vietnam and instances like Downs’ where napalm was loosely thrown hindered the military’s success in Vietnam.⁵³

Napalm burns everything it touches. The 25th Infantry used tactical bombing to clear an area around a bridge which “was able to not only bomb bunkers and trenches near the crossing, but also to burn heavy elephant grass and bamboo at the approach of the site.” Burning large areas of vegetation in a predominantly agrarian based society further limited pacification efforts tailored to gaining an edge against the guerrilla forces. Alienating the population that relied on the land to live is not proper counterinsurgency. Lam Son 719 is notoriously known for the dropping of 20,000 pounds of bombs and napalm, in addition to 32,000 pounds from Arc Light strikes, as South Vietnamese forces

⁵³ 4th Infantry Division, Operation Paul Revere IV, 13; 25th Infantry Division, Operation Shenandoah II, 2; 25th Infantry Division, Operation Attleborro, 2-3.

aided by the United States Air Force lethargically invaded Laos in 1971 to cut off the Ho Chi Minh Trail. As destructive as napalm and massive firepower was, the collateral damage hindered counterinsurgency success in an agrarian society. “Napalm Sunday” is a perfect example of how the United States military failed to understand cultural and societal norms of the Vietnamese people. In 1968, fourteen C-130 aircraft dumped jet fuel and diesel oil in a heavily vegetated area which was ignited, destroying the entire area. The Army’s heavy handed philosophy permeated throughout its operations in South Vietnam, and closed itself off from any alternatives to fighting against the communist forces. The detriments of maximum firepower approach are twofold: it failed to accomplish the counterinsurgency strategy, and did not allow for organizational flexibility.⁵⁴

In addition to napalm, defoliants attempted to clear Vietnam’s heavy vegetation that prevented American mobility. The U.S. military used chemical agents like CS gas, Agent Orange, and other herbicides as deterrents, but were used outside of combat. The 4th Infantry’s part in Operation Dan Quyen-Hines in early 1970 employed these chemical agents “for control of vegetation and crop destruction.” Denying crops from the enemy attributed to the Army’s attempt at constricting Viet Cong supplies, and ultimately their capitulation. However, the use of chemical agents isolated the population away from the U.S. It failed to recognize that the areas of operation were primarily located in the

⁵⁴ Department of the Army, *Combat Operations After Action Report*, “Operation Gadsden,” Headquarters 25th Infantry Division, (San Francisco, CA: 1967), George C. Marshall Foundation, 25th Infantry Division, Operational Reports, Department of the Army (OR)/Combat After Action Reports, Department of the Army (CAAR), Box 12, 34; Lam Son 719 was a part of the larger Vietnamization policy implemented by President Richard Nixon to slowly turn over military responsibilities from the United States to the South Vietnamese military; Bernard C. Nalty, *Air War over South Vietnam* (Washington D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2000), 272, 66-67.

countryside where the population lived a self-sustaining lifestyle. Using agents to destroy crops denied the enemy from feeding its troops, but it also prevented the population of its way of life, and destroyed any hopes of counterinsurgency success in those areas.

Chemical agents contributed to the problematic methodology, though employed differently from the Arc Light strikes, artillery, and napalm. The consequences were analogous though, it buttressed the Army's method of fighting in Vietnam, and pushed the Vietnamese population away from the U.S. cause.⁵⁵

The Army's counterinsurgency methodology encapsulated a force of superior firepower and the attempt to achieve tactical advantages on the battlefield. However, the United States Army was not the only military force deployed to Vietnam. The Marines were deployed first, though in a defensive role to protect air bases in March 1965. Their role hardly shifted as the Army hierarchy relegated the Marines to security jobs of air and army bases concentrated in I CTZ while the real offensive war was fought by the Army. One fundamental difference that Marine units incorporated was the population focus during counterinsurgency missions. One key element that reflected positively on counterinsurgency effectiveness and success from a pacification standpoint was the Combined Action Program (CAP). CAP emphasized U.S. marines that aided a Vietnamese unit which not only lived among the population but protected it. CAP committed a defensive approach rather than an offensive one, and relied more on village security for its success measurement than body counts. A stark contrast to the Army offensive search-and-destroy missions, CAP stressed the use of ARVN units, termed

⁵⁵ Department of the Army, *Operational Report- Lessons Learned 4th Infantry Division, Period Ending 20 April, 1970*, Headquarters 4th Infantry Division, (San Francisco, CA: 1970), NA RG 472, Operations Reports, Lessons Learned: 08/01/1966-10/31/1967, 31 October 1969 THRU 31 January, 1970, Input 4 of 4, Container 47, 24.

Popular Forces (PF) that worked to establish proper pacification methods to deny the village to the Viet Cong.

These platoon sized units consisted of fourteen Marines and a Navy corpsman attached to a Popular Force platoon. “Marine members of the CAP’s,” explained a Combined Action Program Report covering from 1965 to 1967, “live in the same tent, eat the same food, and conduct the same patrols and ambushes as their Vietnamese counterparts.” CAP stayed in villages rather than swept through, like the Army. What made these platoons effective was the concentration of progress through a defensive posture against the Viet Cong. The premise of the Combined Action Platoons was to start from a concentrated point, the village, and expand from there to other villages. An approach reminiscent of the British in Malaya from 1948-1960. The inkblot method as it was formally known, incorporated security units that encouraged counterinsurgency progress, rather than offensive minded operations that mired progress. Sir Robert Thompson, a counterinsurgency expert during the Malayan Emergency supported and endorsed the use of such a method to United States military as an advisor during the escalation in the early 1960s in Vietnam.⁵⁶

Security is of the utmost importance for pacification’s effectiveness. In order to pacify, the counterinsurgent must understand the population. The British success in Malaya was due to the formation of the Briggs Plan in 1950. Under the Briggs Plan,

⁵⁶ United States Marine Corps, *Combined Action Program, Vietnam*, Headquarters Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (San Francisco, CA: date note specified), Research Group 127 (Hereafter NA RG 127), Box 146, Records of Units and Other Commands, 1953-1993, U.S. National Archives, College Park, Maryland: National Archives, page number not specified; The British experience in Malaya and the United States experience in Vietnam were drastically different because of geographical, political, and strategic factors. Malaya was geographically isolated from sanctuary areas, the communist population did not hold the population’s majority, and the British incorporated large-scale sweeps that were successful because of the previous two factors.

police and military forces were integrated within the Malayan population to gather proper intelligence on the people, the terrain, and to hunt down the insurgents in the area. British units were interwoven with Malayan forces. Despite using larger unit sweeps, the British effectively cut off the Chinese communist minorities and forced them away from concentrated population centers. This allowed the British to establish effective police and security measures to combat against insurgents. The inkblot strategy is static defense, followed by security methods to expand that defensive area, while simultaneously increasing the effectiveness and capabilities of indigenous police and military units. CAP's success was determined by its ability to work with the population, through the village chiefs, and provide security from the Viet Cong. On November 15, 1968, a village chief offered intelligence on approximately fifty Viet Cong in the area. The 3rd Combined Action Platoon engaged in a security sweep with the permission of the chief. Though the platoon called in artillery and gunships after spotting the enemy, the unit did not fall back to a fire support base like the Army units did, but went back to the village.⁵⁷

The success of CAP is found in Sir Robert Thompson's counterinsurgency theory from Malaya. The Army ousted him as an advisor in Vietnam in the early 1960s. Thompson correctly contended that "the government must give priority to defeating the political subversion, not the guerrillas." Defeating political subversion is directly related to countering the Viet Cong strategy of gaining support from the people. The Viet Cong clearly defined steps in a memo to drive the United States and South Vietnamese government out of South Vietnam through inciting the population to oppose the

⁵⁷ Gian Gentile, *America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New York, New York: The Free Press, 2013), 48-49; United States Marine Corps, *Daily Operations Report, November 1968*, Headquarters III Marine Amphibious Force (San Francisco, CA: 1968), 15, NA RG 127, Box 160, Records of Units and Other Commands, 1953-1993, page number not specified.

government and the military. The memo declared for a push of armed and political struggle “to arouse the masses in the cities and rural areas temporarily under enemy control,” which causes the “enemy rear base” to deteriorate and force “an even more critical stalemated situation.” Concentrating on the population allowed CAP to effectively counter the guerrilla unit’s primary mode of fluidity and protection. From July to October 1968 three companies of the 1st Combined Action Group provided security to its assigned village in Quang Ngai province while also incorporating missions to eliminate the Viet Cong in the area. By using saturation patrols, night patrols, and ambushes, the companies avoided Viet Cong infiltration into the village, and engaged the guerrilla forces. What makes these Marine engagements with the Viet Cong different from the Army reports is the probabilities of direct contact with enemy ground units.⁵⁸

The Army engaged Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regular units after they prepped and softened the area of operation with superior firepower, whereas the Marine units from the CAP engaged directly with the enemy with significantly less reliance of superior weaponry. The Army had troubles maintaining contact with the enemy, while CAP achieved greater success in killing, capturing and denying the village to the Viet Cong. Historians like Gian Gentile insisted that these groups were merely smaller and “more dispersed” search-and-destroy units. Conversely, these platoons allowed Popular Forces that engaged with both village security and combat against the enemy, and a

⁵⁸ Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgencies: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam*, (New York, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966), 55; United States Marine Corps, *Clearly Understand the New Situation and Mission: Take Advantage of Victories and to Surge Forward and Completely Defeat the U.S. and Puppet Enemy*, September 1, 1967, Headquarters III Marine Amphibious Force (San Francisco, CA: 1967), NA RG 127, Box 146, 4-5; United States Marine Corps, *Command Chronology, 1 July, 1960 to 31 October, 1968*, Headquarters III Marine Amphibious Force (San Francisco, CA: 1968), NA RG 127, Box 186, 5, 12-23.

greater level of trust between the population and the military units by remaining in the area before, during, and after combat. Compared to the Army's counterinsurgency warfare, CAP was a relatively better solution to the Viet Cong insurgency. To a large group of contemporary counterinsurgency sources, CAP is treated as an ineffectual counterinsurgency method because it invoked the same sort of fear among the population as the guerrilla forces. However, the realities of CAP were that the Marines actively engaged counterinsurgency and the population in a way that formed better outcomes than the larger, sweeping search-and-destroy Army alternative, with less reliance on artillery and air strikes. CAP provided village security that allowed the South Vietnamese government, and their programs to work, plus made pacification easier.⁵⁹

The Combined Action Program did have its pitfalls. Smaller units meant a lighter force for the Viet Cong to engage. Stymied Viet Cong units used North Vietnamese battalions as supporting units to overrun the marines. Max Boot, a prominent guerrilla warfare writer, described an example of this when a CAP platoon assigned to Binh Nghia, north of Saigon while six Marines were on patrol, Viet Cong and regular forces attacked the rest of the platoon. When Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces attacked, the Marines were overrun and six Popular Forces men and six U.S. Marines were killed.⁶⁰ Westmoreland was generally disinterested in the thought of defensive operations against the Viet Cong. CAP contradicted Westmoreland's shock and awe method to cripple the Viet Cong by finding, fixing and fighting the enemy. CAP's success fell short because of the Army Concept that Krepinevich argued. Westmoreland's conduct of Vietnam

⁵⁹ Gian Gentile, *America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*, 77.

⁶⁰ Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2002), 305-306.

relegated Marine units around Khe Sahn, leaving the Army to do the bulk of the work. Max Boot correctly labelled CAP as a cursory sideshow to the Army's grand strategy of search-and-destroy operations. Army operations definitively included massive firepower, but left little room for flexibility and other methods to conduct counterinsurgency.

Superior firepower exposed the conventional force to vulnerabilities that hindered counterinsurgency success in Vietnam. When Arc Light strikes, napalm and chemical weapons were used, it destroyed the countryside where most of the South Vietnamese population resided. Collateral damage from these strikes forced the population to support the unconventional forces which made search-and-destroy operations almost impossible. The larger question that the Army needed to ask itself was: was 450,000 pounds of ordinance in B-52 strikes in a single bombing run worth the risk of destroying everything the population has that the military was seeking to protect? At what point does the military draw the line concerning collateral damage and its effect on stymieing pacification efforts. The Vietnam War is a reminder that the world's largest and most powerful military can be crippled by a far smaller force when the wrong approach is taken. In the aftermath of Vietnam, the United States military underwent a period of disconnection from overt counterinsurgency missions. It was not until the twenty-first century that the United States would actively engage its military against unconventional forces. But did Vietnam serve as a lesson that the military learned how to engage in counterinsurgency missions?

Chapter Two

The United States military in Vietnam fed off the resolute concept of destroying its enemies in such a way that the military played a children's game with its enemy in the jungle. In the twenty-first century, the military neglected to learn from its mistakes in Vietnam. That negligence perpetuated strategy, tactics, and an inflexible military philosophy. Insurgencies erupted in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, where the enemy used irregular strategies and tactics, because a conventional battle against the U.S. military was suicidal. The U.S. re-entered the counterinsurgency warfare scene, and believed military superiority provided the best solution, as it had in Vietnam. This led to an increase in technological reliance, and a decrease in ground forces deployed to combat until 2014. Counterinsurgency, thus was typified by eliminating insurgents without risking service men and women. Operations in Afghanistan resembled similar operations in Vietnam: preparatory B-52 and tactical air strikes, followed by sweeping/searching operations that also employed advanced military technology, like armored personnel carriers. The doctrinal changes encroached into Afghanistan in 2009, far too late to make a difference. Additionally, presidential administration changes pledged methods that placed stress on service members, but increased the use of technological superiority through drones.

In a memo titled "Strategy," Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld outlined how the United States planned to attack global insurgencies. The United States classified Afghanistan as a breeding ground for like-minded individuals behind the September 11, 2001 attacks. The thrust of the memo attempted to lay out plans for the invasion of Afghanistan, but it also added detailed descriptions of approaches to the tribally diverse

country. Rumsfeld noted in the memo the importance of the Afghan people in a campaign “to eliminate Al-Qaida and Taliban personnel and military capabilities.” Rumsfeld’s acknowledgement revealed that executives in Washington understood, at least on the surface, how insurgencies underlined the population’s impact. However, the rest of the memo engaged with references that resembled strikingly similar characteristics to the superior firepower approach from Vietnam. That strategy developed into Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) that sought to oust terrorist organizations from their “sanctuary” in Afghanistan, and provide protection to the people in various tribes in Afghanistan.⁶¹

Enduring Freedom began with the picturesque conventional offensives comparable to those in Vietnam. Intense firepower of “only 31 preplanned strategic targets,” and dropped close to 2,000 bombs total in five days at the hands of the B-52, complimented with tactical precision by F-14 and F-18 fighter bombers all targeted insurgent training facilities. After it established air dominance, the U.S. military commanded by General Tommy Franks, pushed for the insertion of ground troop to take the fight to the insurgents. The insurgents retreated once the ground campaign rocked their mountain hideouts. The insurgents adhered to traditional guerrilla warfare theory, because they understood they could not win a fight against a technologically superior force. Franks claimed that the cause of the retreat was due to the joint, air and ground campaign. Nevertheless, the initial stages of Enduring Freedom ousted the insurgents from the capitol in Kabul. The initial operations of Enduring Freedom cannot be defined

⁶¹ Donald Rumsfeld, *U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan* (National Security Archives, National Security Council, October 16, 2001), 1-2.

as counterinsurgency operations, because of the dependence on conventional operations by military doctrine and strategy. The military used a strategy that relied on a quick, kinetic, decisive strike force that was far superior to its enemy both technologically, and by force strength⁶²

The shortcomings of the early years in Afghanistan were compounded by limited or non-existent counterinsurgency training, reliance on old methods of waging war, and a poor understanding of the insurgency in Afghanistan. Troops on the ground displayed flexible responses when they realized that traditional methods failed to produce results. Military brass' egregious philosophy retained those traditional practices, despite the flexibility presented by the troops conducting these counterinsurgency missions.

In an interview with J. Patrick Hughes, Lieutenant General David Barno described his command over the Combined Forces Command, Afghanistan. Barno revealed that a large portion of soldiers under his command in Afghanistan from 2003-2005 received no formal counterinsurgency training. Furthermore, Barno explained that many soldiers developed counterinsurgency tactics after deployment to Afghanistan through books ordered online. This "tuning the car while you're going down the highway" showed that Barno's men displayed an organizational deficiency in regard to training. The method adopted by those under Barno's command exemplified flexibility, and a grasp of battlefield realities by those on the battlefield. Soldiers on the ground

⁶² Donald P. Wright, *A Different Kind of War: The United States Army in Operation Enduring Freedom, October 2001-September 2005* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Studies Institute Press, 2010), 64; Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Air Power Against Terror: America's Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG166-1.pdf, 80.

learned counterinsurgency the hard way while the military brass continued to rely on air support and its superior military to beat the insurgency.⁶³

In Herat Province, located in Western Afghanistan, Barno implemented Vietnam-Era tactics by using American firepower as a coercive element. Barno explained, “We helped to deploy Afghan National Army forces out there along with our Special Forces, to separate the factions and to begin disarming them, and to leverage some of the U.S. airpower and other assets to help send convincing messages to these folks.” Instead of risking direct contact with American firepower, the insurgency infiltrated the Afghan government, taking a page out of Mao’s guerrilla warfare strategy. Barno explained that “some of the most prominent warlords in the country had been removed from power or had been morphed into being elected as members of the parliament, being appointed as governors, being appointed as ministers in the government.” This allowed the insurgents to gain a foothold in the already corrupt Kabul government. Insurgent infiltration under the protective wing of the government failed to eliminate previous warlords, who established similar types of terrorist rule over these regions.⁶⁴

The U.S military failed to cut off the Pakistan sanctuary, and more importantly failed to understand the geography of Afghanistan’s predominantly mountainous terrain. Prohibiting insurgents from moving into safe areas in Pakistan revealed a huge limitation to counterinsurgency gains, mostly in eastern Afghanistan. That same region barred movement by heavy military equipment, which led to reliance on air strikes that kept U.S. forces out of harm’s way. And finally, after the 2007 surge in Iraq, reforms in

⁶³ Christopher Koontz, *Enduring Voices: Oral Histories of the U.S. Army Experience in Afghanistan, 2003-2005* (Washington D.C., Center of Military History, 2008), 25.

⁶⁴ Koontz, *Enduring Voices*, 21.

military doctrine, under the sagacious counterinsurgency expert, General David Petraeus, attempted to answer the problems in the Global War on Terror. While the “COINdinistas” praised the use of population-centric counterinsurgency, the insurgents played the U.S. military into the guerrilla warfare game. The insurgency used its Pakistan sanctuary as a staging area to infiltrate into Afghanistan, while simultaneously controlling the northeastern and eastern areas of Afghanistan. These regions generated the harshest firefights in Afghanistan.⁶⁵

U.S. forces that operated along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border developed bitterness towards the insurgency, and the restrictions the border areas created for them. John Hintz served in Afghanistan from 2010 to 2011, and his story detailed the difficult realities for those deployed in the regions along the border:

The Afghani Taliban that we fought and captured would continually go back to Pakistan. And we saw them on video feeds going back and forth. They would go to safe havens in Pakistan because they knew we couldn't engage them there, couldn't follow them there. They would resupply, reoutfit, and a lot of times if we shot them during battles and they were injured they would take their injured across into Pakistan to give them aid and then bring them back into Afghanistan. So it was a very challenging fight because it seemed like an endless supply through these mountains of just personnel going back and forth. And that was—that was the biggest challenge is that although we were fighting in Afghanistan, we felt like we were fighting two countries.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ The term “COIN-dinistas” comes from an article written by Thomas Ricks, “The COINdinistas,” (November 30, 2009), <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/30/the-coindinistas/>; According to Ricks, these counterinsurgency (COIN) experts cracked the code to the “Big Idea,” or the counterinsurgency problem with the creation of the cornerstone joint Army and Marine field manual, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (2007).

⁶⁶ John Hintz, Interview by David Furneaux, November 11, 2011, Transcript, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, AIB College of Business, Des Moines, Iowa, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.82377/transcript?ID=mv000>, (Accessed December 19, 2016).

The inability for the U.S. military to engage outside of Afghanistan, despite the heavy insurgent traffic in the Pakistan-Afghanistan region created similar problems it encountered in Vietnam. Comparisons of the logistical routes between Pakistan and Afghanistan to the Ho Chi Minh trail during Vietnam is unwarranted, but the military failed to prevent the insurgency from using these routes from both wars. A proper comparison lies within the sanctuaries that each provided. Pakistan offered an area where casualties could rest, rehabilitate, and regroup.⁶⁷

When ground forces met resistance, air power from technologically advanced weapons systems attempted to pick up the slack. The insurgents used heavy bombing, and superior weapons by the U.S. to their advantage by prolonging the insurgency which pressured U.S forces to exhaust extreme resources in the region. However, the United States military failed to accept the insurgents' strategy. The early years of Operation Enduring Freedom were formulated on ousting the insurgency from Kabul, followed by nation building. This pushed al Qaeda and the Taliban into the mountains of Afghanistan, and along the Pakistan border. From here they staged attacks against U.S. forces, and the proxy government in Kabul.

Mastermind behind the September 11th attacks, and leader of al Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden illustrated a vivid portrait for defeating the U.S.: "Exhaust the larger enemy whose purpose is to overthrow the states and the movements i.e. the movement in Syria and the emirate in Afghanistan." Bin Laden continued, "we must not allow the enemy to get the Ummah involved in unnecessary misfortunes and calamities that the Ummah

⁶⁷ The Ho Chi Minh trail was a system of trails that webbed itself into various regions between three countries, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

cannot handle.” Bin Laden’s focus, much like Mao was the Ummah, or the people. The U.S.’s focus neglected the population from the onset. Soldiers on the ground in Afghanistan encountered difficulties when they conducted these offensive operations. American units found that it was nearly impossible to continuously engage with insurgents. Many times, insurgents took long range “pot shots” at American forces where the U.S. responded with nothing, or air support to destroy the threat. Army doctrine and methodology pushed with commensurate force as the air strikes they supported for the kinetic oriented mentality. Counterinsurgency was clustered together in what doctrine from the early 2000s classified as full spectrum operations.⁶⁸

“In war the only sure defense is offense, and the efficiency of the offense depends on the war-like souls of those conducting it.” General George S. Patton’s words supplemented the military brawn the United States wanted its military to display. Before the beginning of the Global War on Terror, the United States military incorporated doctrinal change that emphasized “full spectrum operations.” Full spectrum started from offensive capabilities. The 2001 version of *Operations* emanated a purely offensive minded force. Chapter 7, “Offensive Operations” explained the goal is “to throw enemies off balance, overwhelm their capabilities, disrupt their defenses, and ensure their defeat or destruction.” Classical conventional warfare, as explained by Clausewitz, heavily influenced how *Operations* (2001) formed a conventionally minded force, despite the newly added *full* spectrum operations. The section titled “Conducting Decisive Full Spectrum Operations” started with offensive tactics and reasoning, continued by

⁶⁸ Osama Bin Laden, “Give the tribes more than they can handle,” (Office of the Director of National Intelligence date not stated), <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2016/english/Give%20the%20tribes%20more%20than%20they%20can%20handle.pdf>, 7.

explanations for defensive operations geared to quickly turn into offensive operations. In the same way, civil operations primarily dealt with helping the victims of these offensive missions. Throughout the Global War on Terror theater, military operations were conducted along conventional, offensive lines per *Operations*. During battles with insurgents, offensive operations in Afghanistan hardly produced favorable outcomes for the United States military.⁶⁹

Defeating the Taliban produced short term outcomes, and pushed Afghanistan into further instability, because the Afghan government failed to establish central authority. Afghans historically and culturally opposed a central government's role in Afghan tribal affairs. Afghanistan's diverse tribes rejected central authority, dating back to the 1979 Soviet-Afghan War. The American nation building efforts suffered the same fate. Taliban control over Kabul lifted in December, 2001.⁷⁰ Retired Army Colonel Gian Gentile vehemently opposed nation building in Afghanistan, and mentioned the ever-important effects of nation building. Gentile contended "there was no change in strategy and military missions in Afghanistan. From early 2002, it had been fundamentally one of nation building at the barrel of a gun."⁷¹ Gentile's animosity towards the American strategy was warranted. However, Gentile never explained that the U.S. nation building displayed the same sense of hubris that its military projected. Afghan units received

⁶⁹ Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington D.C., Department of the Army Headquarters, 2001), [http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/others/amd-us-archive/fm3-0\(01\).pdf](http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/others/amd-us-archive/fm3-0(01).pdf), vii; FM 3-0, *Operations*, Quote taken from Chapter 7, "Offensive Operations," 7-2.

⁷⁰ Here I am using the same parameters for nation building as I used in the second chapter.

⁷¹ Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New York, New York: The New Press, 2013), 114.

American equipment, which the military, and executive administration believed gave them the edge over the insurgents.

The attitude expressed by American military brass, and some boots on the ground contended that this equipment was needed to repel the Taliban. Sergeant First Class Albert Craven with the Fourth Maneuver Enhancement Brigade in Afghanistan from 2005-2006, and later 2009-2010, recalled his experience with the Afghan National Army (ANA) and its equipment. Craven responded affirmatively that the ANA was well supplied: “they had the Humvees with the Stage One armor, which the Taliban didn’t have. They had the weapons, ammunition, the training, how to shoot the weapons, you know. And then, and then they had armor support too.”⁷² Craven’s response complemented how many in the military’s upper echelon felt about Western equipment on the battlefield against the Taliban. Equipment the insurgents did not possess was a technique that resulted in dire consequences in Vietnam.

Afghanistan’s mountainous terrain proved the most difficult to maneuver through for the U.S. military. The width of a Humvee is just over seven feet and a length that extends to fifteen feet, which is considerably larger than a typical car. Humvees were not suitable for Afghan roads. Craven’s combat deployment exemplified this, and his was not the only one. Mark Anderson served with an Army Stryker brigade in Afghanistan from 2006 to 2012, and recounted his combat deployment in Zhari province. “We pushed in the Zhari Province,” located just west of Kandahar, “and we couldn’t take our strikers in there because of the terrain,” Anderson concluded. Strykers were a variation of the LAV

⁷² Albert Craven, interview by Colin Betts, November 8, 2011, Transcript V300-004, Cantigny First Division Project III Oral Histories, Muncie, Indiana, Ball State University, <http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/CtgnyOrHis/id/72/rec/8>, (Accessed December 19, 2016).

II that the Canadian military used regularly during the 1990s. The insurgents took that disadvantage and exploited it by controlling the terrain in the inaccessible mountains. The armored vehicles used by the U.S. packed a large punch but limited operations in the mountains. Other units experienced these problems, but learned ways around the Humvee's limitations.⁷³

Daniel Kerrigan, who served during Operation Enduring Freedom from 2004 to 2005, also experienced problems with Afghanistan's terrain. Kerrigan recounted one experience from an operation in Purchamon village with a civil affairs unit to negotiate with village elders and chiefs. Kerrigan explained,

It was so far up in the mountains and the roads were so narrow and thin we couldn't take the Hum-Vs. So we took these little mini pickup trucks, and it got to one point where we were having a hard time climbing up the mountains. Then, we ended up in the village of Purchamon. As I said, the roads were really narrow and some cases we were looking down hundreds and hundreds of feet off a cliff, and about half of that trip up into Purchamon was in the middle of the night so it was extra scary because you weren't sure if you were going to get attacked. If you got attacked, there was no place for you to go; you were stuck on the side of the hill.⁷⁴

Humvees provided necessary protection from improvised-explosive-devices (IED), but the terrain of eastern Afghanistan were no place for large armored vehicles. Kerrigan never came under fire from insurgents, but the widespread reliance, and use of a

⁷³ Mark Anderson, Interview by Kyle Hoelscher, June 14, 2012, Transcript, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Corpus Christi, Texas, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.86780/transcript?ID=mv0001>, (Accessed December 19, 2016).

⁷⁴ Daniel Kerrigan, Interview by Katie Morgan, Undated, Transcript, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Lafayette Veterans Blind, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.69701/transcript?ID=sr0001>, (Accessed December 20, 2016).

technologically superior military created an opportunity for the insurgency to gain momentum. It also forced to surrender armored protection for mobility.

Mounting difficulties stemming from the Kabul government, compounded when the actual objectives of Operation Enduring Freedom never emerged as the operation progressed. Problems arose during Operation Enduring Freedom when the U.S. military focused chiefly on its offensive capabilities. The initial thrust of OEF's strategy dedicated a large air campaign to hold, and maintain the status quo in the air. Enduring Freedom was a U.S.-Afghan joint operation into Taliban, and al Qaeda held territories throughout Afghanistan.

Operation Enduring Freedom progressed along full spectrum's guidelines. It eliminated insurgent control from Kabul. The military focus afterwards carried the offensives into the insurgent's hideout in the mountains. Heavy air strikes in the Tora Bora mountains produced a devastating display of U.S. air power. The intricate tunnel systems, allegedly equipped with hydroelectric generators proved impregnable to even the largest of American munitions.⁷⁵ Operations at Tora Bora attempted to find Osama bin Laden, though struggled due to the terrain, and the insurgency's ability to flee the area of operation. Operation Anaconda, the response to Tora Bora's failure, echoed similarities to offensive operations during Vietnam into the central highlands of South Vietnam. The construction of Anaconda was based on finding al Qaeda and Taliban members and killing them in the Shah-i-Kot Valley. However, the operation confronted

⁷⁵ Mary Anne Weaver, "Lost at Tora Bora," *The New York Times Magazine* (September 11, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/11/magazine/lost-at-tora-bora.html?_r=0, accessed January 9, 2017).

serious adversity. Air assets proved difficult to use due to enemy proximity to friendly forces, and poor preparation.

The 1st Cavalry's operations during the Battle of the Ia Drang in 1965, demonstrated the U.S.'s concern over engaging with the enemy, and less focus on the territory. After the battles at landing zone X Ray and Albany, the Army left the area, which was vital to the North Vietnamese staging operations into South Vietnam. Michael Peterson's deployment in early 2002, showed that the same held true for Afghanistan. Peterson, a platoon leader of a 81mm mortar platoon in the 10th Mountain Division deployed into the Shah-i-Kot Valley, located in the Paktia province. Peterson's unit designated the anvil in a hammer-and-anvil maneuver with forces engaged in Paktika province, south of his location. However, Peterson's mortar ammunition totaled a meagre fifty-seven rounds, and to make matters worse, the insurgents outnumbered his unit, and held the high ground.⁷⁶

After a four-hour long firefight, Peterson and his men faced a problematic situation. As insurgents hurled numerous mortar rounds back at them, air support and mortar fire could not engage at the same time, not to mention they lacked the necessary amount of ammo. Air support was used but severely limited due to the proximity of the insurgents to Peterson's platoon. Peterson pulled his platoon back to higher ground once he realized his mortar ammo was spent, and held there until dark with small arms and

⁷⁶ Michael Peterson, Interview by Robert Babcock, October 30, 2002, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Fort Drum, New York, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.04637/transcript?ID=mv0001>, (Accessed December 20, 2016); The fundamental difference between the Battle of Ia Drang and Operation Anaconda is that the insurgents during Anaconda never functioned with, or even resembled a conventional force. See chapter one for description of the Battle of Ia Drang.

m203 grenade launchers. Heavy contact broke when an AC-130 Spectre gunship unloaded its massive firepower aimed at the insurgents. This allowed Peterson and the remainder of the force enough cover to evacuate. For ten days, Peterson and his unit engaged the insurgents in formidable terrain under less than ideal circumstances. The unit stayed as a quick reaction force afterwards, because combat experience was vital that early in the war. Peterson explained “we went back out to the Shah-i-Kot and did a mission. Only fired three rounds, didn't see any bad guys, just some dead bodies.” Shah-i-Kot exemplified the similarity between the early days of Afghanistan to Vietnam. Instead of conducting operations that left behind a defensive force, the military left the area much like the 1st Cavalry did in 1965 after Ia Drang.⁷⁷

Peterson’s part in Operation Anaconda exposed deficiencies in the American strategy in Afghanistan. It continued to define counterinsurgency as an offensive endeavor. Full spectrum operations meant that U.S. forces needed to be ready for offensives, more so than a defensive campaign. Additionally, Anaconda was poorly coordinated in terms of supplying ground forces with enough ammunition and air support when met with heavy resistance. In Michael Peterson’s account, the operation succeeded in fighting the Taliban and al Qaeda, and allegedly killed as many as 500 insurgents. Focusing on eliminating insurgents was a tactical failure, because insurgencies bred, and grew from the population. General Franks commented on the success of the operation, and stated “Operation Anaconda sought to clear the enemy in that valley area and in those hills, and succeeded in doing so where many operations in history had not been able to get that done.” Franks’ boastful remark supported the offensive oriented military

⁷⁷ Michael Peterson Interview.

mindset at the onset of Operation Enduring Freedom. Soldiers on the battlefield struggled on occasions to cope with this concept, because of Afghanistan's terrain and the nature of the insurgency.⁷⁸

Sergeant First Class Craven's Maneuver Brigade deployed with full spectrum in mind. Craven explained that his brigade "was pretty much like homeland security" before deploying, but once they landed in Afghanistan, their jobs quickly shifted into a combat role. Craven spoke pridefully that "now, we're getting ready to transform into a bein' a deployable brigade to, you know, Afghanistan, Iraq, North Korea, wherever we need to go." *Operations* stressed the importance of the offensive, rather than the defensive. Consequently, the population hardly occupied any space, and was constantly overshadowed by military's offensive way of war.⁷⁹

Daniel Kerrigan, who experienced difficulties with Afghanistan's terrain in Purchamon village, conducted a separate operation to aid elections in Kirjan village. Kerrigan remembered that "we didn't have any incidents during the election process. On our way home from that mission, we had a spotter trailing us from a distance and we crawled in a close air support and a helicopter came in and gave us air cover as we made our way back to our camp." Air support certainly left those in danger with a feeling of security, but hindered counterinsurgency success. In Kerrigan's case, instant air support served as a deterrent to combat. Insurgents knew that engaging with American firepower

⁷⁸ United States Air Force, *Operation Anaconda: An Air Power Perspective* (Headquarters United States Air Force, February 7, 2005), http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/af/anaconda_unclassified.pdf, 12.

⁷⁹ Craven, Interview.

never favored them, and thus retreated until a more advantageous situation arose. Combat during Operation Enduring Freedom ⁸⁰

Justin Thompson served with the 2-20th Special Forces in Afghanistan, and his experience offered a glimpse into improper counterinsurgency practices: the dependence on air power. “Combat really wasn't combat.” Thompson explained, “I would call it more them firing at a vehicle from about a mile away. We would either fire back or call for air support. Most of the time air support took care of everything, and when they got done we would go assess the damage.” Air support was immensely destructive, and usually vaporized the target, if hit successfully. Assessing the damage after an air strike is necessary, but at the same time it is difficult to make an accurate conclusion if nothing is left. Thompson’s explanation paralleled Plaster’s missions along the Ho Chi Minh trail and into Viet Cong infested territories. Although, Plaster expressed his discontent with the ineffectualness of air strikes, whereas Thompson bought into the idea that air support was the best method on the battlefield. After limited progress in both Afghanistan and Iraq, in late-2006, the military needed a change in its tactical outlook on the Global War on Terror. ⁸¹

Hearts-and-minds counterinsurgency succeeded in places like Malaya in the 1950s, and in I Corps of South Vietnam. It failed to infiltrate the steadfast philosophy in the military until 2007. Referencing the raging insurgency, John Nagl argued “the Army was unprepared to fight it.” Nagl’s comment in the foreword of *Counterinsurgency*, Field

⁸⁰ Kerrigan, Interview.

⁸¹ Justin Thompson, Interview by Zack Koestler, Undated, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.43583/transcript?ID=sr0001>, (Accessed December 20, 2016).

Manual 3-24 was a continuation of his book on the U.S. Army's failure to learn during counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam, like the British did during the Malayan Emergency. 2006 and early 2007 was considered a monumental turning point for the war in Iraq, but not much attention was devoted to the cause-and-effect that occurred in Afghanistan following the Iraq surge. Afghanistan saw a relatively large troop increase in 2009 to accommodate for an establishment of surge-like tactics used in Iraq. New voices in the military's counterinsurgency argument provoked change within the military. The voices of those like then commander of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Lieutenant General David Petraeus, counterinsurgency advisor David Kilcullen, and John Nagl directed the focus on alternative counterinsurgency practices.⁸²

Counterinsurgency, Field Manual 3-24 is both a perplexing, and groundbreaking military doctrine. Perplexing in that it offered no difference between the definition of counterinsurgency warfare, or tactics from the twentieth century to the twenty-first. It also built its thrust off the widely popular argument from John Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*.⁸³ The field manual manifested a characteristic that Nagl correctly claimed that the Army lacked in Vietnam: an organizational push for flexibility and to learn from mistakes. However, *Counterinsurgency*'s perplexity resided in its abstract view that counterinsurgency has not changed since the twentieth century debacle in Vietnam, without directly stating. The manual is driven by prioritizing population-centric missions, rather than enemy-centric missions. The first two pages detailed components

⁸² U.S. Army and Marine Corps, Counterinsurgency Field Manual *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), xiii.

⁸³ I describe Nagl's book in greater detail in the Introduction and the argument holds greater weight in chapter one.

that significantly lacked during military activities during Vietnam, but adequately covered in previous supplementary manuals and guides of the time.⁸⁴ What makes *Counterinsurgency* groundbreaking is that it represented a change in the military's overall approach to counterinsurgency.

General David Petraeus is famously known as the posterchild that created this shift in the military's focus in late-2006, and rightfully so. Petraeus is a counterinsurgency genius. He met with a large cohort of other counterinsurgency experts, notably Nagl, and created *Counterinsurgency* at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Nagl's foreword to the manual boastfully commented that "it was downloaded more than 1.5 million times in the first month after its posting to the Fort Leavenworth and Marine Corps Web sites." The field manual's multiple forewords, prefaces, and introductions all expressed concern over the plausibility of the method pushed by the field manual. Sarah Sewall questioned the ability of the U.S. military to operate under a manual that committed larger numbers of troops. Anxieties from the American public, military hierarchy, and Washington of risking service members contradicted the type of operations this manual promoted. The merit, and the problem of this change rested in the steps to change doctrine.⁸⁵

One method of counterinsurgency methods the Field Manual 3-24 promoted was "Clear-hold-build" operations. These operations hoped to establish control in key areas, then expand outward, while providing security for the population in the form of combat

⁸⁴ See in Chapter One, the Army's *Counterinsurgency Planning Guide*, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, and advisor reports from individuals like Sir Robert Thompson advising against offensive, kinetic operations geared primarily against the enemy.

⁸⁵ U.S. Army and Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5*, xvii; xxi, xxxviii.

outposts, and patrol bases in controlled areas. The British used this method successfully in Malaya, during the Malayan Emergency from 1948-1960. However, clear-hold-build operations rely on the offensive successes at the beginning. These operations hardly differ from search-and-destroy missions, but the Field Manual 3-24 claimed their effectiveness only when sufficient intelligence is gathered before conducting these operations. The manual devoted most its focus on intelligence, totaling six sections, which comprised the bulk of the manual's middle portion. The second method proposed by Field Manual 3-24 realized successful attempts during the Vietnam War, though overshadowed by Krepinevich's "Army Concept," aided in securing the population away from the insurgency. Combined Action units lived among the population, which made it difficult for insurgent infiltration.⁸⁶

The manual argued that "a combined action program can work only in areas with limited insurgent activity." Taking the fight to the insurgency produced detrimental problems in Vietnam, and in the early years of Afghanistan. Defensive operations, like CAP during the Vietnam War, produced better outcomes. Regardless of the inherently offensively minded U.S. military, the shift to population counterinsurgency allowed the military more flexibility, which it lacked in the previous counterinsurgency struggles. These operations needed a larger force to effectively provide security to the population. Clear-hold-build operations need more troops, due to the necessity of combat outposts, and patrol bases to constantly remain available to provide protection.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Finish Footnote.

⁸⁷ *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5*, 184; Combined Action, and the Combined Action program from Vietnam is described in detail in chapter one.

In 2009, Petraeus, General Stanley McChrystal, the former commander of Joint Special Operations Command in Afghanistan, and others, successfully persuaded President Barack Obama to approve Afghanistan's version of the Surge.⁸⁸ Troop increases, the essential component of The Surge in Iraq, enabled the U.S. military to commit to population-centric counterinsurgency. Obama committed an increase of 17,000 troops to aid in the ongoing struggle to conduct proper counterinsurgency missions. Afghanistan's troop surge provided the U.S. military with adequate man power to conduct the operations proposed in *Counterinsurgency*. Despite the superfluous reference to clear-hold-build operations that are borderline search-and-destroy missions, population counterinsurgency finally made its mark on American military strategy. *Counterinsurgency* provided the theoretical framework of counterinsurgency warfare. It was up to the military to use that knowledge, and transfer theory into practice.⁸⁹

In *ARMY Magazine*, Stephen Magennis and First Sergeant Shane Pospisil of the 501st Infantry recalled their involvement with successful Combined Action platoons in Paktika province. "Initially, we were not colocated with Afghan National Security Forces," they stated, "Even if you are just a few minutes down the road, that is not good enough. With combined action, the expectation became that U.S. forces partnered with Afghan forces one level up and actually lived with them." These units adopted methods from Vietnam's Marine Combined Action Platoons, and reinstated them in Afghanistan. Combined action promoted the effectiveness of indigenous forces, and it created unit

⁸⁸ I discuss the Iraq Surge in chapter three, which the military hierarchy devoted much more attention to population security in Iraq, than in Afghanistan once the introduction of the surge.

⁸⁹ Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York, New York: Penguin Group, 2014), 284; Those inside the military felt a larger increase was imperative to turning the Afghanistan insurgency around. Advocates proposed an immediate 4,000 troop increase after Obama approved the 17,000 increase.

cohesion between U.S. and ANA forces. Neil Erickson, operating in Paktia province with C Company of 1-40th Cavalry explained how CAP in Afghanistan worked: “the direct partnership of an ANA company and a U.S. platoon focused on their own district with its subgovernor and ANP was vital to the long-term security and improvement in each district.”⁹⁰

The downside to population-centric counterinsurgency is that a large quantity of ground forces was needed for both types of approaches. *Counterinsurgency* heavily influenced the war in Afghanistan, though the increase in American forces in the Middle East and South Asia initially tackled the problems in Iraq. The surge in Iraq, commanded by Petraeus occupied a large portion of the military’s focus during the Global War on Terror. Clear-hold-build operations, and Combined Action relied heavily on an adequately manned force to be successful. Furthermore, these approaches built from interacting on a personal level with the local population. Organizationally, the military started the counterinsurgency learning process.

Developing a relationship with the populace was integral during operations that Green Beret Noah Smith took part. “I knew the success of our work depended on the relationships we developed with locals. They were our first line of defense,” Smith wrote for *The War Horse*. Building rapport with the population denied the insurgency of crucial assets to stage attacks against Smith and his men. Smith noted the importance of establishing their lifeline for both the forces operating in the area, as well as the population. “Living with the Afghans, we understand the rhythm of life in the villages.

⁹⁰ *ARMY Magazine*, “Company Command: Building Combat-Ready Teams,” August 2010 ([http://www.usma.edu/calldol/siteassets/armymagazine/docs/2010/CC_ARMY_10-08%20\(Aug10\)%20CAP-in-AFG.pdf](http://www.usma.edu/calldol/siteassets/armymagazine/docs/2010/CC_ARMY_10-08%20(Aug10)%20CAP-in-AFG.pdf)), (accessed January 14, 2017), 70, 72.

The State Department diplomats never seemed to have the rapport with the locals like we did,” Smith explained, “because at the end of the day they went back to the embassy and we went back to our mud houses.” Smith’s units conducted the Combined Action approach, much like those conducted by U.S. and South Vietnamese Marines in Vietnam.

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Counterinsurgency also added a section at the end of the publication: air power, which resorted back to the traditional philosophy used in Vietnam. The manual stated that “airpower both serves as a significant force multiplier and enables counterinsurgents to operate more effectively.” Cautious undertones resonated throughout the airpower section, without any acknowledgement of how air power failed in Vietnam. Advocates of the increased use of technological advantages through air power claimed “the ability to conduct precision strikes across the globe can play an important role in COIN operations,” because “these capabilities provide our fighting forces with highly asymmetric advantages in the IW (irregular warfare) environment.” These words by retired Air Force Lieutenant General Allen Peck supported *Counterinsurgency*’s assessment that air power generated successful counterinsurgency. Air power is an inadequate method of pacification, if Vietnam provided any reasonable basis to learn from.⁹²

⁹¹ Noah Smith, “Nothing Prepares You for War,” *The War Horse* (<http://www.thewarhorse.org/our-stories/nothing-prepares-you-for-war>, Accessed January 8, 2017), all quotes taken from article.

⁹² *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5*, 363; Lt. General Allen Peck, “Air Power: The Theater Perspective,” *The Air Commanders’ Perspectives: Air Power in Afghanistan, 2005-2010*, Edited by Dag Henriksen (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2014), http://www.au.af.mil/au/aupress/digital/pdf/book/b_0000_henriksen_commanders_perspectives.pdf (accessed January 10, 2017), 23.

Air power during counterinsurgency campaigns proved useful for the British in Malaya. Success in Malaya occurred for numerous reasons, but one huge contributing factor is that the Malayan communists did not possess a sanctuary to flee to if situations proved dire. *Counterinsurgency* used Malaya as a poor example to advocate for airpower. It argued “airpower enables counterinsurgents to operate in rough and remote terrain, areas that insurgents traditionally have used as safe havens.” The military in Vietnam tailored air mobility into its operational preferences, a tactic that contributed to the cat-and-mouse game. In Afghanistan, this tactic provided an approach to tackle insurgent safe havens in remote locations in the mountains. Deploying in those regions forced large preparatory strikes beforehand, to ensure American forces were not ambushed from the start. This was the same concept in 1965, with the 1st Cavalry Division’s operations in the central highlands of Vietnam, in 2001 during Enduring Freedom, and again in early 2002 with Operation Anaconda.

The Global War on Terror’s incessant reliance on air strikes persisted in the years that followed Enduring Freedom and Anaconda. Between 2004 and 2010, U.S. close air support strikes skyrocketed from 5,000, to almost 35,000. Quantity took precedence over quality. Not until unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, were used in place of inserting ground forces did this concept of quantity over quality shifted in favor of the latter. When Barack Obama won the presidency in 2008, the use of air power increased for a couple of reasons. Public support for the Global War on Terror in Afghanistan, and Iraq dwindled to a drastically low level. Americans no longer wanted to see American men, and women dying overseas when an end goal seemed unattainable. Obama’s platform during the election proclaimed a tectonic shift in American strategy. The Obama Administration

issued a troop drawdown due to end in 2014, but with a small military footprint remaining in both regions. In the absence of an effective troop strength to conduct counterinsurgency missions, the alternative resorted back to a reliance on air power, but through drones, and precision munitions.⁹³

“I made one deployment in Afghanistan. I dropped more bombs and shot more bullets there than I did in all three of my Iraq trips combined,” wrote Air Force pilot Eric Chandler. Chandler’s deployment in Afghanistan showed, as late as 2013, that the military was driven by its air power capabilities. Chandler continued to elaborate on another operation to kill a target riding a motorcycle along a road in Afghanistan. Chandler dropped two 500-pound bombs, but missed the target. The second pass went slightly better, “we ran our tactic a second time, and this time we got it right. I put two 500-pounders on the man where he hid in some rocks.” A single 500-pound bomb costs just over \$6,000 in the 2014 fiscal year. The military continued to rely on its aerial technology through air power, and later through drones during counterinsurgency operations.⁹⁴

⁹³ *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5*, 364; *The Air Commanders’ Perspectives: Air Power in Afghanistan, 2005-2010*, Edited by Dag Henriksen, 287; For an adequate, retrospective view of Obama Administration’s foreign policy in the Middle East, see “Obama’s Promise to End America’s Wars- Has he?” in *The Atlantic*. The article argued that troop casualties under Obama was significantly lower than Bush’s, however, the two are hardly comparable due to the Obama Administration’s use of drone strikes as an alternative to ground force.

⁹⁴ Eric Chandler, “The Day I Held My Fire,” *The War Horse* (<http://www.thewarhorse.org/our-stories/the-day-i-held-my-fire>, Accessed January 3, 2017), all quotes taken from article; For a truncated breakdown of weapons systems see AEROWeb’s article “General Purpose Bombs,” (<http://www.fi-aeroweb.com/Defense/General-Purpose-Bombs.html>). The closest number available for the 500-pound bomb outfitted on the F-16, the fighter bomber that Chandler flew in Afghanistan, is \$6,084: per AEROWeb; Payment figures taken from the Army’s current website for an active duty soldier with less than two years’ experience (<http://www.goarmy.com/benefits/money/basic-pay-active-duty-soldiers.html>).

The ubiquitous term given to both unarmed, and armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones completed the final impetus for the U.S. military's use of superior technology on the battlefield. Drones provided a key tactical advantage that attracted executives and the military: they limited the risk for service members, and provided immediate results. Two different types of drones were used in Afghanistan, the MQ-1B Predator, and the MQ-9 Reaper. The Predator and the Reaper were outfitted with hellfire missiles, but the MQ-9's armament far surpassed the MQ-1B with a combination of hellfires, GBU-12s, and GBU-38s or Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM). The Predator's max range topped in at 770 miles, while the Reaper surpassed it with a total of 1,150 miles. These two different drones operated with two roles, but both were used for their strike capabilities. The Predator was primarily used for target acquisition, reconnaissance, and surveillance. Reapers conducted the bulk of drone strikes, whether through intelligence gathering, or air strikes.⁹⁵

Some argued that 2012 was the pivotal year that the American military shifted from its Surge mentality to the drone mentality. Spencer Ackerman argued in an article for *Wired* in late 2012 that drone strikes in that same year increased from 5%, to 11.5% of the *entire* air war in Afghanistan. Ackerman's statistics showed an increase in the 2012 calendar year from 333 airstrikes to 447. However, the evidence he presented offered a much more revealing argument that he never made. The Afghanistan Surge of 2009 showed an almost 10,000 numerical increase of "intelligence, surveillance, and Recon Sorties." Drones were implemented as hunting tools that relied, at least in the initial push

⁹⁵ John Kaag & Sarah Kreps, *Drone Warfare* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014), 23, 24; The focus of this section of this chapter is drone strikes in Afghanistan. The use of drones into Pakistan, Yemen, and other insurgency beds are out of the scope for this analysis.

for their use, on intelligence gathering, and surveillance. If 2012 is any indicator that drone usage altered the framework of how the Afghan war was conducted, 2009 provided a more convincing argument.⁹⁶

Lieutenant Colonel Michael Navicky, commander of the 62nd Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron in Afghanistan indicated that “MQ-1s and MQ-9s are essential to locating high value targets, facilitators of IEDs and those bringing weapons into the country...we’re absolutely on the hunt.” The benefits of drones were remarkable for saving the lives of combat service men and women. At the same time, drones failed to fit into the scope of counterinsurgency warfare. The intelligence benefits of drones remained immeasurable to ground forces, however, due to the force drawdown, the intended supplemental use of drones transformed into the primary role. The increase in drones, combined with the decrease in ground forces, made population counterinsurgency nonexistent. Hunting down key leaders without putting numerous service members in danger changed how the American military conducted its missions against the insurgents. Drones provided the best possible alternative during the Global War on Terror, thus, increased drone strikes.⁹⁷

The proliferation of drone usage by the American military contributed heavily to the fixation on conducting operations without jeopardizing American lives. Lt. Colonel T. Mark McCurley who flew Predators and Reapers in Iraq and Afghanistan commented, “in 2011, the Air Force flew more than five hundred thousand hours in combat with the

⁹⁶ Spencer Ackerman, “2012 Was the Year of the Drone in Afghanistan,” *Wired*, December 6, 2012, <https://www.wired.com/2012/12/2012-drones-afghanistan/>, (Accessed January 10, 2017).

⁹⁷ Joseph Swafford, “Reapers, Predators on the Prowl in Afghanistan,” *Air Reserve Personnel Center* (August 24, 2015), <http://www.arpcc.afrc.af.mil/News/ArticleDisplay/tabid/267/Article/614554/reapers-predators-on-the-prowl-in-afghanistan.aspx>, (Accessed January 10, 2017).

Predator alone. In comparison,” he continued, “all the fighters and bombers in the Air Force flew approximately forty-eight thousand hours worldwide, not just in combat.” Those statistics enticed the U.S. military into using drones more exclusively. “Remotely piloted aircraft mean more flexibility with fewer people and aircraft,” Lieutenant Colonel Michael Navicky specified. “Because they are unmanned, sometimes you can accept more risk. All that is always going to be valuable.” Navicky referenced the flexibility that drones offer, but his definition of flexibility and the definition *Counterinsurgency* encouraged are entirely different.⁹⁸

The definition *Counterinsurgency* generated was “a continuous cycle of design-learn-redesign to achieve the end state.” The definition that Navicky advocated for was that the flexibility provided by drones enabled an opportunity to take more risks. *Counterinsurgency*’s model for air power emphasized that “inappropriate or indiscriminate use of air strikes can erode popular support and fuel insurgent propaganda.” Risking collateral damage, either in the form of killing innocent civilians, or unnecessary destruction pushed the population away from the U.S. Furthermore, drones hardly provided progress for future counterinsurgency operations. Stanley McChrystal, former commander of Joint Special Operations Command in Afghanistan objected to the drone program by prudently saying “it’s not a strategy in itself; it’s a short term tactic.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Lt. Colonel T. Mark McCurley, *Hunter Killer: Inside America’s Unmanned Air War* (New York, New York: Dutton, 2015), 341; Josh Smith, “Afghan Drone War- Data Show Unmanned Flights Dominate Air Campaign,” *Reuters* (April 20, 2016), <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-drones-exclusive-idUSKCN0XH2UZ>, (accessed January 10, 2017).

⁹⁹ Foreign Affairs Interview with Stanley McChrystal, “Generation Kill: A Conversation with Stanley McChrystal,” March/April 2013), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/interviews/2013-02-11/generation-kill>, (Accessed January 10, 2017); *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5*, 150, 365.

Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan represented a roller coaster with no end in sight. Each twist and turn the U.S. military went down produced difficult situations with no end in sight. Donald Rumsfeld's strategy that he pushed for in early 2001 created a war much like Vietnam. Lieutenant Colonel T. Mark McCurley's experience shared similar characteristics, most notably the reliance on superior technology to win a counterinsurgency war. The road from Rumsfeld's war to McCurley's, exposed a harsh reality for the American military: superior technology provided short-term advantages on the battlefield, but often produced long-term consequences during counterinsurgency operations. General David Petraeus deserved credit for aiding the change in the military from its annihilation driven attitude to warfare, to focusing more on the population. Instead of fighting the war in Afghanistan like it had in Iraq following the reformation of American counterinsurgency warfare, the U.S. resorted back to traditional counterinsurgency practices that plagued Vietnam.

Chapter Three

“As the night deepens, F-16s thud five-hundred-pound bombs onto buildings just north of us, then circle back around above our heads to *boom, boom, boom*[sic] a second and third and fourth and fifth time. Later, we watch an American M-1 pound out several rounds at some other targets.”¹⁰⁰ *New York Times* reporter Karl Zinsmeister’s recounted the events with the 82nd Airborne’s operations on March 28, 2003 in Samawah, Iraq. This exemplified the United States military’s methodology during the invasion of Iraq. Superior technology, and firepower expedited the American-led coalition invasion of Iraq, and eliminated Saddam Hussein’s vise grip. Iraq erupted into an unrelenting insurgency after the overthrow of Saddam, that the U.S. attempted to pacify. However, the method that succeeded in overthrowing Saddam failed to destroy the insurgency. Counterinsurgency approaches in Iraq mimicked those used during the Vietnam War, which focused more on conventional operations, and superior weaponry. Consequently, the United States military employed the use of technological superiority, in the form of air strikes, helicopters, and artillery, which severely mired successful counterinsurgency operations.

President George Bush argued in his 2002 State of the Union Address that “Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror.” Bush took a deeper stab at Iraq and maintained that “states like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger.”¹⁰¹ The U.S. led invasion

¹⁰⁰ Karl Zinsmeister, *Boots on the Ground: A Month with the 82nd Airborne in the Battle for Iraq* (New York, New York: Truman Talley Books, 2003), 95.

¹⁰¹ John Ehrenberg, J. Patrice McSherry, Ramon Sanchez, Caroleen Marji Sayej, *The Iraq Papers* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 60.

started on March 30, 2003 under the name Iraqi Freedom. Saddam's rule toppled when coalition forces captured Baghdad on April 9, 2003. The iconic video of Saddam's statue falling over symbolized a new problem for the United States. Saddam's regime ended, but the resulting instability threatened Iraq's future. Operation Iraqi Freedom created a blazing insurgency, that raged throughout Baghdad, Fallujah, Ramadi, Sadr City, and Mosul. Counterinsurgency strategies from Vietnam resonated throughout Iraq, as military units fought to hold territories and eliminate insurgents.

Like Vietnam, Iraq suffered inevitable failure due to improper strategy, and tactics. The Bush administration failed to implement a proper plan after the fall of Baghdad. Defeating Saddam's Republican Guard proved relatively easy considering the invasion met less resistance from the conventionally minded Iraqi Army. President Bush explained on March 17, 2003, the lofty strategy for Operation Iraqi Freedom: "to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger." The result of the strategic failure forced the U.S. military to resort to familiar conventional tactics once the insurgency erupted. Backlash against the initial strategy met harsh critiques from inside the military. But, one large theme remained unaddressed until 2007: conventionally minded operations formed the backbone of the U.S. military's operations in Iraq.¹⁰²

Retired Army Colonel and historian, Gian Gentile lambasted the Iraq strategy from the beginning in *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*. "The problems in Iraq," Gentile argued, "had much less to do with the methods of armed nation building that the U.S. Army and Marine Corps were applying on the ground than

¹⁰² George W. Bush, "President Bush Addresses the Nation," March 17, 2004, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030319-17.html>, (Accessed January 25, 2017).

with key decisions of policy and strategy made at the start of the war.” Though he neglected the egregious conventional method in Iraq, Gentile’s revealed that the problems in Iraq started from positions of authority. The emphasis after the fall of Baghdad lacked in key areas, because the U.S. military focused too much attention on military might to suppress the insurgency. Security of the Iraqi people failed to materialize any realistic consideration. From 2003, until 2007, the primary focus during operations remained kinetic. This method failed to recognize the uselessness of hunting the insurgents when they melted into the population once a U.S. presence, or firepower was present.¹⁰³

“We’re not just going to pick off individual snakes; we intend to drain the entire swamp.” Paul Wolfowitz’s words from October of 2001 spoke volumes to the methodology of U.S. forces in Iraq. Strategy and tactics played an integral part in why the United States military struggled in Iraq. Through its warfighting capabilities, the U.S. military believed traditional methods could defeat both Saddam’s forces, and the insurgency that followed. But the tactics employed during a purely conventional fight played into an insurgent’s strategy to cripple U.S. will. Doctrinal deficiencies for American conventional units plagued the military because it focused on the offensive, instead of a flexible force. Doctrine, per Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (2001) “is the concise expression of how Army forces contribute to unified action in campaigns, major operations, battles, and engagements.” FM 3-0 praised tactics used during the Iraq

¹⁰³ Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America’s Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New York, New York: The New Press, 2013), 97; The time-period between March 30, and April 9, 2003 presented caveats to his argument, simply because the invasion of Iraq, and takeover of Baghdad was fought predominantly through conventional warfare.

invasion, which carried consequences when it dealt with subsequent insurgency problem.

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Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (2001) supplemented the invasion of Iraq, but not the peacekeeping mission that quickly followed. Primarily because Saddam's forces operated along conventional lines, and the initial invasion by Coalition forces encountered relatively low resistance in cities before the regime toppled. However, after the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, the military possessed no widely-disseminated doctrine, or method that accommodated for counterinsurgency operations. 3-0 started chapter seven, "Offensive Operations," with a quote from General George Patton, that reiterated the concept of the American way of war: "In war the only sure defense is offense, and the efficiency of the offense depends on the war-like souls of those conducting it." That offensive mentality proved detrimental for the boots on the ground. Major General James Mattis supported this philosophy during an interview when asked what the plan was for the I Marine Expeditionary Force in 2004. Mattis explained that "the main effort was diminishing support to the insurgency," and continued "we had an idea of how we'd diminish support for the insurgents there by doing things around the periphery." The periphery and destroying insurgents took precedence over interacting with the tribes, though Mattis claimed "the tribes, from the very beginning, that [was] the plan going in."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington D.C., Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2001), [http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/others/amd-us-archive/fm3-0\(01\).pdf](http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/others/amd-us-archive/fm3-0(01).pdf), 1-14; Quote taken from "The Iraq War- Part I: *The U.S. Prepares for Conflict, 2001*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Boon No. 326, Quotes," by Joyce Battle, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB326/IraqWarPart1-Quotes.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵ Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, 7-2; Timothy S. McWilliams, Kurtis P. Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening: Volume I, American Perspectives: U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009* (Quantico, Virginia; Marine Corps University, 2009), 24.

Although Mattis's statements reflected a surface level importance of the tribes, and the population, the overarching nature of the marines under his command engaged more with the insurgents. Even when asked about combined action platoons, like those in Vietnam, Mattis explained "the three P's: patient, persistent, presence."¹⁰⁶ Mattis's "P's" displayed the importance of retaining a solid presence in trouble areas, rather than sporadic appearances. These defensive overlaying tones by Mattis reflected an interesting component of military leadership. While some understood basic counterinsurgency concepts, the broader strategy in the military's counterinsurgency capabilities remained offensive. By going after insurgents through cordon-and-search operations, or by dropping precision munitions, the military's philosophy remained staunchly offensive. The insurgency environment remained difficult for the military because the insurgents operated among the population. Collateral damage provided a vehicle for the insurgency to paint the U.S. forces as an illegitimate occupying force. Thus, the insurgents turned U.S. superior firepower into a liability, rather than an asset.

"What we basically did, before we dropped a bomb," Lieutenant General John F. Sattler proclaimed "after about the two-week mark, [a] press release went out from us, telling what we did, why we did it, [that] the individual was a thug," and that the individual posed a threat to the Iraqi people in the area. The insurgents forced the U.S. military's hand when it used superior weapons, and exploited any amount of collateral damage. Osama Bin Laden exalted these efforts in his *Second Letter to Muslim Brothers in Iraq*. Advocating for guerrilla warfare, Bin Laden wrote "guerilla wars and martyrdom operations...they are the weapons that impede and insult the enemy, by the Grace of God,

¹⁰⁶ McWilliams, Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening: Volume I, American Perspectives*, 29.

the Most High [*sic*]. And they have an enormous impact in destroying the enemy's morale.” Appealing to the political nature of guerrilla warfare, Bin Laden praised the use of guerrilla tactics to gain an advantage over the United States forces. One of the only aspects of Bin Laden’s guerrilla mentality that aligned with Mao focused on the people. The raging insurgency in both Afghanistan and Iraq resembled more closely with another guerrilla warfare strategist; Che Guevara.¹⁰⁷

Bin Laden claimed that Islam was the sole religion of the world, and in his words “religion gets established by fighting.” Bin Laden’s philosophy aligned with Guevara more than Mao. Guevara’s approach to guerrilla warfare implemented a uniquely focused strategy that tailored the use of violence. Furthermore, Guevara’s focoist strategy¹⁰⁸ relied on the insurrection’s ability to create favorable situations, rather than Mao’s method of striking when the situation was indefinitely favorable to the guerrillas. Al Qaeda’s strategist, Abu Bakr Naji promoted the same element of guerrilla warfare in *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical State Through Which The Umma Will Pass*. Building on Guevara’s violence focus, Naji provided an example

“if [the military group] sends all of its members on this secure (by the permission of God) operation for the purpose of massacring and terrorizing the enemy, when the people and the newspapers talk about what happened, the people and the enemy will think that the coming operations will be even more concentrated and have a commensurate

¹⁰⁷ McWilliams, Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening: Volume I, American Perspectives*, 78; Osama Bin Laden, *Second Letter to Muslim Brothers in Iraq* (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Bin Laden’s Bookshelf, declassified material, March 1, 2016), <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/resources/bin-laden-bookshelf?start=1, 1, 2;>

¹⁰⁸ See Ernesto “Che” Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 47-48, Guevara’s focoist strategy for revolutionary warfare consisted of three main factors which differed quite drastically with Mao’s form of guerrilla warfare. The three components of Guevara’s focoism were that the “popular forces” can defeat a superior army, that it was unnecessary to “wait until all conditions...exist,” because the insurrection could create them, and finally, that the “underdeveloped countryside is the basic area for armed fighting.”

numerical increase, which will raise the reputation of the mujahids in the media and dissuade the hearts from opposing them.”¹⁰⁹

Bin Laden and Naji promoted violence and ensured the population provided the basic elements for the insurgency in Iraq. This strategy worked in Iraq, because U.S. forces focused on the insurgents at the beginning, while the insurgents were free to interact with the population.¹¹⁰

As of June 2001, special forces elements carried the counterinsurgency capabilities of the United States military. These units conducted unconventional warfare, trained indigenous forces, and implemented similar methods that insurgents used during guerrilla warfare. Outside of the special forces, the United States military largely formed its operational framework under conventional means. Artillery, air strikes, and reinforcements of heavily armored personnel carriers entered the battlefield. Armored vehicles the military used in Iraq intended to keep units protected, while simultaneously provided the firepower for hunting for insurgents. Civilians caught in the crossfire, or those used as bait stood no chance. Insurgents ensured that superior American firepower, and advanced technology destroyed much more than militants. Collateral damage and the tenants of insurgency, or guerrilla warfare made success difficult for a conventionally dominant force.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical State Through Which The Umma Will Pass*, Translated by William McCants (John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, 2006), <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf>, 29.

¹¹⁰ Bin Laden, *Second Letter to Muslim Brothers in Iraq*, 4; Ernesto Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 47.

¹¹¹ Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-05.20 (FM 31-20), *Special Forces Operations* (Washington D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, June 2001), <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-05-20.pdf>, 2-1.

Counterinsurgency in Iraq proved difficult for two reasons; the United States military operated under the impression that holding insurgent territories would pacify the people, and that the fear of American military might could deter these insurgents from attacking. 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry (mechanized) commander, Captain Todd Brown discovered the harsh realities of using “react-to-contact” methods. Brown wrote in *Battleground Iraq: Journal of a Company Commander*, “the mortars fired on *Anaconda*, [a forward operating base in Iraq] and the brigade fired back with artillery. Unfortunately, they had 24-knot winds and the rounds fell 500 meters short. They landed on a house, killing a lady and two kids.” Outside of physical collateral damage, the real problem for Brown’s units came from the locals. Collateral damage provoked the population to see the U.S. in a negative light, which opened the door for the insurgents. United States forces in Iraq all dealt with these vulnerabilities on the battlefield.¹¹²

The urban battlefields of Iraq produced this notion that U.S. forces primarily conducted house-to-house operations to root out insurgents. The universal view of forward operating bases in the Iraq War provided the framework for critics to promote alternative methods. The Iraq War received a bad reputation by those who advocated for population-focused counterinsurgency, because they argued American units commuted to the fight before 2007. The group that would later be classified by Thomas Ricks as the “COIN-dinistas,” pushed the narrative that forward operating bases (FOB) severely hindered counterinsurgency success due to limitations on securing the Iraqi population. That bad reputation, or narrative as Gentile argued, was unjustified. Gentile contended

¹¹² Todd S. Brown, *Battleground Iraq: Journal of a Company Commander* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2007),178.

that forward operating bases inadequately represented the broader counterinsurgency approach. Many units in Iraq used different methods than forward operating bases. Gentile recounted his experience with security operations in Tikrit in 2003. These operations focused on infrastructure, the key component of nation building, in hopes of aiding the community. However, the bulk of military operations in Iraq originated from these bases, and like in Vietnam, once the operation concluded the U.S. forces left the area of operations. This lack of presence allowed the insurgency free roam in Iraqi cities.

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Forward operating bases, and strictly offensive operations failed to prohibit the insurgents from moving, and consequently left them free to interact with the population. At the beginning of March 2004, the 4th Infantry Division met staunch insurgent resistance in Samarra. “The major effect of their operations,” Major John Casper revealed, “was that they didn’t actually kill or capture many of their targets but they did drive them into hiding in town.” Despite Casper’s optimism, hiding insurgents meant that U.S. forces had no way of killing them. Pair hiding insurgents with U.S. forces returning to forward operating bases when fighting was non-existent, and the rate of eliminating insurgents diminished altogether. Problems for Casper originated from the fluidity of the insurgents, something Mao Tse-Tung considered vital to guerrilla warfare. The fluidity that guerrilla warfare drew from, served as a fundamental problem that the early invasion

¹¹³ General David Petraeus, “Multi-national Force-Iraq Commander’s Counterinsurgency Guidance,” *Military Review*, September-October 2008, http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20081031_art004.pdf, (Accessed January 25, 2017), 2; Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 97, 93-94; The term “COIN-dinistas” comes from an article written by Thomas Ricks, “The COINdinistas,” (November 30, 2009), <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/30/the-coindinistas/>; According to Ricks, these counterinsurgency (COIN) experts cracked the code to America’s counterinsurgency problem.

of U.S. forces struggled with immensely. Consequently, the U.S. military continued to use unfeasible methods to fight counterinsurgency warfare.¹¹⁴

Operation Iraqi Freedom began with an impressive array of air power, something that carried over to the counterinsurgency operations that followed the invasion. Between March 19, 2001, and April 18, 2001, U.S. and Coalition forces fired almost 30,000 munitions. The U.S. military utilized air strikes, and other air assets to prosecute the war. Air power provided the military with a tactical edge over the insurgency, considering it never possessed weapons like the Americans. This edge produced a reliance on air capabilities in combat, like it did in Vietnam. After air strikes were conducted, the military emphasized sweeping operations. Once sweeping operations into the urban areas forced insurgents out of hiding, helicopters provided the option of interdicting the enemy. Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the subsequent operations until 2007, ostensibly pledged a counterinsurgency role, when realistically they resembled more offensive, conventional operations.¹¹⁵

The conception of operations against the insurgency facilitated a philosophy that emphasized sweeping missions along the battlefield to push out the insurgents. Once the insurgents pushed out from the urban areas, the might of the U.S. military could engage the enemy the way it wanted to: with its air power, and technological prowess. In April 2004, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry under the 2nd Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division

¹¹⁴ Matt M. Matthews, "Task Force 1-26 Infantry: The Easter Battle of Samarra, April 2004," in *Between the Rivers: Combat Action in Iraq, 2003-2005* ed. John J. McGrath (Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2012), 19.

¹¹⁵ T. Michael Moseley, "Operation Iraqi Freedom: By the Numbers," United States Air Force Central Command, April 30, 2003, <http://www.comw.org/pda/fulltext/oifcentaf.pdf>, (Accessed January 28, 2017), 11.

operated near the city of Hawijah, in Iraq. John J. McGrath detailed the intense operation in *Between the Rivers: Combat Action in Iraq, 2003-2005*, Captain Scott Carpenter commanded Alpha company. Forward Operating Base McHenry, located two miles outside of the city only permitted a platoon-size force to conduct operations inside the city.¹¹⁶ On April 7, an Iraqi Civil Defense Corps meeting sparked protests in the streets, which quickly escalated into hostilities against U.S. and Iraqi forces. Carpenter's problems mounted as insurgent numbers increased. He responded by deploying the reinforcing platoon from FOB McHenry, to push the insurgent offensive back, and take the initiative. However, resistance increased at a disproportionate rate. The insurgents forced Carpenter into devising a maneuver plan that created a disadvantage for the American forces.¹¹⁷

Carpenter's maneuvers relied on pushing the insurgents to the outskirts of the city, where Apache AH-64 attack helicopters could destroy the insurgents. The multi-platoon sweeps made moderate progress, and Carpenter called in Apaches to finish the maneuver. In textbook guerrilla warfare fashion, once the Apaches entered the area of operations, the insurgents faded into smaller units, and broke contact. Hawijah exemplified combat in Iraq from 2003 to 2007. Insurgents recognized the futility in engaging with the superior technology of the U.S. military and fled, which consequently enticed the American forces to classify the operations as successful. These outcomes developed a sweeping methodology in Iraq with an affinity to deploy American firepower to initiate the operation or end it, like in Vietnam. Offensive sweeps that prioritized

¹¹⁶ Due to a rotation duty, one platoon conducted operations, while a second platoon was placed on FOB duty. A third platoon previously conducted operations before the first platoon. This limiting factor contributed to Carpenter's problems once insurgents began their offensive.

¹¹⁷ John J. McGrath, "The Battle of Hajiwah, 7 April, 2003," in *Between the Rivers*, 3-9.

house-to-house searches for insurgents continued to cloud the judgement of the American military. Air support served as a lifeline, which in many combat situations adequately served as a necessary means to engage insurgents. Not all situations demanded the use of air support, and the military failed to operate with the flexibility needed that is imperative for counterinsurgency operations.¹¹⁸

Chief Warrant Officer Daniel J. Clanton reminisced on his deployment to Iraq with 2nd Battalion, 101 Airborne Division during an interview for the Veterans History Project. Clanton deployed to Iraq as an Apache pilot during the early stages of the insurgency. When asked about operations he participated in, Clanton described a primarily offensive role for the Apaches. “We ended up putting a scout helicopter,” he explained, “an OH-58, teamed up with one Apache. So, the Apache would fly a little bit higher, provide cover; and the scout would get right down on the rooftops and go looking for bad guys.” Once the scout helicopters “peeled off,” Clanton detailed, “then we would come in and-you know, and lay waste...to whatever we found.” Air support provided security to ground forces in dire situations. However, between 2003 and 2007, air support was used in ways to initiate, or disengage with the insurgents. Engagements throughout Al-Anbar province, the breeding ground for insurgents, illustrated this methodology perfectly.¹¹⁹

Al-Anbar presented an exceedingly difficult task for counterinsurgency missions, because of the concentration of former-Baathist, Republican Guardsmen, and foreign

¹¹⁸ McGrath, *Between the Rivers*, 11-13.

¹¹⁹ Daniel J. Clanton, Interview by Jeffrey Sanford, October 28, 2011, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Fort Worth, Texas, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.84815/transcript?ID=mv0001>, (accessed January 27, 2017).

fighters that flocked to the province after Saddam's toppling in 2003. Sunni Muslims inhabited the bulk of al-Anbar. From Tikrit, south towards Ramadi, and ending east towards Baghdad, this region was labeled the Sunni Triangle. Al-Anbar produced some of the fiercest battles early during the war. As the largest province, taking up almost a third of the country, Al-Anbar garnered the bulk of American military focus. Operations into the Sunni Triangle, and the surrounding province offered a glimpse into the military's offensive philosophy.

Al-Qaim District, located along the Iraq-Syria border in November 2003 included a large proportion of Saddam's Baathist supporters. The 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, tasked with training Iraqi military, and police forces noted an increasingly hostile environment materializing in late-summer, and early-fall of 2003. By November, the situation deteriorated. Colonel David Teeples, with the help of three battalions, initiated Operation Rifles Blitz. Teeples asserted that collateral damage must not deter the population away from the coalition. However, preparatory artillery, and air strikes intended to notify the town and insurgents of the U.S. presence. Artillery Captain Anthony Yeatts, who recalled the preparatory air strikes and artillery:

The first day we were just trying to wake [the Iraqis] up and the opening volley was some three-round missions all around the town, very close to the town where the aviation was following up right into it. About that time was when all the phone lines were being cut and the power was being cut. We were just letting them sit there for a while to let them think about what was going on before everything really kicked off.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Thomas A. Brusino Jr., "Clearing the Jihad Super Bowl: Al Qaim District, Anbar Province November 2003," in *Between the Rivers*, 83.

The air power of the U.S. military intended to deter the insurgents from fighting.

American forces followed the air strikes and artillery with a four-day sweep into their responsible zones. Insurgent resistance was low, like it was with Carpenter's men after the Apaches came into the fight in Hawijah. Commanders from Rifles Blitz concluded the decreased activity following the artillery, air strikes, and sweeps successfully rooted out the insurgency in Al-Qaim, at least momentarily. Thomas Brusino Jr. explained the marine unit that relieved the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment experienced problems months after Operation Rifles Blitz. The resurgence of hostilities after the regiment left suggested the insurgency melted into the population to avoid superior firepower.¹²¹

Military hubris plagued counterinsurgency operations during Vietnam. In Iraq, it was no different. Major General Stephen T. Johnson recounted his command over II Marine Expeditionary Force in an interview conducted by Lieutenant Colonel Craig H. Covert. From July 2005 until the December elections, Operation Sayeed, an umbrella operation to drive the insurgency out of the Euphrates River Valley in Al-Albar buttressed American conventional approaches to counterinsurgency. Johnson bumptiously claimed that "we put the insurgent back on his heels." Johnson's military hubris exposed the chief problem in the U.S. military during the Iraq war. The reliance on the offensive as the best choice to fighting counterinsurgency warfare mirrored the same mentality that the military brass unequivocally praised in Vietnam. Johnson continued his admiration for offensive approaches, focused on kinetic operations.¹²²

¹²¹ Brusino, *Between the Rivers*, 92.

¹²² Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening*, 105.

Operation Sayeed gravitated towards the boldness of American conventional capabilities. “The 2d Marine Division, and RCT-2 (regimental combat team) in particular, did a magnificent job of fighting a counterinsurgency fight, taking the fight to the enemy...,” Johnson ambiguously stated. The focal point throughout Johnson’s interview revealed that the military actively, and kinetically sought out the enemy. The counterinsurgency fight the Major General referenced contained small characteristics of successful counterinsurgency operations. Johnson elaborated on the incorporation of the Iraqi Security Forces as a key accomplishment that provided a safe environment for elections in the province. However, the emphasis on vigorously engaging with the insurgency dominated over providing a flexible response, or alternative counterinsurgency methods.¹²³

The insurgency used cities like Fallujah, Ramadi, and Sadr City to stage attacks against U.S. and Coalition forces. Fallujah, located thirty-five miles west of Baghdad, housed large contingents of insurgents following the fall of Baghdad. American and Coalition forces attacked Fallujah twice to emoliate the insurgency’s pressure on Baghdad. The first operation failed in April 2004. The First Marine Expeditionary Force arrived in March, relieving the 82nd Airborne Division. The Marines hoped to break from the traditional search-and-sweep operations the Army conducted, by focusing more on the population. The increased marine presence provoked hostilities. On March 31, 2004, insurgents in Fallujah burned bodies of private military contractors and hung them from a bridge on the western edge of the city. The response, Operation Vigilant Resolve, sought retribution for the brutal killings, and to take back control of Fallujah. The

¹²³ Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening*, 105-106.

operation showed characteristics of a hasty, emotional response. The impact of the emotional response established an operation that conducted preparatory, and precision air strikes, followed by a large, four marine battalion sweep of the city.

Operation Vigilant Resolve halted due to heavy resistance, and the marines withdrew on April 9 after occupying a large portion of the city. A second operation for taking Fallujah materialized after the Iraqi government authorized an additional assault against Fallujah. Operation Phantom Fury, or Operation Al Fajr attempted what Operation Vigilant Resolve failed to achieve. Before the attack began, U.S. and Coalition forces, and the Iraqi government initiated a civilian evacuation of the city to alleviate any unnecessary collateral damage. After a cordon of the city was established, an eight-hour aerial and artillery bombardment began the assault on the city, followed by four marine battalions and two army battalions conducting a sweep to eliminate the remaining insurgents. Colonel Michael Formica, commander of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 1st Cavalry Division, explained the preparatory artillery barrage: “it was just unbelievable the amount of firepower that was being used there. My battery alone shot over 1,800 rounds of 155.” Artillery constituted the bulk of the preparatory strikes to soften the insurgency within the city.¹²⁴

Colonel Michael Shupp, commander of Regimental Combat Team I (1st Marines) recalled a similar, but substantially larger artillery output by his battery than Colonel Formica’s. “My 155s fired over 4,000 rounds inside the city,” he explained. Because of the immense air and artillery barrage, marine and army units breached the city with

¹²⁴ Kendall Gott, *Eyewitness to War, Volume I: The U.S. Army in Operation AL FAJR: An Oral History* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 33.

relatively little resistance. David Bellavia, staff sergeant in 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, stood shocked after his unit breached the north side of Fallujah, and remembered “The pre-assault bombardment has turned this part of the city into a holocaust of twisted wreckage, mangled buildings, and broken vehicles. Houses have been cleaved in two, as if some sadistic giant has performed architectural vivisection on the entire neighborhood.” The remaining insurgents met a massive rain of fire from the invading ground forces, and the air support above. AC-130 gunships provided constant air support for ground forces. The night-vision capabilities the gunship provided barred insurgents from controlling the streets of Fallujah. ¹²⁵

Operation Phantom Fury illustrated a vivid, destructive assault that displayed the capabilities, and showed how the military wanted to fight. Fallujah distorted the military’s outlook on how to engage the insurgency. Phantom Fury was conceptually a conventional operation that effectively pushed the insurgency out of Fallujah, but at the costly price of immense collateral damage. The operation decimated the urban environment of Fallujah, which made the counterinsurgency mission for those in Fallujah difficult. ¹²⁶

Operations like Phantom Fury in Fallujah, Rifles Blitz in Al-Qaim, and the Battle of Hawijah demonstrated that the military fought the insurgency in Iraq the way it wanted to fight. Instead of analyzing the insurgency’s methods of fading from the battlefield once air strikes, artillery, helicopters, and close air support were used, the military continued to implement those same methods of fighting. The genesis of operations flowed from

¹²⁵ David Bellavia *House to House: A Soldier’s Memoir* with John R. Brunning (New York, New York: Free Press, 2007), 90-91.

¹²⁶ Gott, *Eyewitness to War, Volume I*, 60.

forward operating bases, followed by ground forces, that conducted house-to-house searches for insurgents closely resembled the mobility driven air assault capabilities utilized during Vietnam. Military operations continued these approaches until late-2006, where a reformed counterinsurgency philosophy materialized as the military sought to change the tactical outlook on operations. A cohort of counterinsurgency experts, Ricks' "COIN-dinistas," met at the Combined Arms Center, and created a new military doctrine that reflected a change in counterinsurgency approaches.

General David Petraeus, and the "COIN-dinistas" met at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and recreated the U.S.'s counterinsurgency doctrine. U.S. Army and Marine Corps, Counterinsurgency Field Manual *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5*¹²⁷ took a population-centric approach to counterinsurgency. The new manual illustrated what Westmoreland, MACV, McNamara, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff during Vietnam failed to implement. The insurgents' strategy in Iraq exploited the population against the U.S. military, and American operations failed to adequately address the insurgent strategy. The population enabled the insurgents to move freely amongst civilians, while using any collateral damage as propaganda against the U.S. The new manual focused more on countering the insurgents' monopoly on the population. The primarily offensive driven operations tapered off, and gave way to population-centric approaches. The field manual offered no new theories for

¹²⁷ Hereafter referred to as *Counterinsurgency*, or Field Manual 3-24.

counterinsurgency operations, and relied on counterinsurgency theories from the Cold War era.¹²⁸

Field Manual 3-24 advocated the offensive, while it added the defensive characteristics that developed during the Vietnam War. “Clear-hold-build,” one of the three approaches explained by the manual, though more offensively minded, sought to establish both government control over an area, and popular support. This approach dangerously resembled search-and-destroy operations with the added “build” aspect. “Clear-hold-build objectives require lots of resources and time,” meaning a healthy source of men and materiel. Additionally, the manual took a page out of the British counterinsurgency playbook from Malaya, “Clear-hold-build operations should expand outward from a secure base.” The second, and more defensive oriented approach developed during Vietnam. Combined Action in Vietnam highlighted an indigenous force with American forces. “This approach attempts to first achieve security and stability in a local area, followed by operations against insurgent forces now denied access or support.” Combined Action suited counterinsurgency warfare more than search-and-destroy operations, because it denied and secured the population away from the enemy and did not lead with the offensive.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ U.S. Army and Marine Corps, Counterinsurgency Field Manual *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), xvii; xxi, xxxviii, hereafter referenced as *Field Manual 3-24*.

¹²⁹ *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5*, 174-175, 184; See Gian Gentile’s *Wrong Turn: America’s Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* and John Nagl’s *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* for detailed secondary literature on the British Malaya experience. Moreover, the inkblot method succeeded in Malaya, because it utilized effective security measures by establishing an effective police system. The Field Manual used David Galula’s *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* quite frequently. Galula’s counterinsurgency theory noted the importance of the population, and served as an adequate doctrinal response to Mao’s *On Guerrilla Warfare*.

The manual argued in favor of the offensively minded clear-hold-build operations that “a combined action program can work only in areas with limited insurgent activity.” Taking the fight to the insurgency produced detrimental problems in Vietnam, and in the early years of Iraq, which made the emphasis on clear-hold-build surprising, considering Petraeus’ surge of ideas. Defensive operations, like CAP during Vietnam, and the defensively oriented inkblot strategy that the British used in Malaya, produced better outcomes than search-and-destroy, and house-to-house missions. Regardless of the inherent offensively minded U.S. military, the shift to population counterinsurgency allowed the military more flexibility, which it lacked in the previous counterinsurgency struggles. The only addition needed was an adequate fighting force to conduct these operations.¹³⁰

The sequence of events from fall of 2006, to January 10, 2007 pushed the war in Iraq to the edge. Insurgents increased their attacks during the fall of 2006, which changed the philosophy of how the U.S. military viewed the war. In coordination with the Al Anbar Awakening, where anti-al Qaeda, and anti-Taliban Sunni Iraqis ardently opposed the terrorist group’s control in Al Anbar province sectarian violence erupted throughout Anbar, and in Baghdad. The ensuing chaos produced by the Awakening, paired with the doctrinal change, created a more favorable outcome for the U.S. than the previous four years. Al Qaeda and Taliban control vanished, though, at the cost of brutal sectarian violence. President Bush addressed the nation on January 10, 2007 detailing the changing situation in Iraq:

¹³⁰ *U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No 3-33.5*, 184.

America will change our strategy to help the Iraqis carry out their campaign to put down sectarian violence and bring security to the people of Baghdad. This will require increasing American force levels. So I have committed more than 20,000 additional American troops to Iraq. The vast majority of them -- five brigades -- will be deployed to Baghdad. These troops will work alongside Iraqi units and be embedded in their formations.¹³¹

Iraq's sectarian violence, coupled with the increase in troop numbers to conduct the "embedded" missions Bush referenced meant that the U.S. no longer fought predominantly house-to-house, or from forward operating bases. Instead, it was a war that focused on population security.

In addition to the five brigades to secure Baghdad, four thousand marines were dedicated to "reinforce efforts in al-Anbar province to combat al-Qaeda in conjunction with local tribal leaders." The Surge determined to suppress sectarian violence, and seize the initiative of the war through population security. Whether through clear-hold-build operations, or Combined Action, the framework in Iraq expressed a new outlook on the war in Iraq. The Surge began in February 2007, where Multi-National Force-Corps commander, Lieutenant General Ray Odierno and his staff, devised Operation Fardh al-Qanoon to secure Baghdad. Translated to "Enforcing the Law," Operation Fardh al-Qanoon began with securing Baghdad, but showed characteristics of an offensive campaign against the insurgency.¹³²

¹³¹ President George W. Bush, "President Bush Addresses Nation on Iraq War," Transcript, *Washington Post*, January 10, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/10/AR2007011002208.html>, (Accessed February 4, 2017).

¹³² Colonel Peter R. Mansoor, *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), 55.

The concept of Operation Fardh al-Qanoon described by Retired Army Colonel Peter Mansoor “as the ‘doughnut plan,’ which envisioned Baghdad as the center of a series of concentric rings surrounding the city.” This plan relied on protection by two brigades in the center of the city, while three brigades moved into the “Baghdad belts,” located around the city, to fight the insurgents. The clear-hold-build method during Fardh al-Qanoon incorporated a key component *Field Manual 3-24*. It established a presence, proceeded with protective elements, while the offensive units rooted out the insurgency. It also incorporated efforts from Combined Action. Iraqi units, paired with American units in combat outposts, created a stronger coordination within the area of operation. More than sixty-six of these outposts utilized the Surge’s mentality inside Baghdad. Community presence allowed for a larger focus on intelligence gathering, which augmented the security approach. The lack of proper intelligence hindered the operational success of the U.S. counterinsurgency missions during the years before 2007. This is where the Surge’s benefits excelled at creating favorable situations.¹³³

For Petraeus, the Surge devoted itself to much more than combat operations. Petraeus’ foreword in Peter Mansoor’s *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War* contextualized the efforts the Surge provided for the military as an institution. Petraeus termed it as “The surge of ideas,” that shifted the attention away from the insurgents to the “human terrain,” or population, and security. The human terrain created intelligence the U.S. failed to gather, or even had the opportunity to gather before. Information such as census data, which enabled effective checkpoints, provided a way to monitor sections of Iraq. Operationally, this mentality

¹³³ Mansoor, *Surge*, 65-68, 73.

changed the battlefield. The most important aspect of this shift was that U.S. forces relied less on forward operating bases, and more on living within the population it hoped to protect. American and Iraqi forces no longer commuted to the fight. They staged their operations from combat outposts, and patrol bases. Comparing situations from the pre-Surge years, to the Surge exposed the deficiencies of earlier counterinsurgency operations.¹³⁴

Soldiers and marines in the field prior to the Surge noted differences following the surge's implementation. Staff Sergeant Kevin Frantz commended the Surge efforts:

the place itself was a lot safer. In 2006 they hadn't done the surge yet...they hadn't started like, little command posts out amongst the people. Everyone still lived on the FOBs [Forward Operating Base]. And then when we got there in 2008, it was the end of the surge, so there was troops everywhere. There was little patrol bases everywhere, but it was safer.¹³⁵

The detachment from the forward operating bases enabled a new form of staging bases. Instead of forward operating bases, U.S. forces staged operations from combat outposts, and patrol bases. These bases were located inside the area in which the units it housed, operated. Spatially, the battlefield shrank, and allowed a better presence among the population.

Population-centric counterinsurgency operations provided security for the population, but also coalesced into safer situations for military forces. Mercer

¹³⁴ Mansoor, *Surge*, x; Petraeus, "Multi-national Force-Iraq Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance," *Military Review*, 2.

¹³⁵ Kevin Frantz, Interview by Robbie Fucela, November 8, 2011, Cantigny First Division Project III Oral Histories, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, <http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/CtgnyOrHis/id/69/rec/13>, (Accessed February 4, 2017), 16.

remembered his scout platoon conducting convoy missions to find either weapons caches, improvised explosive device (IED) makers, or insurgents responsible for ordering IED attacks. Mercer, like Frantz applauded new efforts in Iraq: “We were able to go out and mainly talk with the local people.” Mercer continued to praise these operations and the difference from the previous operations, was “again all part of the actual counterinsurgency operation, really getting imbedded with the people.” *Field Manual 3-24*, and the Surge reformed the American way of counterinsurgency. Instead of Vietnam-era operations that relied on mobility, supported by artillery, and air strikes, the military utilized the population as its weapon to defeat the insurgency. The outcome forced the insurgents on their heels, and to re-evaluate their operations. Implementing security operations first, followed by offensives that incorporated the inkblot method, enabled the U.S., and Iraqi military to make progress.¹³⁶

After the 2006 attack on the al-Askari mosque in Samarra, the insurgents bombed the Shiite shrine again in June 2007. They hoped to create the same pandemonium, and initiate sectarian violence on the same level as the previous attack produced. U.S. and Iraqi forces planned a large coalition offensive to cripple the insurgency’s foothold in Baghdad, and the surrounding areas. Operation Phantom Thunder’s primary objective during the offensive stage in the Surge was to clear Baqubah of insurgents, located in Diyala province. Phantom Thunder utilized “a considerable amount of firepower from ground combat vehicles, attack helicopters, guided rockets, artillery, armed Predator

¹³⁶ Paul Mercer, Interview by Tanner Russo, November 20, 2010, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Fauquier, Virginia, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.76066/transcript?ID=sr0001>, (Accessed February 4, 2017).

drones, and fighter aircraft,” recalled retired Army Colonel Peter Mansoor. Despite the offensive nature of Phantom Thunder, U.S. and Iraqi forces in Baqubah managed to suppress insurgent hostilities. The key difference afterwards was that instead of leaving the area of operations, the units remained in the provincial capital city. Mansoor argued that Phantom Thunder “was an enormously important and successful operation that in the summer of 2007 turned the tide of the war in Iraq.” The subsequent year and half established a security presence in key areas throughout Iraq, which allowed offensive counterinsurgency operations.¹³⁷

Other operations from 2007 to 2008, most notably Operation Phantom Strike into northwestern Baghdad outlined the offensive approach to clear-hold-build operations. Petraeus dubbed the operation as an attempt like that of the Union’s Anaconda Plan from the American Civil War. Phantom Strike planned to constrict al-Qaeda’s needs to regain the initiative, which included provoking instability throughout Iraq like it did at the al-Askari mosque. This strategy introduced kinetic operations, to deny sanctuaries, non-kinetic operations to sustain population control, and increased intelligence.¹³⁸ Although Phantom Thunder, Phantom Strike, and the operations underneath emphasized a more kinetic approach, it coordinated simultaneous missions to safeguard population control. These operations followed into mid-2008, when the Surge lifted. The Surge’s legacy sparked debates that attempted to assess its successes and failures, but improper strategy clouded many judgements from seeing a comprehensive approach to improving situations in Iraq.

¹³⁷ Mansoor, *Surge*, 155, 158.

¹³⁸ Mansoor, *Surge*, 177-173.

Thomas Ricks argued that it “was the right step to take, or more precisely, the least wrong move in a misconceived war.” Ricks’ view halfheartedly supported the surge, but failed to note the importance Petraeus’s surge of ideas within the military. Gian Gentile offered a trenchant disposition towards glorifying Petraeus, and the Surge. “The real story in Iraq,” Gentile wrote, “is one of continuity between the commanding generals and the policies they put in place. This continuity suggests that effective counterinsurgency tactics practiced throughout the war and commanding generals whose generalship was largely the same are not enough to save a war that was fought under a botched strategy.” Both arguments spoke to the fallibility of American strategy within counterinsurgency practices, but failed to see the overarching theme of progress. For the soldiers and marines that conducted counterinsurgency during the surge, the Surge produced results that made counterinsurgency easier. The implementation of realistic counterinsurgency during the Surge produced drastically different outcomes from the early operations during Iraqi Freedom. Once hostilities were reduced to a manageable level in mid-2008, the nation building effort commenced with the intention of reducing the U.S. presence in Iraq.¹³⁹

The problems that the military encountered after stabilizing, and reducing sectarian violence to manageable levels, resembled the shortcomings of nation building in Vietnam. Nation building’s objectives, defined by the RAND Corporation’s *The Beginners Guide to Nation-Building* “is to leave behind a society likely to remain at peace with itself and its neighbors once external security forces are removed and full

¹³⁹ Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 295; Gentile, *Wrong Turn*, 98.

sovereignty is restored.” The Iraqi government failed to pick up the progress when U.S. forces passed the torch. Many military efforts to source construction jobs to Iraqi contractors promoted development, labor, and income for Iraqis. Captain Robert Brossett, deployed to Iraq in the summer of 2009. Under the 5th Engineer Battalion, Brossett’s platoon provided security for Iraqi contractors that were hired to construct roads, buildings, or clean water initiatives. Brossett and his platoon aided the hearts-and-minds approach to counterinsurgency in Iraq under Commander Emergency Response Program (CERP). This program used Iraq and U.S. funds to hire Iraqis “to improve their civil capacities to make life better for the Iraqi people.” CERP projects, as well as civilian programs slowly allocated U.S. duties to the Iraqi government. The transfer of responsibility to the Iraqi government altered the war in Iraq, mainly due to the abilities, and motives of the Iraq government.¹⁴⁰

The U.S. and Iraq signed the Status of Force Agreement on November 17, 2008, which pledged a complete withdrawal of American forces in Iraq by December 31, 2011.¹⁴¹ Additionally, the Surge officially ended in the summer of 2008. Iraqization, a term synonymous to Vietnamization, assumed that the surge, and the progress from 2007-2008, allowed the Iraqi government to shoulder the burden of protecting its citizens. The progress on the battlefield during the Surge made this transition easier. Army Specialist

¹⁴⁰ James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, Beth Cole DeGrasse, *The Beginners Guide to Nation-Building* (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, National Security Research Division, 2007), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG557.pdf, (Accessed February 12, 2017), xxxvi; Robert Brossett, Interview by Gigi Robinson, Transcript, November 8, 2011, Cantigny First Division Project III Oral Histories, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, <http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/CtgnyOrHis/id/68/rec/2>, (Accessed February 7, 2017), 12-13.

¹⁴¹ U.S. State Department, “Agreement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq On the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq,” November 17, 2008, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/122074.pdf>, (Accessed February 26, 2017), 20.

Zachary Garbrecht's unit deployed in 2010 to Kirkuk, located in northern Iraq, to conduct Iraqi Police training. Garbrecht affirmed this change in responsibilities when his unit initiated a specialized police program, the Joint Investigation Team: "we train them, and they get trained by their own. Their own investigators train and become certified investigators." In addition to a botched strategy, that Gentile, Ricks, and countless others argued, the post-Surge years developed a nation building policy that failed to ensure Iraq's security.¹⁴²

Nation building promoted infrastructure, and helped train Iraqi military and police units for stability. However, once the U.S. military turned over responsibilities to the Iraqis, the situation deteriorated. Many factors created the situation following the Surge, and the American withdrawal. Each one failed to recognize an adequate timeframe for counterinsurgency operations. The U.S. military failed to retain its security presence for a longer period than a year and a half. The U.S. gambled with sectarian violence, which provoked hostilities at the height of Petraeus' restructuring of military philosophy. Iraqi military, and police forces failed to provide comparable security to the population, in the American absence. These factors compounded the post-Surge condition in Iraq. However, the factor that pushed Iraq back to the pre-2006 years happened after the Iraqi government assumed the bulk of responsibilities.

Most of the surge's progress deteriorated after the final withdrawal of U.S. troops in December 2011. The Surge generated a series of initiatives that democratized the Iraqi

¹⁴² Zachary Garbrecht, Interview by Sarah Myers, Transcript, November 8, 2011, Cantigny First Division Project III Oral Histories, Ball State University, Muncie Indiana, <http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/CtgnyOrHis/id/73/rec/15>, (Accessed February 7, 2017), 12.

government, making positions available to a wider range of people rather than a singular group. Sectarian differences started by the Iraqi government between Sunnis and Shia Iraqis provoked the return to a problematic Iraq. “Those Iraqi government actions,” Petraeus wrote, “have also prompted prominent Sunnis to withdraw from the government and led the Sunni population to take to the streets in protest. As a result of all this, Iraqi politics are now mired in mistrust and dysfunction.” Failed cooperation between the religious groups following the U.S. withdrawal created instability, which al Qaeda, and consequently, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) capitalized to regain the initiative.¹⁴³

Counterinsurgency warfare is an arduous process that cannot be viewed in short term approaches. Moreover, strategy must promote fluidity, much like the enemy’s irregular strategy. The pre-2007 years in Iraq went against these concepts, and produced insurmountable consequences. *Field Manual 3-24* created method of American counterinsurgency warfare that focused more on population security, than American firepower. Although, the U.S. military has not completely cracked the code on counterinsurgency, it understands the main thrust of guerrilla warfare. The Surge in 2007 proved that population-centric operations created a safer environment for U.S. forces, and the population. Iraqization tainted counterinsurgency successes, and provoked a negative outcry against counterinsurgency warfare following 2011. The impact Iraq had on the Global War on Terror generated severe animosities towards other counterinsurgency operations, most notably in Afghanistan. The Iraq war began with a botched strategy, but

¹⁴³ David Petraeus, “How We Won in Iraq,” *Foreign Policy*, October 29, 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/10/29/how-we-won-in-iraq/>, (Accessed February 13, 2017).

changes by *Field Manual 3-24*, and Petraeus in 2007, demonstrated that the U.S. military began understanding counterinsurgency better than it did in Vietnam.

The war in Iraq during the Surge illustrated the type of war the United States needed to fight where it committed its ground troops during the Global War on Terror. However, the war in Afghanistan failed to harbor Petraeus' Surge of ideas until 2009. By then, a new presidential administration pledged, and instituted a smaller American presence in the Middle East, and South Asia as the Global War on Terror entered its seventh year.

Conclusion

Counterinsurgency in Vietnam applied practices that, in a long-term sense, put American forces in danger. Search-and-destroy missions attempted to find, fix, and eliminate Viet Cong insurgents in a conventional battle. This approach proved problematic because it allowed the insurgency to gain the initiative. After-action reports from 1st Cavalry, 4th Infantry, and 25th Infantry operations all exposed how the American military wanted to fight in Vietnam. American forces used Arc Light strikes, artillery, napalm, air mobility, and search-and-destroy operations to hunt for an almost invisible adversary. Adding another element to the problems this method created in Vietnam, the rare occasions that enemy contact enabled the U.S. military to effectively engage the Viet Cong, the battle for hearts-and-minds was lost. Marine lieutenant Philip Caputo's January engagement during Operation Long Lance in 1966 exemplified the U.S. counterinsurgency method which did not change until 2007.

Caputo called in a tactical air strike on January 5, 1966. After successfully coordinating the air strikes with two Skyhawks, Caputo and his company proceeded to the search leg of their search-and-destroy mission in the Vu Gia Valley. On the hunt for the North Vietnamese Army battalion in the area, they came across a village with a large cache of rice, medical supplies, uniforms, and equipment. Caputo's request for a helicopter to remove it altogether from Viet Cong use was denied because the company was on a tight schedule. Caputo gave the order to destroy the cache, despite one of his sergeant's eloquent verbal response to the egregious solution. The destructive emphasis by the U.S. military in Vietnam produced a situation that made winning the hearts-and-minds of the South Vietnamese countryside nearly impossible. Destroying livelihoods

and lifestyles in isolated villages fueled Viet Cong propaganda, ultimately pushing the most important factor in counterinsurgency warfare against the U.S.: the population.¹⁴⁴

This vignette serves two purposes. On the one hand, Caputo's experience showed how not to conduct counterinsurgency warfare. The military's goal had less to do with pacification and more with conventionally eliminating the enemy. On the other hand, it showed that the military decided what war it wanted to fight with little room for change or flexibility. During the surge in Iraq, the U.S. military put itself in the best possible situation to do just that. By increasing troop numbers to effectively field a force that amply provided population security through a constant presence, it produced far more favorable outcomes than the previous four years. The 2008 presidential election altered the progress that the surge produced. Consequently, the Obama administration pushed for a policy in Iraq with less troops, due in part to the contentious reasons for invading the country in 2003. Afghanistan was more complex. Nevertheless, a similar shift away from the long-term outlook materialized. Drone strikes provided short-term outcomes.

In Vietnam, Iraq outside of the surge years, and Afghanistan, the U.S. military failed to understand the difference between the war it wanted to fight, and the war it had to fight. What resulted in all three locations was an incessant reliance on traditional, conventional methods that failed to work in an unconventional environment. The short-term approach to counterinsurgency failed in Vietnam, Iraq in the pre-2007 years, and remains problematic in Afghanistan with precision munitions and drone strikes. Should the American military be committed to similar conflicts as these, strategic limitations

¹⁴⁴ Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York, New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1996), 299-300.

cannot outweigh its tactical capabilities. Those capabilities need to be flexible to battlefield realities, however harsh that pill is to swallow for the American military. Additionally, the American public plays an integral role in achieving counterinsurgency success. Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan showed how an intolerant and exhausted home front can cripple a counterinsurgency campaign. When the American public lost its motivation to support the Global War on Terror around 2012, precision munitions and drones replaced the Surge mentality that provided the best counterinsurgency alternative, though at a cost to American lives. This cyclical strategy fails in the long term.

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