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**Will Iraq
transform
US doctrine?**

US counterinsurgency in the information age

If the US military 'transforms for stability operations', what implications will this have on transformation as initially conceived? In anticipation of the Department of Defense's 2006 quadrennial defence review, David Ucko assesses the magnitude and full meaning of the current reforms.

◆ A US soldier secures the area in front of Palestine Hotel a day after three vehicle-borne suicide bombing attacks hit the compound, in Baghdad, Iraq, on 25 October.

In February 2006, the US Department of Defense (DoD) will release its quadrennial defence review. It will assess the progress made since the last review, which was published soon after the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US and consider how best to prepare the US military for future challenges. This review is the second such document published under the auspices of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and arrives in the wake of the US military involvement in two major campaigns – Afghanistan and Iraq.

The anticipation is heightened by the fact that the US military continues to face significant challenges in both theatres. The US military has suffered, on average, 70 casualties per month in Iraq since the beginning of the year. The monthly toll on Iraqi servicemen and civilians is believed to exceed 800. In Afghanistan, initial US counterterrorism operations have mutated into a prolonged campaign against a dug-in Taliban force launching attacks throughout the southeastern provinces. Once again, the US military is actively involved in counterinsurgency – a category of conflict it has sought to avoid since the Vietnam War.

There have been positive developments: on 15 October, the Iraqi population voted in a new constitution in a referendum and in September Afghanistan held its first parliamentary elections in three decades. Nonetheless, even the most optimistic account must highlight the need for the US military to improve its ability to conduct the types of operations that have been thrust its way since it launched the war on terrorism. This need will be particularly acute if the widely held belief that terrorism breeds in failed states gains further currency, and intervention in Third World conflicts becomes a national security prerogative. Training and the participation of foreign militaries in these missions mitigate the burden, but the US will require its own capabilities.

These capabilities have remained underdeveloped since the Vietnam War. The US military sidelined counterinsurgency following the defeat in Southeast Asia and instead specialised in conventional war fighting. Subsequent military doctrine excluded US combat troops from counterinsurgency operations, which were instead to be fought by host-nation troops instructed

by US military advisors. Despite its merits, this approach erroneously presupposed that future counterinsurgency campaigns would not require a US military presence. It also helped to marginalise counterinsurgency within military training and education. Little changed with the end of the Cold War: any

Key Points

- The uneven performance of the US armed forces in anticipating, preparing for and carrying out the post-conflict phase of Operation 'Iraqi Freedom' has brought into relief a 'missing link' in the US's awesome military capability.
- The operational setbacks in Iraq have also dented the enthusiasm surrounding Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's concept of 'military transformation'. Having enabled the three-week blitz to Baghdad in 2003, this concept has proven less applicable in the subsequent stabilisation phase.
- In recognition of these deficiencies, the US Department of Defense (DoD) is now seeking to implement a raft of reforms to improve the military's ability to conduct 'stability operations'. This constitutes a potential turning point, as the US military has since the Vietnam War focused mostly on conventional combat.

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◆ Many network-centric warfare technologies have shown themselves highly applicable in unconventional warfare situations, such as during Operation 'Enduring Freedom'. The photo shows an unarmed version of the Predator MQ1 unmanned aerial vehicle, which has been successfully deployed in lethal precision strikes against individual terrorists. It is useful for reconnaissance beyond the forward edge of battle and it has also been deployed to help monitor patterns of rebel activity.

enthusiasm for 'peace enforcement' operations was swiftly crushed by the 1993-94 intervention in Somalia. These experiences culminated in an overriding aversion to complex, prolonged on-the-ground, politico-military engagements.

This stance marked the first administration of President George W Bush. During the 2000 presidential campaign and while in office, he and senior members of the administration publicly opposed US involvement in 'stability operations' and 'nation building'. The vision for the US military instead centred on the concept of 'military transformation' - the process of exploiting information-age technology to improve the military's speed, agility, efficiency and connectedness. Rumsfeld has pushed this concept since his appointment in early 2001. In October of that year, the Office of Force Transformation was created within the Office of the Secretary of Defense. In 2002, the Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) was made a lead agency of the DoD's overall transformation process. The US military services were then requested to submit yearly Strategic Transformation Assessments to the Office of Force Transformation so as to ensure adherence to the new vision. Transformation has since assumed centre-stage within the DoD and beyond.

DoD enthusiasm for transformation was further heightened by the two post-11 September 2001 military campaigns. In Afghanistan, the image of US Special Forces and Air Force combat air controllers on horseback calling in precision air-strikes

from bombers overhead seemed to encapsulate the imagination, agility and innovation of the transformation ideal. In his Citadel speech in December 2001, Bush contended that Afghanistan - a 'proving ground' for transformation - had demonstrated that 'innovative doctrine and

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high-tech weapons can shape and then dominate in an unconventional conflict'. The three-week blitz to Baghdad in Operation 'Iraqi Freedom' showcased the best sides of this revolutionary model of warfare: speed, efficiency, jointness and decisiveness. Significantly, however, Rumsfeld's first quadrennial defence review - published on 30 September 2001 - and other DoD reports on transformation, made no mention of either stability or counterinsurgency operations. Indeed, these types of campaigns were unforeseen and undesired even as the US military entered Afghanistan and Iraq. The full cost of this neglect has since been

brought into sharp relief. Against this backdrop, speculation abounds regarding the forthcoming review and the future direction of the world's mightiest military: how will it adapt to face the unforeseen operational challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan? What implications will this have on the DoD's transformation drive?

Network-centric counterinsurgency

Transformation has remained the lodestone with which Pentagon officials judge the value of programmes and systems. This begs the question of whether it can tackle the problems currently facing the US military: the messy, on-the-ground counterinsurgencies being fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. Opinion on this matter tends towards polarisation, with transformation sceptics and enthusiasts failing to find the common ground on which to move forward.

A key proponent of transformation, Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowski, former director of the Office of Force Transformation, summed up one side of the argument at a recent conference: "Who wants to be less networked? Who wants to know less? Who wants to be slow and lethargic? Who wants to be ponderous and clumsy?" Reference is made to the ideal of the transformation process: 'network-centric warfare'. This relates to the prosecution of war through the active interlacing of allied actors in a network, where sensors, decision-makers and shooters are connected, resulting in greater and shared awareness, an 'information advantage' over one's adversary and, ultimately, a speedier, more accurate decision-making cycle and leverage of force. Network-centric warfare relies on the ability to collect, analyse and act upon information so as to pre-empt and disrupt the adversary. It is a model predicated on precision, protection, speed and lethality.

This type of warfare is not exclusively applicable to conventional battlefields; it can also create a distinct advantage in counterinsurgency operations, particularly in the tactical realm. Here, superior communications and mobility ensure swift action when needed. Similarly, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and sensors can provide vital information on rebel movement or patterns of activity. Finally, the precision obtained through 'smart' weapons can, in specific circumstances, provide an unparalleled means of eliminating hardline pockets of resistance.

These tactical benefits notwithstanding, there are deeper operational and strategic tensions between this emerging approach to war and the requirements of a counterinsur-

gency campaign. Indeed, the two forms of warfare – that anticipated by the transformation ‘model’ and those now encountered on the ground – are incongruent and often incompatible. As the DoD seeks to prioritise transformation and improve its ability to conduct stability and reconstruction operations, it must pay special attention to these contradictions.

Many of the incompatibilities stem from the historical context of transformation. It was in the late 1970s that US strategists first sought to exploit information technology and precision weaponry, then to offset the numerical superiority of Soviet armour in the European theatre. The result was perceived as a ‘military technological revolution’ and provided the foundations for the current transformation drive. Importantly, this concept was intended to combat a conventional militarily threat. Likewise, the simultaneous quest for service jointness – a foundation stone of network-centric warfare – was prompted not by the lack of co-ordination in Vietnam or the need to prepare specifically for counterinsurgency campaigns, but in response to inter-service dysfunction in various special and mid-intensity operations of the early 1980s, such as the invasion of Grenada and Operation ‘Eagle Claw’, the failed hostage-rescue operation in Iran. As the military technological revolution gave way to the C4ISR-driven ‘revolution in military affairs’ of the 1990s, the technology and concepts were updated but the approach remained intact. The revolution accordingly proved itself most effective against conventional threats: contrast the 1991 Iraq campaign with the operation in Somalia three years later.

With the revolution in military affairs’ later mutation into force transformation, little has changed: the process remains predicated on conventional campaigns. The desired end product – a military with an ‘information advantage’, resulting in a smaller, leaner and more technological force, operating on shorter timelines and with greater mobility – is not intrinsically suited or intended for manpower-intensive, politically complex and long-term campaigns, whether termed counterinsurgencies or stability operations. These missions were to be avoided, a strategy forcibly abandoned only when state failure became associated with the threat of international terrorism.

Transformation enjoys a forced proximity with the current counterinsurgency campaigns. The incompatibility has various manifestations. Operationally, as demonstrated in both Operation ‘Enduring Freedom’ and Operation ‘Iraqi Freedom’, the possibility of winning conventional combat

quickly can compromise the subsequent stabilisation period. There is scant time to plan for the post-conflict phase and because ‘victory’ is achieved with a light or even non-existent footprint, there is no large occupation force in place to assume the necessary constabulary duties of the transition period. Meanwhile, precision strikes on societal nodes and infrastructure, in particular the electricity grid, leave the targeted state rudderless and exceptionally vulnerable. While transformation can produce quick wins, these necessitate an organised and trained follow-on force ready to seize the initiative even before the total cessation of hostilities. While it would be undesirable to tinker with the winning formula for conventional war fighting, the stability component must become integral to strategic planning from the start: delays during the interregnum between combat and post-combat are fatal.

A second incompatibility relates to the function of military force. Network-centric warfare and transformation capabilities are geared towards the timely and precise

‘Who wants to be less networked? Who wants to know less? Who wants to be slow and lethargic? Who wants to be ponderous and clumsy?’

Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowski, former director of the Office of Force Transformation

destruction of military targets. To employ the transformation jargon, lethality is pushed to the edge of the force or the ‘tip of the spear’. Nonetheless, the ability to channel the information advantage to neutralise threats before they are brought to bear is not so useful in counterinsurgencies, where the primary function of the military is not to kill but to guarantee security, initiate reconstruction and work towards the transition of power to a legitimate local government.

Accordingly, counterinsurgencies do not require the small and technologically reliant forces envisaged in the transformation literature, but a large and appropriately robust force that can ‘stay put’ and withstand unpredictable threats, setbacks and casualties until local security forces are able to take over. The lightness, deployability and decisiveness sought through transformation take on a tactical edge, even in counterinsurgencies, but the strategic contest is won gradually through survivability and attrition – the very anathema of the transformation ideal.

Furthermore, the killing conducted as part of a counterinsurgency requires a degree of precision that eludes even today’s high-tech capabilities. It is a task best undertaken by disciplined and well-trained infantry. Even ‘smart’ munitions are of limited value in counterinsurgencies, as militants typically disperse to avoid detection or operate in urban settings, forcing politically delicate decisions regarding blast radii, circular error probables and missile precision. Similarly, the network-centric warfare ‘signature-chasing’ and preferred means of intelligence-gathering via UAVs and sensors are not ideally suited for counterinsurgencies, where the adversary is low-tech and human intelligence (HUMINT) has proven to be more valuable.

The larger problem here is that network-centric warfare was developed in isolation from the political dimension of conflict. This is no oversight: a prime directive of the transformation era is to focus not on prospective threats but on the capabilities required by the US military. Whereas this approach has merits, it discourages long-term contingency planning and context-specific consideration of adversary and setting – the type of information that is critical in a counterinsurgency campaign. It is therefore unfortunate that network-centric warfare, in its theory and approach, is so markedly apolitical and divorced from actual contingencies, current or anticipated. The capability is awesome, but who will it be used against and to what precise political purpose? Meanwhile, a paramount concern with the construction and management of the US network obscures the real factors behind success in counterinsurgencies: the people, the adversary, their interaction and their motivation to resist, fight or co-operate.

The transformation process

That the transformation process is not wholly appropriate for stability and reconstruction or counterinsurgency operations may not be entirely surprising. After all, this was not its stated purpose, either historically or as conceived by the Bush administration. However, this is changing. As the DoD moves from the 2001 quadrennial defence review to the 2006 review, the focus on transformation will remain but the neglect of politico-military contingencies will seemingly not. The 2001 review outlined a 1-4-2-1 paradigm, predicated on homeland security, four small-scale operations and two near-simultaneous major campaigns, whereof one could be won decisively. In contrast, the 2006 review will seek to respond to four categories of threats, including ‘irregular’ ones such as

Transformation for stability operations

	Transformation	'Second transformation'
The network	Network-centric warfare: sensor-to-shooter	Interagency, sharing information to achieve unified action
Jointness	Service interdependence in combat	Military and interagency jointness to streamline and co-ordinate government action
Information	Conventional intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance: sensors, drones, SIGINT, signatures	HUMINT, social-network analysis, cultural awareness
Precision	Surgical strikes with precision-guided munitions, smart weapons	Achieve a precise psychological effect through the channelling of non-military and/or military assets as appropriate
Speed	Maximise battlefield speed, pre-empt and disrupt enemy decision-making cycle	Control tempo, ability to accelerate and decelerate as appropriate
Technology	Boost lethality, 'dominant manoeuvre', 'precision engagement' and 'full-dimension protection'	Boost human skills (language), non-lethal weapons, biometrics, communications interoperability, Counter typical threats (such as snipers, improvised explosive devices)

◆ In light of the operational challenges in Iraq, the transformation process is itself being redefined to accommodate stability operations

counterinsurgency and stability operations. This strategic concept, now dominant within the Pentagon, also indicates that US engagement in irregular operations is considered highly probable.

This shift emerged in early 2004, when the situation in Iraq was recognised as a protracted counterinsurgency rather than the death throes of a defeated regime. In January 2004, the Office of the Secretary of Defense requested that the Defense Science Board focus its yearly Summer Study on the transition to and from hostilities. Released in December 2004, the report framed stability operations as an unavoidable, expensive 'growth industry' that had to be faced head-on. The report warned of the limited role of transformation in fostering capabilities for stability operations and emphasised the implications of such missions on force structure. In late 2004, the DoD released its Strategic Planning Guidance 2006-11. Envisaging greater US engagement in stability operations, the DoD ordered the military to work on interagency co-ordination, develop specialised skills and technology, and implement certain key changes in Army and Marine Corps force structure.

Since then, much has changed. Recognition of the operational realities in Iraq has prompted some within the DoD to downplay transformation as traditionally conceived, or to redefine it simply as

'changing the way we think' about the military. This new definition implicitly acknowledges the changing role of the military, but it is vague and offers no criteria or basis for interpretation.

To be effective, the reorientation must not only address stability operations directly, it must be deep-rooted, institutionalised and encouraged from the top. What is required may be nothing less than a 'second transformation' – a concept advanced by Dr Hans Binnendijk, director of the Center for Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defense University. As he presents it, this second transformation must produce radical change in four interdependent areas: technology; concepts; culture, education and training; and organisational structures.

Technology

Acquiring technological assets for counterinsurgencies is the least complicated means of adaptation, especially for the US. At the same time, technology will not provide a magic bullet. The process is informed by the experience in Iraq and emerging capabilities are based largely on military requirements in urban settings: crowd control, surveillance, non-lethality and real-time language-translation devices. The DoD is also developing the capability to track, target and locate individual enemies rather than

weapons systems or vehicles. Meanwhile, 'dual-use' technologies such as UAVs, communications equipment and body armour can be made relevant to both conventional and stability operations.

Technological innovation has already helped counter the threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). In July 2004, the DoD established the Joint IED Defeat Task Force and awarded it an annual budget of USD1 billion. This has accelerated the development and deployment of vital gear. In May, the DoD fast-tracked the purchase of 6,500 portable and programmable Warlock Blue jamming devices. Meanwhile, the military is operating in conjunction with industry to develop and field a host of IED countermeasures, ranging from personal and vehicle armour, electronic shields and signal jamming equipment to explosive ordnance disposal and remote-controlled vehicles. The challenge here is to be proactive and stay ahead of the insurgents rather than only reacting to situations on the ground.

Technology is also applied to stability training: at a recent conference, Lieutenant-General John F Sattler, commander of the Marine Forces Central Command, detailed the construction of an 'Urban Center of Excellence' at the Twentynine Palms base. According to Sattler, a 100-building town has been completed and a further two of 300 and 1,500 buildings are to be constructed. These centres are modular and can be reconfigured to create unpredictable urban settings.

Concepts and Doctrine

Several sectors of the US armed forces are currently developing the doctrine and concepts with which to frame stability operations. Having released FM 3-07, Stability and Support Operations, in February 2003, the US Army is renewing its 2004 field manual for counterinsurgencies. The US Marine Corps is working on a concept paper on the same topic and JFCOM on an updated Joint Operating Concept for the military contribution to 'security, transition and reconstruction operations'. The pre-approval copy of the concept reveals the lessons learnt in Iraq: it emphasises inter-agency co-ordination, the need to balance force with restraint, and the establishment and sustainment of legitimacy.

Many of the dominant themes are found in the August 2005 Capstone Concept for Joint Operations. This document details the military contribution to 'unified action', the co-ordinated application of all government agencies to achieve operational success. The tenets dealing with stability operations stress several classic counterinsurgency lessons

and are indicative of the US military's reorientation. Like the Joint Operating Concept, the paper recognises stability operations as a predominantly political endeavour and advocates an interagency approach where military force is employed in support of the wider goals pursued through diplomacy, intelligence and economic policy. The capstone concept also underscores the complexity and unpredictability of counterinsurgency operations and urges rigorous scrutiny of campaign policies and effects.

Culture, education and training

The US military is reorienting its education and training to prepare for stability operations. One of the first indications of this volte face was the decision in 2003 not to close down the Peacekeeping Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, as planned (the Institute faced closure due to objections made by the Army and the Office of the Secretary of Defense to the military's role in such missions). In recognition of the difficulties in Iraq and the need to conduct similar operations in the future, this centre was instead re-launched as the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute.

Since then, training institutions have begun emphasising the role of culture, the specificities of urban operations, the civil-military operational interface and other aspects particular to stability operations. In the same vein, the DoD launched the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap in early 2005, promulgating a strategy to boost the linguistic capabilities of the armed forces. The assumption guiding this initiative is clearly that US soldiers will regularly be participating in operations where good relations and understanding of the locals are necessary.

Ideally, these and other initiatives will be consolidated by the forthcoming Directive 3000: DoD Capabilities for Stability Operations, which, following a year's sculpting, is seemingly nearing formal publication. This directive presents stability operations as a chief preoccupation of the US military and directs the DoD's various under-secretaries to configure their respective departments accordingly. Again, the directive urges interagency co-ordination and encourages other agencies to train and work with the military to arrive at unified government procedures for stability operations. The training itself, the directive states, should focus on harnessing language skills and cultural awareness for the most likely deployments.

For Directive 3000 to count, it must be met by a US military that is culturally open to



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◆ (Above and left) US Special Operations Forces on patrol in Kandahar, Afghanistan during Operation 'Enduring Freedom' in January 2002. A combination of Special Operations Forces and US precision air power was credited by the Pentagon with the swift victory over the Taliban and Al-Qaeda elements in 2001/02.

stability operations. The critical but equally woolly notion of culture is really the sine qua non of this second transformation. It entails a sea change in both institutional self-perception and the individual soldier's conception of the military. It comes down to two questions: who joins the US military and why? Changing culture is nonetheless primarily a top-down process, hinging on targeted recruitment, training and education, as well as the remoulding of the US military's institutional character. In the broadest terms, the first step involves recasting stability operations as integral to US national security rather than as missions that detract from combat readiness. In this regard, the aforementioned concepts and doctrinal publications are promising.

Organisational structures

The creation of organisational structures for stability operations remains a stumbling block. Which branch of the armed forces is to be nominated as the executive agent for these missions? The issue is linked with culture, as the willingness to pick up the gauntlet requires a shift in the perception of

the task at hand. This is not 'escorting kids to kindergarten' as Condoleezza Rice derided nation building in 2000, it is a complex but highly critical part of the spectrum of operations, central to the very utility of US military force in the 21st century. But will participation in these operations be perceived as such by the individual soldier, and will his or her achievements be rewarded as such by the larger system at hand?

This is not to say that there has been no progress. In response to a Strategic Planning Guidance order either to 'create standing units focused on stability operations or develop the capability to rapidly assemble... modular force elements that achieve the same effect', the US Army is currently modularising its force structure, moving from 10 divisions to 43-48 stand-alone brigade combat teams (BCTs) of 3,500 to 4,000 soldiers each. The thrust of this transformation is to form deployable and self-contained brigades that can be rendered multi-functional through modularity: the required skills are added in a plug-and-play manner. The Army could then implant military-police units, engineer components,

tactical HUMINT and other modules as required to meet stability challenges as they arise. The Army is also rebalancing its active and reserve corps, shifting more than 100,000 active corps positions from air defence and artillery to high-demand stability skills commonly found within the reserve corps, such as military police, psychological operations and civil affairs.

Embracing change?

It is tempting to view this raft of activity as a watershed in the DoD's approach to stability operations. However, while the lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan are having a dramatic effect, many of the new ideas and principles can be found in previous doctrine, such as the Army and Air Force FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, *Military Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict*, published in 1990, and the Army FM 7-98, *Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict*, published in 1992. Stability and support operations were also integral to the June 2001 FM 3-0, *Operations*, an Army capstone manual. Going back further, the Marine Corps' *Small Wars Journal* of 1948 still holds many truths regarding the politico-military complexities of what are now termed 'stability operations'. Nothing here would suggest that the more recent publications are redundant or misguided, instead, it is necessary to consider why the directives have not been internalised. The critical question is whether the publication of concepts and doctrine will in this instance result in genuine institutional, organisational and cultural change. The rhetorical commitment specifically to stability is welcome (and relatively novel), but how does it translate into practice?

The question of implementation has also plagued the draft Directive 3000, which has been criticised for failing to establish a precise plan to realise the undeniably sound proposals that it advances. The objective of interagency co-ordination is hardly new, yet previous directives, such as Bill Clinton's PDD-56 and PDD-78, were not implemented and therefore short-lived. How exactly is this new proposal going to resolve the impedimenta that have marred past initiatives? Clearly this issue goes beyond the DoD, but the latter must itself consider the incentives necessary to induce its services to toe the line.

It is also uncertain how exactly the Army organisational restructuring will effect the type of deep-rooted change necessary for the task at hand. It is somewhat disconcerting that the creation of lighter, deployable and net-friendly brigades is also serving the interest of the traditional transformationalists, as the aim of improving the Army's

stability operations ability may be overshadowed by more typical priorities. This would not be unprecedented. Dr Binnendijk says: "What you would really need is a large specialised force." The practice of using combat troops for stability operations as needed "is an insufficient response to the particular demands of these missions", according to Binnendijk.

The argument here is that stability operations require specific (and often non-military) skills that must be learnt in advance rather than ad hoc. This is true, but there is also reason to consider the insistence of Brigadier-General David Fastabend, deputy director of the Futures Center at the Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), that stability capabilities should not come at the expense of flexibility: "We cannot decide what force will be needed - it is the adversary's decision." Fastabend's point is that "in an uncertain operating environment where the enemy has no pattern, it is necessary to have a broad menu of capabilities".

This tension between flexibility and specialisation has yet to be resolved. For now - in the absence of a specialised agency - it

'Peacekeeping is not a job for soldiers, but only soldiers can do it'

Dag Hammarskjöld, former secretary-general of the United Nations

is critical that certain augmentation modules receive training that is appropriate specifically to stability operations, not just the conventional military tasks that may also be relevant in such circumstances. Binnendijk and others have advocated the establishment of a stability and reconstruction functional command that can act as a force-provider for these missions. Yet as Binnendijk acknowledges, the current military overstretch and the services' fear of turning units into second-class structures impede the shifting of resources to stability areas. Directive 3000's publication is delayed precisely because of concern as to whether the Army should be made the executive agent for these operations. When pressed to assume a role in this realm, Special Operations Command has expressed a similar reluctance to move beyond its traditional remit.

This reluctance is indicative of the overriding culture within the DoD and the services. Beyond the language employed in official documentation, the aversion to stability operations remains palpable. This is problematic. Dag Hammarskjöld, former secretary-general of the United Nations,

famously remarked: "Peacekeeping is not a job for soldiers, but only soldiers can do it." Yet the soldiers in question must also be trained for these missions. It is insufficient to prepare for big wars in the hope that the attendant knowledge and skills will also be applicable to irregular operations.

Beyond these abstract issues, the US military faces the immediate problems of low recruitment rates and fiscal cutbacks, both of which will retard its adeptness for stability operations. Thomas Edward Lawrence, better known as Lawrence of Arabia, noted: "War upon rebellion is messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife." Counterinsurgency is notoriously difficult, requiring a capable, disciplined and intelligent force. Given the current recruitment crisis, it is difficult to imagine how the US military will attract the type of personnel needed for stability, the 'strategic corporals', in General Charles Krulak's words, who have the education, intellect and acumen to manage the complexity of counterinsurgencies and act accordingly, even under pressure.

The way ahead

The US military stands at a crossroads: it is at this point uncertain whether the interest in stability and counterinsurgency will be sustained. The DoD has flirted with these types of operations before, then termed low-intensity conflict or military operations other than war, but attempts to transform the military into one institutionally capable of conducting these operations have continuously faltered. Whether it will be different this time, post-Iraq, depends largely on the outcome of the current campaigns. A catastrophic experience in either might again force counterinsurgency off the table. Early indications of such a diversion would include the conceptual subordination of counterinsurgency as a subset of counterterrorism, an overriding preoccupation with conventional threats such as North Korea and China and continued fixation with winning wars rather than consolidating the subsequent peace. ●

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