Decade of War: Enduring Lessons from a Decade of Operations[1]

SUMMARIZED BY ELIZABETH YOUNG

The year 2001 began with the inauguration of a U.S. President deliberately aiming to shift the use of the military away from the numerous humanitarian and peacekeeping interventions of the 1990s toward responding to and defeating conventional threats from nation-states. The mood was optimistic, with the new U.S. National Security Strategy, recently put in place by the departing Clinton administration, citing widespread financial prosperity and conveying no sense of an imminent threat to the homeland.[2] But this situation proved fragile: the events of a single day, September 11, 2001, altered the trajectory of the United States and the way it used its military over the next decade. A nation focused on countering conventional threats was now confronted by an enemy that attacked the homeland with low-tech means in asymmetric and unexpected ways—individuals armed with box-cutters using hijacked civilian aircraft.

In the decade following 9/11, it became evident that the Cold War model that had guided foreign policy for the previous 50 years no longer fit the emerging global environment. Key changes included:

- A shift from U.S. hegemony toward national pluralism
- The erosion of sovereignty and the impact of weak states
- The empowerment of small groups or individuals
- An increasing need to fight and win in the information domain.

In the midst of these changes, the United States employed its military in a wide range of operations to address perceived threats from both nation-state and terrorist groups; to strengthen partner nation

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militaries; to conduct humanitarian assistance operations; and to provide defense support of civil authorities in catastrophic incidents such as Hurricane Katrina. This wide range of operations aimed to promote and protect national interests in the changing global environment.

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In general, operations during the first half of the decade were marked by numerous missteps and challenges as the U.S. Government and military applied a strategy and force best suited for a different threat and environment. Operations in the second half of the decade often featured successful adaptations to overcome these challenges. From our study of this "decade of war," we identified 11 overarching, enduring themes that present opportunities for the nation to continue to learn and improve. In this article, we briefly summarize each of these themes.

Lesson 1: Understanding the Environment

In operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, a failure to recognize, acknowledge, and accurately define the operational environment led to a mismatch between forces, capabilities, missions, and goals. The operational environment encompassed not only the threat but also the physical, informational, social, cultural, religious, and economic elements of the environment; each of these elements was important to understanding the root causes of conflicts, developing an appropriate approach, and anticipating second-order effects.[3] Despite the importance of the operational environment, the U.S. approach often did not reflect the actual operational environment, with different components of the

government undertaking different approaches. In addition, a nuanced understanding of the environment was often hindered by an intelligence apparatus focused on traditional adversaries rather than the host nation population.

There were a number of examples where separate elements of the U.S. Government undertook different approaches based on their views of the nature of the conflict and operational environment. In Iraq in 2003, military plans included assumptions regarding the rapid reconstitution of Iraqi institutions based on the understanding that national capabilities had to be rebuilt to promote governance and stability. Yet the first two orders issued by the civilian Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) unexpectedly removed both host nation security forces and midlevel government bureaucrats, crippling Iraqi governance capacity and providing fuel for the insurgency.[4] These actions created a "security gap" that lasted for years and widened over time, reducing the effectiveness of the reconstruction effort, causing the population to lose trust in the coalition and Iraqi government, and allowing terrorist and criminal elements to thrive. Two years later, civilian- and military-led reconstruction and development efforts still had different missions and perceived end states, which led to large expenditures with limited return, as well as missed opportunities for synergy.

A complete understanding of the operational environment was often hindered by U.S. intelligence-gathering that focused on traditional adversary information, neglecting "white" information about the population that was necessary for success in population-centric campaigns such as counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. Local commanders needed information about ethnic and tribal identities, religion, culture, politics, and economics; however, intelligence products primarily provided information about enemy

actions. This problem was exacerbated by shortages of human intelligence personnel and interpreters needed to capture critical information from the population, as well as a lack of fusion of this intelligence with other sources of information. Furthermore, there were no pre-established priority intelligence requirements or other checklists or templates that could serve as first-order approximations for what units needed to know for COIN. As a result, processes for obtaining information on population-centric issues tended to be based on discovery learning and were not consistently passed to follow-on units.

Other intelligence capabilities and platforms proved valuable to understanding the environments in Iraq and Afghanistan but were in short supply—eventually, their numbers surged in both countries as their value was recognized. For example, manned expeditionary intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms were developed and fielded (for example, Task Force Odin and Project Liberty) in response to growing recognition of an unmet requirement.[5]

Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations similarly required an understanding of the operational environment for success. Timely initial assessments were critical for an effective response. These assessments were used to determine command and control requirements, estimate damage (including the status of critical infrastructure), gauge the size and type of required military response units, and establish deployment priorities. In natural disasters, these assessments were often difficult to achieve due to limited availability of assets. While the U.S. military had significant capability for performing these assessments, the assets used for these assessments (usually air) were typically in high demand for delivering aid and performing search and rescue missions.

In the latter part of the decade, forces learned to overcome challenges, gradually developing innovative, nontraditional means and organizations to develop a more nuanced understanding of the operational environment. These means included direct interaction with the local population through patrols, *shuras*, and key leader engagements; the creation of fusion cells that coupled operations and intelligence information; the expanded use of liaison officers to facilitate communication and coordination; and the practice of all-source network nodal analysis to guide actions and engagements. These efforts were supported by senior leaders and organizations that assumed risk to fully share information among U.S. forces, interagency partners, host nation forces, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), industry, and academia. Senior leaders came to rely upon these nontraditional sources of information to increase their understanding of the operational environment and glean insights as to what approaches were successful.

Forward presence helped the United States achieve an accurate understanding of the environment. In areas where U.S. forces were not based in significant numbers, even a modest forward presence enhanced situational awareness and deepened relationships. For example, when U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) moved from its Panama headquarters and robust presence in the region to Miami and a more modest presence in the region, it worked to maintain forward locations and basing arrangements to sustain U.S. presence and access. Similarly, U.S. forward presence in the Philippines proved useful well beyond the narrow U.S. counterterrorism (CT) focus of its post-9/11 mission. Resultant relationships with host nation forces at multiple echelons provided for improved exchange of information and strengthened understanding.

Lesson 2: Conventional Warfare Paradigm

Major combat operations in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 confirmed the ability of the United States to conduct such operations rapidly and surgically.[6] While it is critical that the United States retain this capability, *conventional warfare approaches often were ineffective when applied to operations other than major combat, forcing leaders to realign the ways and means of achieving effects.*

The conventional warfare paradigm is exemplified by fighting in World War II, Korea, and Operation *Desert Storm*; it is characterized by the use of direct force against adversaries, with centralized command and control to support the massing of resources against the enemy center of gravity—that is, a nation-state's uniformed military forces.[7] However, the past decade saw many operations other than conventional warfare and major combat, such as COIN, stability, CT, HA/DR, antipiracy, and counternarcotics operations. In addition to Iraq and Afghanistan, past operations conducted in locations such as Panama, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Somalia, Colombia, the Philippines, Sudan, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, and Yemen, suggest that operations other than conventional warfare will represent the prevalent form of warfare in the future.

In conventional warfare, forces employ a direct approach, using force against an enemy military to achieve objectives. Over the past decade, in contrast, forces learned to combine both direct and indirect approaches for generating effects. The combination of these approaches leveraged a broad set of tools including the use of precise force, money as a weapons system, information operations, and key leader engagements to address threats both directly and indirectly. In particular, the indirect approach was able to focus on the underlying root causes of terror and/or insurgency.

At the same time, the use of force continued to be a critical tool in operations. Moreover, the use of precision engagements and avoiding collateral damage, especially noncombatant civilian casualties, became paramount in preserving necessary freedom of action. Efforts to be precise and discriminatory in engagements were aided by increasing availability of precision air- and ground-based weapons. In addition, units had increasing quantities of ISR support to determine positive identification and screen for potential collateral damage. Finally, leaders pressed units to take additional steps to avoid civilian casualties beyond those required by international law, such as tactical patience and looking for tactical alternatives (for example, employing a sniper instead of using an airstrike against enemy taking refuge in civilian homes). Forces in Afghanistan discovered that there were win-win scenarios for the use of force and limiting collateral damage: forces could maintain or increase mission effectiveness while also reducing civilian casualties. Conversely, U.S. forces found that insurgent groups were strengthened and U.S. freedom of action was curtailed when its forces caused civilian casualties.[8]

Conventional warfare features a hierarchical top-down command structure to manage forces and support the massing of major military elements against the center of gravity of enemy forces. Information and intelligence gained by tactical forces are fed back to the top where adjustments are made to the overall scheme of maneuver. In contrast, for other kinds of operations in the past decade, especially those featuring fleeting targets and population-centric campaigns, forces found this arrangement ineffective. Rather, flexibility and empowerment at the lowest appropriate level promoted success in these kinds of operations. Leaders deliberately decentralized authority and capabilities; they provided intent and then allowed subordinates the freedom to innovate

and explore tactical alternatives within given left and right limits.

Unlike conventional warfare, success in many of the operations over the past decade depended on building local capacity and sustaining gains that were made during operations. This focus on capacity-building taxed the military and the U.S. Government overall, as they were often not prepared for these tasks, especially on the scale demanded in Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, the task of creating Iraqi military and police forces, along with their accompanying institutions, created a severe burden on both U.S. military and civilian organizations. This burden was magnified by the initial lack of preparation for this mission and compounded by the semi- to non-permissive security environment in which civilian agencies and departments could not typically operate.

Conventional warfare and operations other than major combat had different means ("the use of force" versus "broader effects combining direct and indirect approach") and ends ("capitulation of a military force" versus "sustainability and capacity-building"). Because of these differences, operations other than major combat required a broader response than the military alone was prepared to provide, necessitating an effort that combined the strengths and capabilities of multiple U.S. departments and agencies, as well as coalition partners and, in some cases, NGOs. Best practices and challenges regarding interagency unity of effort are discussed below in Lesson Seven, Interagency Coordination, and for coalition operations in Lesson Eight, Coalition Operations.

Lesson 3: Battle for the Narrative

Over the past decade, U.S. adversaries realized that victory on the battlefield was not the only way to meet their overall objectives: by influencing *perceptions* on a local or global scale, they could also achieve victories. The United States and its allies had an interest in shaping perceptions, and this resulted in a competition in the information domain. We call this effort to influence perceptions "the battle for the narrative."[9] Over the past decade, *the United States was slow to recognize the importance of the battle for the narrative in achieving objectives at all levels; it was often ineffective in applying and aligning the narrative to goals and desired end states.*

In major combat operations, the United States was successful in employing military power; however, other instruments of national power (diplomatic, information, and economic) became more important as operations shifted away from major combat. In particular, the U.S. Government was challenged with providing accurate and timely information to proactively win the battle for the narrative, partially because of a lack of necessary resources and leadership emphasis on this aspect of operations.

The proliferation of the Internet, social media, and personal electronic devices caused the paradigm of communication to shift. It was no longer possible (or desirable) for the military to attempt to tightly control most information. While the military was slow to adapt to these developments, the enemy was not, developing considerable skill in using these new means of communication to their own ends. In addition, the enemy was frequently unconstrained by the need to tell the truth; for example, they could feed false information to the media through the use of news stringers on fast-dial from an insurgent/ terrorist cell phone. This allowed the enemy to make the first impression, an impression that could be difficult or impossible to overcome, even when false. For example, advances in communication technology had a direct impact on Israel during and after the 2006 Lebanon War. Initially,

Mine resistant ambush protected vehicles are lined along Highway 1 near Haji Sultan, Zabul province, Afghanistan, Feb. 16, 2012.

the Israeli military response to Hezbollah rocket attacks was widely seen as justified. However, as time progressed and Hezbollah successfully manipulated print, broadcast, and online media, the world increasingly saw images of civilian casualties (both doctored and real) and the tide of public opinion turned. There was widespread negative international sentiment regarding Israel's "disproportionate response," and Israel was not successful in turning this tide.

The United States eventually recognized the need to be more proactive in the battle for the narrative and developed innovative means to do so. For example, Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF-I) created a communications cell that monitored both national and international

media to understand trends and issues, an effort that was emphasized and supported by senior leaders. Similarly in Afghanistan, the Presidential Information Coordination Cell was established to manage communication and information between the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Afghan government. The coordination cell was often successful in resolving potentially negative issues before they became public.

Finally, while managing information was critical in the battle for the narrative, the past decade showed that words alone were not sufficient; they had to be consistent with deeds. The image of the United States was frequently tarnished by tactical actions that contradicted American values or strategy. The Abu Ghraib

scandal in Iraq, for instance, documented in photographs that were widely disseminated, undermined the mission and significantly marred the image of the United States. Years later, terrorists in Iraq and Afghanistan cited the Abu Ghraib incident as their motivation for striking the United States. Similarly in Afghanistan, the burning of Korans in spring 2012 created significant backlash. In that case, U.S. personnel were taking actions to remove a variety of documents, including some religious texts, which had been altered by detainees. The context—that Korans had been cut up and written in by detainees in part to convey messages—was not communicated clearly, and U.S. actions were rougly perceived as religious persecution rather than countering insurgent efforts.

Lesson 4: Transitions

All operations in the past decade featured important transitions, such as the transition from Phase III to Phase IV in Iraq, the transfer to Iraqi sovereignty (performed in two steps in 2004 and 2005), the transition to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) leadership in Afghanistan in 2006, and the transition to host-nation responsibility during numerous HA/DR events (for example, the Pakistan earthquake of 2005).[10] Transitions between phases of operations offered opportunities for advancing U.S. strategic interests if they were managed well; alternately, they were opportunities for the enemy or for the failure of our intended objectives if they were not. In the first half of the decade, *failure to adequately plan and resource strategic and operational transitions endangered accomplishment of the overall mission.*

Transitions were often poorly planned and trained; in particular, plans for transitions did not include well-developed branch plans for contingencies. In Iraq, while Phase III

combat operations were meticulously planned and trained extensively, Phase IV post–major combat operations were not. In addition, pre-deployment training focused on major combat tactics and maneuver of large-sized forces, not contingency or stability operations. Noncombat skills, to include civil affairs, were not adequately rehearsed alongside combat, war-winning skills until late in the campaign.

In addition, the post–major combat plan for Iraq was reliant upon civilian elements of the U.S. Government and based on assumptions of a stable security environment and a capable Iraqi government and security force. Despite the significant role that U.S. civilian elements had to play, they were not significantly involved in early planning efforts. This contributed to major disconnects between planning assumptions used in military- and civilian-led efforts; as previously described, these disconnects were exacerbated by Coalition Provisional Authority actions in the summer of 2003, as well as divergent military and civilian reconstruction approaches over the following several years.

Similarly, during the transition to NATO leadership in Afghanistan in 2006, military planning assumed that the chief duties of ISAF would be reconstruction and the provision of humanitarian aid. This faulty assumption caused a mismatch between ISAF policies and actual, on-the-ground mission requirements.

Often, planning assumptions were based largely on U.S. expectations that were inconsonant with those of the host nation. For example, the planned end state for Afghanistan was envisioned to be a strong central government, despite no record of such a government in Afghan history and lack of broad popular support for that system of governance. Another was the lack of anticipation of operations shifting from a military Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) framework

to a warrant-based law enforcement framework as host-nation sovereignty increased.

These faulty assumptions led to mismatches in approaches that were later overcome by adaptation; for example, the approach that envisioned a strong central government in Afghanistan was later combined with efforts to develop local governance and security (for example, Village Stability Operations/Afghan Local Police), while the transition from a LOAC framework was addressed through ad hoc approaches to requirements for warrants and evidentiary support.

humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations operations also demonstrated the importance of unity of effort to successful transitions

Transitions tended to be poorly resourced and lacked adequate numbers of personnel with sufficient expertise or training. For example, shortly after the end of major combat operations in Iraq in 2003, the V Corps commander arrived in theater to assume command of Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) 7, having trained for division-level combat operations and not as a joint task force that would lead a national reconstruction and stabilization effort. His staff was not manned, equipped, or resourced to accept these responsibilities. Additionally, civilian manning for the Coalition Provisional Authority remained low throughout 2003. Over the next few years, Embassy and Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) partners gradually increased in number, but they often lacked the necessary expertise and experience.

Lack of unity of effort between civilian and military organizations tended to be a key component of transition challenges.[11] The rapid transfer from military to civilian leadership in Iraq in summer 2003 repeated a lesson seen from previous operations over the history of the United States: premature transition to civilian agencies.[12] Similar challenges were observed in the handover of sovereignty to Iraq in June 2004 when the two senior U.S. leaders were replaced simultaneously: General George Casey, USA, succeeded Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, USA, and Ambassador John Negroponte succeeded Ambassador L. Paul Bremer. Several critical organizations were also created during this time, including MNF-I, Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq, and the U.S. Embassy. These changes in key leaders and organizations during the transition added to the challenges.

Politically–driven transition timelines exacerbated the lack of resources. For example, in Iraq in 2004, civilian and military organizations had only just sorted out their respective responsibilities for training, equipping, and supporting the Iraqi security forces when the United States executed the transition to Iraqi sovereignty. The transition pushed the Iraqi security forces into a role for which they were not yet ready, degrading security and further challenging the effort to build these forces.

Many of the transition challenges described above were remedied during important transitions in the latter half of the decade. Leaders learned critical lessons and worked to understand the operational environment; they designed transitions to be more conditions-based to reflect this understanding. Likewise, an awareness of specific weaknesses of host-nation militaries and governments facilitated the use of tailored enablers to prop up host-nation capabilities and promote success during key transitions. Transitions were planned and resourced appropriately, with key staff retained through the critical transition periods.

Humanitarian assistance disaster relief operations operations also demonstrated the importance of unity of effort to successful transitions. For example, in Haiti peacekeeping operations in 2004, USSOUTHCOM benefited from preexisting relationships with interagency partners that helped overcome the challenges arising from the ad hoc nature and wide variety of participants in the operation. Within days of the deployment of U.S. troops to Haiti, USSOUTHCOM leveraged its joint interagency coordination group to provide a forum for discourse between the various U.S. Government elements involved in the region. Again, after the Haiti earthquake of 2010, the robust integration of interagency representation at USSOUTHCOM gave the command an enhanced ability to gain situational awareness and provide focused aid, which promoted successful transition of responsibilities to a variety of civilian agencies and international organizations working on behalf of the Haitian government.

Lesson 5: Adaptation

Adaptation is an essential part of the military profession and of military operations. At the same time, adaptation must be balanced with the requirement to appropriately train and equip forces for current operations. During the first half of the decade following 9/11, *Department of Defense* (DOD) *policies, doctrine, training, and equipment were revealed to be poorly suited to operations other than major combat, forcing widespread and costly adaptation.*

During the early years of the decade, doctrine voids were exposed, as evidenced by the amount of important doctrine that was created in the second half of the decade to compensate.[13] Similarly, forces were trained to win against another nation's armed forces, and were not prepared to combat adaptive insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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Equipment suited for conventional war was not always suited for COIN or stability operations, resulting in many urgent operational needs voiced in theater for required capabilities.

Fortunately, the challenge of inadequate preparation was matched by widespread and often successful adaptation at all levels. Forces on the ground learned from challenges and adapted their approaches to compensate, developing new organizations and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP), rapid fielding initiatives, adaptive leadership approaches, and agile workarounds for the passing of and acting upon lessons. While these adaptations were generally successful, they were costly in terms of time and resources.

Since forces were primarily organized for major combat operations, there was a necessity to develop new types of organizations at all echelons to address the changed environment. In Iraq, these organizations included the Force Strategic Engagement Cell that worked at the strategic level to reconcile insurgents, the PRTs that worked at the regional level to extend governance capacity, and the Human Terrain Teams that worked at the local level to understand human factors. In addition, forces developed in-theater initiatives such as the COIN Academy, which provided near-term, tailored training to fill identified gaps while the schoolhouses adjusted their curricula to better match the operational missions. At the same time, advisor and lessons learned organizations were used to identify and overcome tactical and operational shortfalls across a broad set of missions.

Forces also adapted their TTP to promote success. One example was the "find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, and disseminate" (F3EAD)

targeting approach. Special operations forces (SOF) used the F3EAD approach in their targeting of insurgents, and over time this TTP was increasingly used by conventional forces in their targeting operations as well. As host-nation judicial systems matured, forces again adapted their targeting approach toward a warrant-based approach in order to reinforce rule of law and model law enforcement for the host nation. Yet another new organizational structure, fusion cells, provided a means by which TTP could be shared and learned. Other tailored and adaptive TTP in Iraq and Afghanistan included key leader engagements, sensitive site exploitation, and civilian casualty battle damage assessments (geared toward identifying the presence and scope of civilian harm).

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The fielding of new equipment aided the innovative TTP described above. For example, as new ISR assets were fielded in increasing numbers, they could then be provided to lower echelons to better find and fix terrorists/insurgents, minimize civilian harm during engagements, engage with the population, and pursue reconciliation efforts. Other equipment was fielded to provide enhanced force protection against asymmetric threats (for example, Mine Resistant Ambush Protected [MRAP] Vehicles and electronic countermeasures). While providing needed capability rapidly, challenges with accelerated development and rapid fielding included forces not being able to train on these capabilities prior to deployment, as well as the possibility that vulnerabilities, interoperability problems, and maintenance issues were not identified.

Leaders acknowledged successful adaptation by tactical forces to modify their overall approaches. One example was the reconciliation initiatives in Al Anbar Province, Iraq. After then–Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, USA, heard of the successes that coalition forces were having in Al Anbar, he broadened and adapted reconciliation efforts into an Iraq-wide movement. Underlying this expansion was the recognition that success required a change in focus from understanding the threat to understanding the environment.

Sometimes, adaptation led to the discovery that the old model was preferable. For example, USSOUTHCOM adapted a functional organizational model that departed from the Napoleonic "J-code" structure. This new model was not successful in responding to the crisis of the Haiti earthquake in 2010, so USSOUTHCOM quickly reverted back to its original J-code organization, confirming the value of this organizational construct.

While units learned and adapted to their operating environments, their experiences, best practices, and lessons were not always shared, either within theater or with larger DOD institutions. Although there were many Service lessons learned organizations with active data collection efforts operating in Iraq and Afghanistan, their efforts tended to stay in their respective stovepipes and were rarely integrated across the joint force. Service lessons learned efforts generally supported adaptation at the Service tactical level, which was their chartered mission, but joint tactical-, operational-, and strategic-level lessons were often unaddressed unless specifically requested by commanders. The smaller, more agile, and better-resourced SOF lessons learned organizations tended to be more focused, and their processes were designed for a quick turnaround to forces in theater. A number of ad hoc mechanisms were

established to improve the effectiveness and time-liness of the lessons learned process, including the Army's Operation *Enduring Freedom* Lessons Learned Forum and the Joint Staff CIVCAS (Civilian Casualties) Working Group. These mechanisms helped provide focus and sharing of lessons for key operational challenges.

Lesson 6: SOF-GPF Integration

In Iraq and Afghanistan, *multiple, simultaneous, large-scale operations executed in dynamic environments required the integration of SOF and general purpose forces (GPF), creating a force-multiplying effect for both.*[14] Initially SOF and GPF experienced friction operating together, but through effort and experience, they developed means of effective integration that enhanced the collective mission sets of both.

In post-2003 Iraq, SOF were not always well coordinated with GPF. This led to situations where GPF, as the battlespace owners (BSOs), were left managing the second-order effects of special targeting operations. GPF complained about not receiving notice of impending operations, not receiving intelligence that came from SOF, and significant disruption of their battlespace in the aftermath of those operations. Similar complaints were made by GPF in Afghanistan through 2008. For Combined Joint Special Operations Task Forces (CJSOTF) in Iraq and Afghanistan, one factor in this poor coordination was the Theater Special Operations Command being unable to provide effective representation at senior levels. This was later addressed in Afghanistan through creation of an in-theater, flag-level command, Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan, to better integrate SOF activities into an overall strategic campaign.

Over time, SOF and GPF elements worked to integrate and take advantage of SOF capabilities and GPF capacities. An early example of this integration was among Task Force Freedom and SOF operating in Mosul, Iraq, in 2005. These elements combined assets and target lists to create an integrated force to combat the enemy. This approach was later expanded into other areas of Iraq and institutionalized into Intelligence Fusion Cells. These cells allowed expansion of the total set of actionable targets—a set that was too large to be handled by a single force—as well as a synergistic approach to those targets. By the end of 2008, dramatic progress in security had been made: attack levels were the lowest since the summer of 2003. The integrated targeting effort between SOF and GPF was a significant component of this success.

In Afghanistan, SOF and GPF integration improved considerably from 2009 to 2010. SOF were better coordinated with BSOs and consequence management efforts were mutually reinforcing. At the same time, communication about targeting increased, and SOF focused more on targets that hindered BSO freedom of maneuver. In 2011, SOF began conducting pre-deployment training with GPF to accelerate integration when in theater.

SOF and GPF also contributed to developing host-nation security forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. All forces moved to a partnered approach to operations, collectively boosting host-nation security force capability. GPF focused on the regular army and police forces, while SOF focused on host-nation SOF and army and police CT units. Collectively, SOF and GPF combined to address training and partnering requirements that were beyond the scope of what was manageable by either force independently.

While an early example of progress, operations in Mosul in 2005 were accomplished through cooperation at the working level, and many of the later improvements were driven

U.S. military and civilian staffs learned to leverage each other's strengths

by SOF senior leaders as they emphasized the importance of integration with GPF. The creation of fusion cells in Iraq involved a commitment of SOF personnel and ISR resources; in both Iraq and Afghanistan, SOF also used their resources to create a network of liaison officers to provide a direct conduit to improve communication and collaboration.

Lesson 7: Interagency Coordination

Across the wide range of operations conducted over the last decade, *interagency coordination was uneven due to inconsistent participation in planning, training, and operations; policy gaps; resources; and differences in organizational culture*. Similarly, the military was challenged by the need to work with NGOs, a type of organization that interacted frequently with some elements of the U.S. Government, but less commonly with the military.

Initially in Iraq and Afghanistan, interagency unity of effort was a resounding failure.[15] During the first half of the decade, the United States consistently failed to harness the strengths and resources of its departments and agencies. Of note, several Joint Center for Operational Analysis studies reported that the biggest lesson for the United States from the first five years of war in Iraq was "the inability to apply and focus the full resources and capabilities of the [United States] in a concerted and coherent way."[16] Despite the criticality of unity of effort, it was slow to develop and was largely personality dependent. In fact, the notable unity of effort that was finally achieved in Iraq was largely due to the initial, deliberate, and personal efforts of General David Petraeus, USA, Ambassador Ryan Crocker, and their immediate staffs in late 2007.

U.S. military and civilian staffs learned to leverage each other's strengths and communicate more effectively over time, lessening the need for leadership to be a forcing function for collaboration. Nevertheless, these efforts still had to overcome institutional barriers to cooperation such as disparate organizational authorities, roles, missions, and cultures; different levels of resources; an absence of interagency "doctrine"; security concerns; and varying levels of training and education. Despite these challenges, an increasingly expeditionary and collaborative mindset has become resident in a number of U.S. organizations. This progress may be temporary, however, since it is based on experiences and personalities and not on any institutional imperative for integration derived from current law or policy.

For some specific missions such as counterterrorism and countering weapons of mass destruction, the United States created action plans that described roles and missions for specific elements of the government. While these were useful for laying out how different departments and agencies interacted in general, they lacked specificity. Overall, there was a lack of interagency "doctrine." Joint Interagency Task Force–South (JIATF-S) provided a model for how such interagency guidance could be created: JIATF-S brought together a group of personnel from different U.S. departments and agencies, each accustomed to its own terminology and approach. JIATF-S then created a standard operating procedure (SOP) for the organization that established common terminology and TTP to be used by all interagency team members.[17] This SOP also clearly delineated authorities, rules of engagement, and restrictions on roles during operations. Similar efforts for the interagency community could provide a foundation for unified effort in future operations.[18]

The U.S. military was also challenged by the need to work more closely with NGOs over the

past decade. While some elements of the U.S. Government routinely work with NGOs, the military often lacked experience working with those organizations, further complicating DOD coordination efforts. While coordination between the U.S. military and NGOs was generally beneficial to American efforts, these relationships were hindered by a mutual lack of understanding, the military's tendency to try to direct NGO activities, and the desire of some NGOs to retain a perception of neutrality to maintain humanitarian space to conduct their operations.

A common challenge in working with interagency partners and NGOs was information exchange, where unity of effort was often hindered by limited or no access to DOD communications networks. The use of a non-DOD network to facilitate needed information exchange helped to overcome this. One example was the use of All Partners Access Network (APAN), a collaborative network established on a non-DOD domain used by organizations contributing to the 2004 tsunami disaster relief effort. Similarly, USSOUTHCOM employed APAN during disaster relief operations in Haiti in 2010. These IT solutions fostered information exchange and collaboration between the U.S. Government (including, but not limited to, DOD) and other nations and organizations that did not have access to DOD systems and networks.

Lesson 8: Coalition Operations

While the United States was involved in a number of coalition operations in the past decade, *establishing and sustaining coalition unity of effort was a challenge due to competing national interests, cultures, policies, and resources. In addition, the enduring challenge of information sharing impeded coalition effectiveness*.

Coalition operations were influenced by the national interests of participating nations.

Different nations had differing interests that affected the missions they chose to conduct, as well as how they conducted them. For example, France had financial interests in Iraq that were a disincentive for its involvement in major combat operations in 2003. Similarly, Japan and Norway chose roles in Afghanistan that focused on reconstruction instead of the larger COIN mission because of their national interests.

national caveats were a significant challenge in all of the major coalition operations of the past decade

In addition to national interests, participating nations had cultural differences that influenced both the roles they would play and the way that they would conduct their given missions. In Afghanistan, individual nations valued different elements of the overall campaign strategy. The net effect was the conduct of differing sub-campaigns in different geographic areas, limiting complete implementation of the theater strategy. In addition, some nations were more willing than others to conduct offensive operations. Since offensive targeting was an integral element of the campaign plans for Iraq and Afghanistan, this uneven approach within the coalition impacted the conduct of these campaigns.

National caveats were a significant challenge in all of the major coalition operations of the past decade. Participating nations limited their potential actions and missions based on policy decisions in the form of national caveats. Collectively, these caveats became a patchwork of rules that both confused forces and limited overall unity of effort.

Some operational restrictions were formal policy caveats, while others were effective differences in how a nation operated, but not

captured formally as a caveat. One illustration of this was the U.S. self-defense criteria in the standing rules of engagement in Afghanistan. This policy effectively served as a national caveat since it was a departure from ISAF rules of engagement, but it was not reflected in compilations of national caveats.

Disparate resources also complicated coalition operations. Different nations brought different and uneven levels of capabilities, often as part of intentional alliance decisions about the development of complementary, not duplicative, military capabilities. For example, in Libya operations, the United States had the majority of certain valuable types of ISR assets as well as precise, low-collateral damage weapons. The lack of these assets in other coalition countries limited the scope of their contributions. Similarly in Afghanistan, some partner nations lacked ISR capabilities and airpower, which limited both their mobility and responsiveness to threats.

Another challenge to coalition operations was differing training and TTP. Coalition forces often used their own unique TTPs and approaches, so that coalitions did not interface with host-nation militaries or populations uniformly. For example, in Afghanistan, different nations employed differing escalation of force TTP, which could lead to civilian casualties. Afghan civilians, accustomed to TTP from one ISAF nation's forces, would travel to a different area of Afghanistan where another nation employed different TTP and the Afghans were often confused and uncertain how to respond. Compensation policies for civilian harm were also different for different nations, resulting in nonstandard treatment and frustration among the population.

Interoperability was another challenge of operating within a coalition. Use of different and non-interoperable systems limited the utility of available capabilities. For example, digital data links in Iraq did not consistently exchange information between coalition nations, leading to incomplete operating pictures, reduced battlespace awareness and, increased risk to forces. Friendly fire was observed to result in cases where data on friendly force location were available but not presented to operators due to lack of interoperable systems.

Information-sharing policies and systems hindered effective and efficient coalition operations. Non-U.S. members of coalitions frequently cited restrictions that limited (or even precluded) their inclusion in planning and execution of operations. Classification issues and lack of coalition-wide secure information systems limited the ability to share needed information and intelligence. Over-classification and slow foreign disclosure processes also contributed to these challenges.

Eventually, the United States learned to operate more effectively within coalitions, accruing multiple benefits that included:

- enhanced force levels and resources
- political credibility and legitimacy
- different sets of ideas on how to confront problems and the ability to leverage the respective strengths of different nations[19]
- increased experience and proficiencies of national partners.[20]

These benefits provide compelling reasons to suggest that the United States will continue to operate in a coalition environment in the majority of future operations.

Lesson 9: Host-nation Partnering

In many of the operations over the past decade, *partnering was a key enabler and force multiplier and aided in host-nation capacity building. However, it*

was not always approached effectively and was not adequately prioritized or resourced.

Partnering between the United States and host nations was essential for achieving strategic goals and promoting a number of key objectives. First, partnering enabled the host nation to develop a sustainable capacity to provide security and counter threats. This provided an exit strategy for the United States and offered an alternative to sustaining a large American footprint on the ground. Second, partnering enhanced the legitimacy of U.S. operations and freedom of action. Finally, partnering built connections between the United States and host-nation security forces, increasing opportunities for influence both within respective militaries and with other sectors of government and society. Partnering offered the United States a way to advance its objectives through influence rather than through direct action.

While security force assistance (SFA), foreign internal defense, and building partner capacity were essential to strategic goals and offered alternatives to a large U.S. footprint, these activities were not adequately planned, prioritized, or resourced. Partnering was an inherently interagency activity, but there was an overall lack of unity in these efforts. In Iraq, the scope and mission of SFA needed in light of the Coalition Provisional Authority decision to disband the Iraqi security forces were not anticipated in planning. Sufficient institutions to address the SFA requirements were not established until the following year, and resources were slow to arrive, both in terms of trainers and needed equipment. For example, weapons for the Iraqi forces were difficult to procure because of U.S. export legislation that did not consider large-scale urgent SFA requirements.

Working with host-nation security forces on partnered operations brought both advantages

one challenge was a propensity for the U.S. Government to shape host-nation institutions after its own image

and challenges. Host-nation forces tended to have an increased awareness of cultural cues that helped them to discriminate between threats and noncombatants and to communicate more effectively with the local population, who tended to be more responsive to host-nation forces. However, challenges encountered in partnering with host-nation forces in Afghanistan included a lack of proficiency and experience, as well as corruption, infiltration, lack of accountability to international norms for the use of force, and resource constraints.

The United States faced further challenges that complicated partnering. One challenge was a propensity for the U.S. Government to shape host-nation institutions after its own image, rather than allowing the host nation to make such decisions consistent with its own history, culture, and traditions. Another was a lack of strategic patience, where a desire for quick results at times drove the United States to lead the partnering relationship, rather than operating by, with, and through host-nation forces to build long-term capacity. Last, forces did not always respond positively to cultural differences of the host nation, leading to poor partnering and advisory relationships.

Partnering relationships tended to change over time as host-nation capabilities matured. For example, partnering in Iraq and Afghanistan transitioned from U.S.-led operations, with Iraqi or Afghan forces being mentored during those operations, to partnered operations where host-nation forces participated in planning and execution alongside American forces. This then transitioned to host nation–led operations where the United States or coalition countries

provided key enablers that the host nation did not possess, such as air support, logistics, or ISR capabilities. Similarly, in the Philippines, early U.S. partnering focused on tactical operations and later transitioned to operational-level support as Philippine security forces became more tactically proficient.

Resourcing for foreign internal defense and SFA was complicated by a number of different and partially overlapping authorities and funding streams. In Iraq and Afghanistan, diverse elements of building partner capacity were conducted by different organizations with distinct missions and little integration of their efforts.

in Operation Enduring Freedom–*Philippines, the mission was limited to targeting terrorist organizations that were affiliated with al Qaeda*

In some case, narrowly defined missions limited the utility of U.S. partnering efforts. For example, in Operation *Enduring Freedom–Philippines*, the mission was limited to targeting terrorist organizations that were affiliated with al Qaeda (for example, Jemaah Islamiyah and Abu Sayyaf). U.S. support did not extend to Philippine efforts to address the foremost threat to the Philippine government, the Communist Party of the Philippines New People's Army, because they were not affiliated with al Qaeda. This restriction created friction between Philippine and U.S. forces and also limited the ability of the United States to promote host-nation capacity to achieve long-term security.[21]

Despite these challenges, U.S. partnering efforts improved the host nation's ability to provide security and advance American objectives. In Iraq and Afghanistan, these efforts were essential both to provide near-term security in order to set the conditions for longer term stability and to develop host-nation security forces that could sustain security in the absence of U.S. and coalition forces. In other countries such as the Philippines, small investments of U.S. SOF served as enablers to enhance host-nation effectiveness.

Lesson 10: State Use of Surrogates and Proxies

After the United States demonstrated its ability to quickly and effectively conduct major combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, other *states sponsored and exploited surrogates and proxies to generate asymmetric challenges* through a variety of means.

Surrogates and proxies gave nation-states options for indirectly opposing U.S. interests and objectives. For example, one nation funded and supplied insurgent groups in Iraq with technical capabilities beyond their original reach, challenging the coalition and causing greater U.S. casualties. Similarly, in order to oppose Israel, a nation supplied Hezbollah with advanced weapons capabilities, including a missile inventory that rivaled that of many nation-states. In Afghanistan, other nations similarly opposed ISAF by providing resources and support to terrorist and insurgent groups operating there.[22]

Throughout the decade, the overlap of crime, terror, and nonstate actors continued to increase. The movement of money and contraband, a specialty of criminal elements, also benefited terror groups acting as proxies, and the latter could leverage these criminal elements for a price. To counter this, the overlap had to be addressed: for example, JIATF-S focused on countering narcotics-trafficking, but it also included countering terrorist activities because of the significant overlap between drug and terrorist networks and finances.[23] However, despite the global importance of law enforcement and nonmilitary organizations in combating proxies and surrogates,

the military lacked authorities to train or provide information to these nonmilitary entities. In addition, a regional focus on these issues—especially when different departments and agencies used differing geographic boundaries—created gaps and seams that the enemy could exploit.

Because of U.S. overmatch in military capability, the enemy tended to shift to the use of inexpensive, low-technology approaches and/or TTP (often provided by sponsor nations) to foil high-technology U.S. capabilities that had been designed to counter conventional peer-on-peer threats. One example was the wide use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) against coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. While coalition armored vehicles were designed to resist significant damage even when fired upon by similarly designed vehicles, they were vulnerable to IEDs exploding underneath the vehicle; with simple tools and at a low cost, insurgents and terrorists could cause significant casualties and damage to U.S. vehicles.

In some cases, the United States successfully worked with partner nations to develop their capabilities to counter internal and regional threats. In effect, this amounted to the creation of U.S. proxies. Through training, provision of key enablers, and additional measures such as the Rewards for Justice Program, partner nations were increasingly effective at countering threats to U.S. objectives.[24]

Lesson 11: Super-empowered Threats

Terrorism has long been characterized by individuals or small groups exerting disproportionate influence through their actions. However, in the past decade *individuals and small groups increasingly exploited globalized technology and information to expand their influence and approach state-like disruptive capacity*.

Commercial technologies made weapons of mass effect achievable by small individuals or groups—for example, DNA sequencing equipment to create lethal viruses such as smallpox or the influenza strain that resulted in the 1918 pandemic. Critically, the cost of these technologies has decreased by orders of magnitude over time, and access to these technologies is much easier. Coupled with transnational criminal networks, these technologies could enable individuals or small groups to generate mass casualties and disruption.[25]

As discussed, the risk is compounded by external sponsors, either national sponsors or other terror groups that provide advanced technologies and capabilities to insurgent groups and terrorist organizations. One national sponsor provided advanced IED technology to terrorist organizations in Iraq and Afghanistan, allowing them to penetrate armored vehicles and cause casualties beyond their original capabilities. Hezbollah also benefited from support from a national sponsor, thus approaching the disruptive capabilities of a nation-state. Similarly, Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines benefited from members of Jemaah Islamiyah who provided material support for terrorist attacks.

Rapidly advancing communication technologies also had significant impact, adding to the super-empowerment of nonstate entities. These groups excelled at rapidly transmitting images to the media as well as their own forums, creating the first impression on the world stage. At the same time, these groups were largely unconstrained by the truth and could adapt the facts to further their cause. In fact, some groups manufactured evidence or doctored images ("fauxtography") to further their own objectives. For example, during the 2006 Lebanon War, Hezbollah used a single corpse at multiple Israeli strike locations to provide "evidence" of Lebanese civilian casualties and a disproportionate response by Israel.[26]

The Internet served as a further enabler for super-empowerment, facilitating recruiting, training, financing, and command and control for terrorist individuals and groups. Insurgent web sites offered propaganda, training materials, and guidance to direct and encourage other attacks. Financing was accomplished both through Internet sites and other nontraditional banking mechanisms.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, many tactical lessons were institutionalized at the Service level through the work of the Center for Army Lessons Learned and the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned, among others. As a complement to those efforts, the Decade of War study sought to identify overarching joint, strategic lessons. As important as it was to identify and understand these enduring lessons, the goal remains for these lessons to be institutionalized in the joint force.

If the solution to any of these problems was purely a materiel one, the process would be relatively straightforward.

Instead, institutionalizing these lessons requires changing education, training, doctrine, leadership development, and other nonmaterial areas. Developing these nonmaterial solutions falls to the Joint Staff J7, the directorate for Joint Force Development. The process of institutionalizing these joint lessons—prioritizing which lessons must be addressed immediately, determining which organizations will spearhead the effort and which will support, and developing actionable solutions—is neither easy nor quick. The scope of the lessons identified in this report is broad, and many of the ideas are difficult to translate into concrete action. Yet we now have a window of opportunity to think about and act on issues that can define and prepare a more adaptable and agile joint force. Future generations will

determine whether we made the best use of this window and if we actually learned the lessons taught by the last decade. PRISM

Notes

[1] This article is a summary of the "Decade of War" study undertook by the Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis (JCOA) division of the Joint Staff J7. The full report can be accessed at: http://blogs.defensenews.com/saxotech-access/pdfs/decade-of-war-lessons-learned.pdf.

[2] *A National Security Strategy for a Global Age* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2000).

[3] The *operational environment* is defined in detail in Joint Publication (JP) 2-01.3, *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, June 16, 2009).

[4] Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Order 1, issued May 16, 2003, removed all Iraqi government employees associated with the Ba'ath Party from current and future employment with the Iraqi government. CPA Order 2, issued May 23, 2003, dissolved the Iraqi army and associated elements.

[5] Task Force Odin was established in 2006 as an expeditionary aviation battalion for providing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). Project Liberty featured modified C-12 aircraft with ISR capabilities. These aircraft were first fielded in 2009.

[6] Initial operations in Afghanistan could be regarded as a hybrid of major conventional war (because of the high intensity) and irregular operations (because of the low density of ground forces, many of them host-nation guerilla-type forces).

[7] Martin van Creveld, "Modern Conventional Warfare: An Overview," *National Intelligence Council Workshop,* May 25, 2004.

[8] These events could create anger within the population, fueling insurgent or terror elements either directly by taking up arms or indirectly through the provision of shelter or money.

[9] Under this definition, the *battle for the narrative* encompasses strategic communication and its key elements: public affairs, public diplomacy, and information operations.

[10] Phase III refers to major combat operations, while Phase IV refers to post–major combat operations.

[11] Hindrances to unity of effort included unequal tour lengths of civilian and military personnel lack of comprehensive, preparatory wargaming for the

whole-of-government team; institutional barriers; and lack of understanding of counterpart cultures and bureaucratic processes. This issue is discussed in more detail in Lesson Seven, Interagency Coordination.

[12] Defense Secretary Henry L. Stimson, "If there is one outstanding lesson to be gained from prior American experiences in military government, it is the unwisdom of permitting any premature interference by civilian agencies with the Army's basic task of civil administration in occupied areas. . . . [I]n those important American experiences in military government (Civil War, Philippine War, and WWI) where civilian influence was permitted to be exercised, the results were, respectively, demoralizing, costly, and ludicrous." See Harry L. Coles and Albert K. Weinberg, *Civil Affairs: Soldiers Become Governors* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1992).

[13] For example, JP 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, October 5, 2009); JP 3-07, *Stability Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, September 29, 2011); and JP 3-26, *Counterterrorism* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, November 13, 2009). Each of these doctrinal publications had significant updates during this time period.

[14] The Decade of War study uses the non-doctrinal term *general purpose forces* instead of the doctrinal term *conventional forces* (CF) due to common usage and potential confusion over *CF* (which is also read as "coalition forces").

[15] The challenge of interagency operations is not a new lesson. A Joint Staff memorandum from 50 years ago pointed out this lesson: "In the past it has been extremely difficult to achieve interdepartmental planning . . . these inhibitions of other governmental agencies must in some way be overcome." Joint Staff Memorandum, March 20, 1961.

[16] *Transition to Sovereignty, Joint Lessons Learned for Operation Iraqi Freedom*, JCOA Report, April 2007.

[17] Military units and embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq also created joint action plans called Unified Command Plans to guide their collective actions. The development of such interagency plans is a best practice, whether in the field or in support of larger institutions.

[18] At the same time, Joint Interagency Task Force–South (JIATF-S) is a special case. All participants have both a common mission and statutory authority to accomplish that mission—elements that are not always present in other interagency efforts.

[19] For example, the United Kingdom brought a wealth of experience from its experiences in Northern Ireland, which informed reconciliation efforts in Iraq as well as their counterterrorism operations in Helmand Province. Similarly, Italy led the development of the Afghan police due to its experience with its own Carabinieri.

[20] For example, the Georgian military gained considerable combat experience from its deployments in support of the International Security Assistance Force.

[21] This friction was mitigated through personal relationships and multiple training events. See David Maxwell, "Foreign Internal Defense: An Indirect Approach to Counter-Insurgency/Counter Terrorism, Lessons from 'Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines' (OEF-P) for dealing with Non-Existential Threats to the United States," December 6, 2011.

[22] For example, "Extremist organizations serving as proxies of the government of Pakistan are attacking Afghan troops and civilians as well as US soldiers." Statement of Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Afghanistan and Iraq, September 22, 2011.

[23] "JIATF-S focuses on the planning and execution of operations to interdict narcotics smuggling and human trafficking *as well as terrorist-related activities.*" Emphasis added. "JINSA Group Visits U.S. Southern Command and the Joint Interagency Task Force South," September 3, 2008, available at <www.jinsa.org/events-programs/regional-programs /florida/jinsa-group-visits-us-southern-command-and-joint-interagen>.

[24] This is a program operated by the Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security. This program offers "rewards for information that leads to the arrest or conviction of anyone who plans, commits, or attempts international terrorist acts against U.S. persons or property, that prevents such acts from occurring in the first place, that leads to the location of a key terrorist leader, or that disrupts terrorism financing." Available at <www.rewardsforjustice.net/index.cfm?page=Rewards_program&language=English>.

[25] One example is the Aum Shinrikyo subway attack in 1995. This organization had over $1 billion in assets and developed its own capability to manufacture sarin gas and other biological agents. The mailing of anthrax bacterium in the United States in 2001 also displayed the disruptive effect the use of such materials can have.

[26] "The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006: The Media as a Weapon in Asymmetrical Conflict," *Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government*, February 18, 2007.

Lion's Square in Rusafa