Winning Battles but Losing Wars:
Three Ways Successes in Combat Promote Failures in Peace

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PHOTO: A vehicle used by Al-Qaeda in Iraq fighters is destroyed by Soldiers from the 1st Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, after enemy fighters engaged coalition forces by detonating a suicide vest, 23 February 2008. (DOD)

RECENT DIFFICULTIES in post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction efforts in both Afghanistan and Iraq stand in stark contrast to the overwhelming successes of their respective maneuver combat operations. While reasons abound for why these problems have arisen, one rationale is still under examined—the methods utilized when conducting direct combat operations. Only by making fundamental changes in American military doctrine can these problems be alleviated, thereby increasing the likelihood of success in stabilizing post-intervention states.

While the U.S. military has always played a role in post-conflict reconstruction operations during phase IV operations, current rebuilding efforts in both Iraq and Afghanistan have been stymied by instability. A resurgent Taliban in southern Afghanistan and increasing opium production raise questions about the effectiveness of U.S. and NATO reconstruction efforts in that country. Reconstruction efforts in Iraq have often stalled because of a dangerous and unpredictable security environment; violence perpetrated by insurgents, militias, cults, foreign terrorists, and profiteering criminals has made the security situation in Iraq untenable. At one point, the Iraqi security environment deteriorated to the point that over two million Iraqis fled their homes and entered neighboring countries.[1]

These daunting post-conflict challenges stand in stark contrast to the successes during the maneuver operations (phase III operations) during these two wars. When conventional U.S. military forces began their campaign in Afghanistan in October 2001, Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, fell in only two months, and most major cities in the country fell by the end of the year. During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, it took a mere six weeks to push into and capture Baghdad. Maneuver operations in both conflicts were powerful, quick, and decisive.

There is no lack of opinions as to why reconstruction was far more challenging than expected in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some critics point to intelligence failures before the wars began and during reconstruction efforts; others point to underdeveloped and ad hoc approaches to post-conflict reconstruction

planning, while still others place the blame on senior leaders of reconstruction efforts.[2]

One potential explanation is rarely discussed: the conduct of combat operations before the beginning of reconstruction. Oftentimes discussions of phase III and phase IV operations occur in relative isolation, and we assume the operations are independent of each other. However, these two components of military actions are highly intertwined and interconnected. Is it possible that the way the U.S. military conducts wars makes it harder to achieve long-lasting, peaceful outcomes?

I believe that the "American way of war," that is, the doctrine followed and tactics used used during phase III operations, creates great difficulties and additional problems to solve during phase IV operations. Methods that are highly successful during the maneuver phase of conflicts directly contribute to increasingly difficult post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

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Cause and Effect

We cannot expect easy post-conflict stabilization operations in our current military operations because of three conditions we either fostered or failed to control. The overwhelming use of force espoused by the Powell Doctrine, the targeting of state infrastructure, and the presence of increasing numbers of foreign nationals, all create problems that continue to plague efforts in reconstruction. I will discuss each of these considerations in turn.

Overwhelming use of military force. One of the most common axioms of military action is to use overwhelming force in order to defeat an adversary.[3] A commonly held guideline when planning an offensive operation is to possess a 3:1 advantage in personnel in combat operations and an even greater numeric advantage during military operations in urbanized terrain.[4] In practice, however, the United States military almost always attacks with less than that ratio. By employing advanced technology,

such as next-generation attack aviation assets and advanced armored vehicles, the U.S. often makes up for differences in numeric quantity.

This approach has been quite successful in recent history. Even though coalition forces barely outnumbered the Iraqi military forces in 1991, U.S. and allied forces soundly defeated an entrenched Iraqi army with a five-week air campaign and a 100-hour ground offensive. In 2003, the predominantly U.S. and British invasion coalition force of 263,000 soldiers attacked and defeated an Iraqi army of approximately 375,000 soldiers and captured Baghdad in six weeks. The use of overwhelming force made these difficult military maneuvers possible even though the coalition was at a noticeable numeric disadvantage.

While stunning military defeats through the use of tremendous amounts of force are important for successful phase III operations and force protection, these types of devastating defeats of American adversaries may come with unintended and problematic consequences once phase IV operations begin. The overwhelming use of military force can spawn a desire for revenge or retribution in defeated adversaries.[5] There are several instances where a humiliating defeat in one war planted the seeds for future wars. As Robert Harkavy writes:

> The extent or depth of defeat may be very important in determining the level of resulting humiliation. The Arabs in 1967 and Iraq in 1991 suffered overwhelming, humiliating defeats of the kind that produces lasting shame. In both cases, before-the-war boastfulness (enemies were going to drown in their own blood) was followed by almost comic-opera levels of military performance, widely interpreted throughout the world as something akin to cowardice that, subsequently, was to produce high levels of shame.[6]

This sort of relationship is not limited to the Middle East. The contentious relationship between Germany and France during the balance of power era in the late 1800s and the numerous wars between India and Pakistan demonstrate that defeat in one war has sown the seeds of the next conflict in direct, explicit terms, a psychological need for the restoration of state honor through military might.

Former enemies often point to one significant indicator when discussing damage to and loss of

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their honor and respect—vast differences in casualties from their opponents. When one side takes a disproportionate level of casualties, it often believes their lives are seen as less valuable or important than the lives of their adversaries, and the need for revenge and retribution grows. This argument is very common when discussing the conflicts and wars between Israel and the Palestinians.[7] Anger because of dramatic differences in casualties has surfaced in U.S. military activities. In the 1991 Persian Gulf War, more than 25,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed compared to only 268 American soldiers. During Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, 18 U.S. soldiers were killed in the October 1993 Battle of Mogadishu, while more than 1,000 Somalis were killed in the fighting.[8] These statistics clearly illustrate that there was a significant difference between the number of U.S. soldiers killed and the numbers of adversaries killed, and in both instances, these battles created dramatic and appreciable levels of hostility.

Targeting infrastructure during combat operations. Infrastructure has always been a critical component of military and security operations. The Roman Empire was able to maintain its control over vast expanses of territory because of the road system it constructed throughout Europe and Western Asia. Strategic road junctions at Gettysburg made the battle there a critical point of the U.S. Civil War because the army that possessed those crossroads would have far greater freedom of maneuver throughout the country. In World War II, German harbors, railroads, and bridges were bombed to curtail and cut off re-supply and troop reinforcements. During the 1991 Persian Gulf War, U.S. warplanes targeted communications nodes and major highways so Saddam Hussein's armies could not coordinate and plan a coherent defense or retreat, leaving them isolated, without instructions, and more vulnerable to coalition attacks.

While it is an important and viable military consideration to target, damage, and destroy these systems during phase III operations, these same infrastructure networks are critical systems that are necessary for successful reconstruction operations in the occupied state during the aftermath of an invasion. A telephone exchange, which can be used to pass along orders and information when attempting to stop a U.S. advance or invasion, is also used in peacetime to pass along information and orders from the central government to outlying areas of the state. A bridge used for moving tanks during wartime can be used to move trucks containing food and other tradable goods during post-conflict rebuilding and peacetime. Targeting these systems in war denies everyone their use in times of peace.

The problem of targeting infrastructure stands out in the Balkan countries. When NATO authorized and implemented an air campaign against Serbia in 1995 and against Kosovo in 1999, one of the primary targets of these campaigns was the infrastructure of these states. The logic of these strikes was to stop the flow of troops, weapons, and orders into Serbia and Kosovo, thereby slowing and potentially stopping the ethnic cleansing in those regions.[9] The costs of targeting infrastructure in those countries is still being paid today, almost a decade after those conflicts. Large numbers of bridges, roads, and tunnels are still not rebuilt, leaving the fabric of those countries torn, and the long process of rebuilding infrastructure prolongs U.S. involvement in that region.

Compounding these problems is the systems' generally diminished and degraded status in many conflict-torn countries. When a country breaks down and the primary focus of the central government is state survival, funds and efforts to maintain or construct infrastructure become almost non-existent. This problem is most acute in states that were involved in long-term civil wars, such as Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Sudan. At a minimum, the infrastructure in these states is neglected, and it is far more common that these important systems are often completely ignored for a substantial length of time (perhaps even for decades).

Phase IV reconstruction is going to be far more difficult and costly without these infrastructure systems, regardless of whether combat operations

or years of government neglect destroyed them. Moving material into remote locations without roads or bridges often requires the use of helicopters or air drops, which are far more expensive to operate than convoys of trucks. Loss of potable water because of combat operations often means that expensive water systems have to be shipped into reconstruction zones, again taking substantial amounts of time and funds. Coordinating phase IV operations across an entire country without a working, serviceable phone system will be considerably more difficult than if a functioning system were in place. Rebuilding destroyed infrastructure costs money that could best be spent elsewhere, and it substantially prolongs U.S. involvement in post-conflict reconstruction.

Non-indigenous combatants in conflict zones. The presence of foreign fighters and support personnel operating against the United States in combat zones should be a growing concern for military planners and policy-makers alike. Many times, we assume the invading force will be fighting and pacifying the people of the state they are "standing in," and will only have to deal with the citizens of that country, but assuming the population and military of a target country only consists of one nationality is dangerous. Greater numbers of foreign nationals are now present in states where military interventions are planned. Broadly speaking, there are two types of foreign nationals that are increasing in numbers and could be involved in direct combat operations against the U.S.—foreign combatants and employees of private military firms (PMFs).

During any international conflict, a number of foreign nationals are drawn to the sound of warfare and combat. Whether they are mercenaries that seek wars for profit or warmongers that seek combat because of bloodlust, when conflicts and wars arise there is an appreciable pull into combat for certain foreign citizens as soldiers and combatants. This pattern has been most obvious and prevalent in various conflicts throughout the Middle East in the last three decades. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1980, there was a heavy flow of foreign-fighters into the ranks of the Afghan Mujahadeen. When civil war broke out in Lebanon in 1983, large numbers of foreign fighters streamed into that state to fight against whichever side they found objectionable, and they continue

The front facade and portico of the bomb-damaged Ba'ath Party Headquarters in the International Zone, Baghdad, Iraq, 23 November 2003.

to do so today. This same problem has manifested itself in Iraq. Foreign nationals from Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria and a diverse array of countries-of-origin have entered the combat zones of these three conflicts. This trend is not isolated to the Middle East; the phenomenon is quite prevalent on the global stage. During the interstate and civil wars in East Africa, fighters from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda intermixed and operated across their respective national borders.

While foreign nationals are one source of trouble, they are not the only foreign presence on today's battlefields that can complicate military operations. Private military firms are increasingly utilized by

all states of the international system. More than 160 countries contracted some form of PMF to help provide services to promote state security.[10] Many of these firms are neither based nor headquartered in the United States, and several operate in multiple countries simultaneously. The global increase in the use of these companies heightens the probability that U.S. or other intervention forces will encounter the citizens of a third-party state during wartime.[11]

Foreign fighters from any source create additional challenges for any military during both phase III and phase IV operations. Foreign fighters often fall outside standard chains-of-command of the official state military. Because these troops operate outside a formal command structure, it is far more difficult (and potentially impossible) to stop their violent activities when a cease-fire or other peace agreement is made or established. They may continue to fight based on their ideological dispositions or contractual obligations, rather than abide by the terms of a cease-fire agreement.

In addition to the above, foreign fighters in a combat zone can create larger diplomatic challenges and potentially initiate additional crises. The presence of foreign nationals in any combat zone, regardless of whether they are active combatants or not, can create international tension and incidents. The accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the air strikes on Serbia created appreciable diplomatic tensions between the U.S. and China during that conflict, even though those personnel were in no way involved in the conflict. If a group of foreign nationals takes up arms against U.S. forces, the capture or death of these nationals could create a large-scale diplomatic or even a military crisis with their country-of-origin.

Policy Recommendations

While it is important to identify what phase III actions make phase IV operations difficult, it is not enough just to criticize them; setting forth guidelines and recommendations for future planning is

After spotting several Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) fighters fleeing the area, a Kiowa provides security for the Soldiers of the 1st Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, as they apprehend the AQI operatives, 23 February 2008.

equally important. Some will note that the changes presented here are often political as well as military proposals. Because the military is the instrument that carries out combat operations, it will be in place immediately as reconstruction efforts begin. Speed of restoration and repair of former combat zones is of the essence; the first 60 to 90 days are critical during phase IV operations. Civilian organizations, while quite useful, may not arrive in a timely enough fashion to help during this critical period, so the military must be prepared to be the lead organization on a variety of issues for several months in order to increase the chances of post-conflict success.

Minimizing humiliation and the need for revenge. It should be a priority for future military planners to identify a middle ground between the need to use overwhelming military power to end wars quickly and the need for defeated enemies to "save face." If a military force is overwhelmingly defeated to the point of humiliation, they will be far more likely to look toward terrorism, insurgency, and guerrilla warfare as an avenue to restore their lost honor and reputation. If the force can be defeated in such a way as to leave it some level of dignity and honor, it should be less likely to try to restore its reputation through the aforementioned methods. Working this consideration into tactical, operational, and strategic planning is not an easy task and is probably the most challenging of the recommendations made here. Force protection is one of the most important considerations for military commanders. However, leaving the honor of an adversary intact is a vital consideration that must be addressed and realized in order to increase the chances of success in post-conflict stabilization.

Wars are becoming more deadly for soldiers and civilians alike. Unrestricted warfare is taking a greater toll on everyone involved, from the sol-

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diers doing the fighting to the civilian populations engulfed by conflict. Every casualty during maneuver operations or in post-conflict reconstruction, civilian or military, intentional or accidental, makes some person more likely to decide to support or join an insurgency. The United States should become a world-leader in working to reduce casualties, both military and civilian, in every conflict around the globe. It should be a U.S. policy goal to make the sterile, cold term "collateral damage" a thing of the past. "Human protection"—a policy of preserving the life and limb of both foreign civilians and enemy military personnel alike—must stand on equal footing with force protection to reduce the dangers to people in conflict zones and reduce and remove the motivations for taking up arms against U.S. soldiers in post-conflict environments.

One way the U.S. military can begin to promote this viewpoint is to focus far greater attention on the increasing development and deployment of mass-effect, non-lethal technologies. Recent technological breakthroughs have made these instruments far more viable and important than they were only a few years ago. Parabolic megaphones and focused microwaves can subdue people without causing permanent harm to them, thereby reducing casualties. These weapons systems have shown dramatic promise in Iraq and elsewhere; we should widely distribute and heavily utilize them during post-conflict reconstruction, and doctrinal planners should begin to incorporate their use into phase III operations.

Targeting, reconstruction, and expansion of infrastructure. The U.S. should change its approach of attacking infrastructure during both phase III and phase IV operations. Future campaigns cannot leave a country in shambles as was done in Serbia or Kosovo. Continuing this approach will lengthen post-war commitments, dramatically increase financial costs of reconstruction, and therefore necessitate longer military involvements in reconstruction efforts. Part of the remedy for this problem is already beginning to take shape with the advent and increasing importance of "effects-based targeting."[12] Rather than damaging and destroying infrastructure in its entirety, military planners are working towards identifying critical hubs and points where the greatest effect can be achieved with the least amount of damage, thereby making post-war

reconstruction efforts easier. While this is an important first change in approach, it is far from sufficient, and new standardized policy directives need to be incorporated during phase IV operations to increase the chances of success once the shooting stops.

It should become part of standard military planning for phase IV operations that any and all infrastructure damaged or destroyed should be restored to pre-conflict conditions within 60 days of the conclusion of major combat operations. If the basic infrastructure systems are so repaired in such a dramatically short period of time, inconvenience to civilians will be minimal and the economic and social fabric of the state will be quickly restored, thereby minimizing the social displacement that contributes to people taking up arms against the U.S.

While repairing damage caused by an invasion is important, it is often not enough to promote the long-term health and welfare of a state. Both military and civilian planners should consider and decide, during pre-combat planning and preparation stages, the degree to which they need to improve and elevate the infrastructure of a state facing a military intervention beyond its pre-war, pre-intervention capabilities. Infrastructure is critical for the basic operation and functioning of all states, and most states that are target candidates for interventions lack adequate infrastructure systems to function. Only by improving these systems throughout a country can state-building efforts take root and promote a long-lasting, stable society capable of governing and defending itself without outside support. Before the shooting starts, military and civilian planners should systematically examine and draft a plan to improve the infrastructure capacity of the state to ensure lasting, successful post-conflict operations.

U.S. Marine Corps, SGT Andrew D. Pendracki

U.S. Marines from Marine Wing Security Battalion 372 engage in civil disturbance training on Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, 23 December 2007. During the training, the Marines learn how to neutralize aggressive rioters using nonlethal tactics in the event of a disturbance on base.

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Quarantining and minimizing external combatants in conflict zones. It is impossible to completely alleviate the prospect of foreign nationals being killed during a military intervention. However, proper military planning can ensure that this problem does not become worse as the conflict and post-reconstruction phase progress. A major objective in any future intervention effort should be to seal off all of the invaded state's borders to reduce the influence of foreign combatants. Allowing the free-flow of terrorists and extremists into a country is a recipe for disaster. Many are well trained and experienced soldiers and combatants, bringing their dangerous expertise to bear against U.S. forces. By sealing off a country's borders, we contain the threat of foreign fighters and do not permit it to worsen. While there may still be foreign fighters present in the battlespace, when the borders are sealed their number will not increase and exacerbate post-conflict reconstruction problems.

When it comes to private military firms, fewer solutions are available. Many PMFs would be deterred from supporting governments directly opposing the U.S. because nothing hurts their profit margin more than their utter military defeat. There are very few scenarios worse for these firms than to openly oppose and fight against the U.S. military. However, deterrence may not be enough. Gaining intelligence on firms and the roles they fulfill should be a fairly straightforward and public endeavor using open-source research because these firms operate in the corporate and legalistic domain. With this information, the U.S. should ensure that any and all PMFs have been notified that they are potentially in the line of fire from a military intervention, by making it a practice to send notices and warnings to both the corporate offices of PMFs and the countries where they have corporate headquarters. When it is clear the U.S. is planning to invade, most firms will make it a point to evacuate the target country of an intervention.

Conclusions

Overall, current U.S. military practices are second to none in successful warfighting. However, the problems that seem to have plagued post-conflict reconstruction efforts over the last six years somewhat overshadow this record of success. Working to modify warfighting techniques can alleviate some post-conflict reconstruction problems. The military will have to take the lead on attempting to reduce and minimize human casualties, the destruction of state infrastructure systems, and the numbers and influence of foreign fighters within combat zones. If the United States can be successful in this effort, it will increase the long-term success of post-conflict reconstruction. **MR**

NOTES

1. Sudarsan Raghvan, "War in Iraq Propelling a Massive Migration." *Washington Post*, 4 February 2007, A01; and Associated Press, "Report: 1 Million Iraqis May Flee in '07." *Washington Post Online* Friday, 16 February 2007.

2. Some of the books that have contributed to these discussions are Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006); Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006); and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 2006).

3. The use of overwhelming military force is best captured in the Powell Doctrine. For further readings on the origins of the Powell Doctrine, see Jeffrey Record, *Making War, Thinking History: Munich, Vietnam, and Presidential Uses of Force from Korea to Kosovo* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2002); and Kenneth J. Campbell, "Once Burned, Twice Cautious: Explaining the Weinberger—Powell Doctrine," *Armed Forces and Society* 24 (1998): 357-74.

4. Timothy L. Thomas, "The Battle for Grozny: Deadly Classroom for Urban Combat." *Parameters* 29 (1999): 87-102.

5. Robert Harkavy, "Defeat, National Humiliation, and the Revenge Motif in International Politics," *International Politics* 37 (September 2000): 345-68.

6. Ibid, 361.

7. Assaf Moghadam, "Palestinian Suicide Terrorism in the Second Intifada: Motiva-tions and Organizational Aspects." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26 (2003): 65-92.

8. Statistics on casualties come from two *Correlates of War* project data sets: The "Interstate War Participant" data set and the "Militarized interstate Dispute" data set. Both are available at <http://correlatesofwar.org/>.

9. Andrew J. Bacevich and Eliot A. Cohen, Eds., *War Over Kosovo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Benjamin S. Lambeth, *NATO's Air War for Kosovo* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2001); and Stephen T. Hosmer, *Why Milosevic Decided to Settle When He Did* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2001).

10. P.W. Singer has written extensively on this topic. His works include *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Cornel University Press 2004), "Peacekeepers, Inc." (in *Policy Review* 119, June-July 2003), "Outsourcing War" (in *Foreign Affairs* 84, March-April 2005), and "War, Profits, and the Vacuum of Law: Privatized Military Firms and International Law" (in the *Colombia Journal of Transnational Law* 2004).

11. It is important to note that this type of an encounter between U.S. and a private military firm has not happened yet. However, with the increasing utilization of these companies by so many countries, the chances are rising that U.S. forces will engage military contractors of a PMF in the foreseeable future.

12. Ward Thomas, "Victory by Duress: Civilian Infrastructure as a Target in Air Campaigns." *Security Studies* 15 (Jan-Mar 2006).