8-1-2003

War and the Art of Governance

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Recommended Citation
On 9 April 2003, jubilant crowds and US troops toppled the statue of Saddam Hussein in central Baghdad and drew down the curtain on the major combat phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Within hours of the liberation of Baghdad, amid spreading disorder and growing expectations, debate began over the reconstruction challenges ahead. Criticism and frustration with the chaos on the ground intensified over the apparent failure of the United States to plan adequately for the restoration of political and economic order once major combat operations had ended.

The root of Washington’s failure to anticipate the political disorder in Iraq rests precisely in the characterization of these challenges as “postwar” problems, a characterization used by virtually all analysts inside and outside of government. The Iraq situation is only the most recent example of the reluctance of civilian and military leaders, as well as most outside experts, to consider the establishment of political and economic order as a part of war itself. The point is not academic. It is central to any effective reconstruction strategy in future wars and has profound implications for the military’s planning, command arrangements, and implementation of current and future governance operations.2

Military and political leaders need to distinguish between governance operations, which are a core element of all wars, and activities such as peace operations and peacekeeping that may occur independently of war. Labeling political and economic reconstruction as a postwar problem muddles the fact that central to strategic victory in all wars fought by the United States has been the
creation of a favorable political order, a process overseen and administered by US military forces—usually the Army. The United States entered virtually all of its wars with the assumption that the government of the opposing regime would change or that the political situation would shift to favor US interests. During the Spanish-American War, we sought to change the governments of Cuba and Puerto Rico, and succeeded. During the Civil War, Washington was determined to change the way the South was governed. In Panama in 1989, the United States ousted Manuel Noriega, and the war did not end until the regime against which US forces had fought was out of power and political stability had resumed. In virtually all contingencies, political leaders in Washington conceded that only US military forces were up to the task of overseeing and implementing this final aspect of war. Arguably, the 2003 war in Iraq is rooted in the most prominent recent case where the political order did not change—the 1991 Gulf War. Some top Defense Department leaders have called the 2003 war a logical conclusion to the 1991 campaign.

President Bush’s early concerns, which emerged during his presidential campaign, about the involvement of US military forces in nation-building and peace operations stemmed from his desire to avoid overextending American resources and commitments.3 A clear distinction between governance operations that are integral to war and the myriad of missions referred to in the peace operations discourse would be hugely beneficial. Such a distinction would allow US defense planners to focus on the political and economic reconstruction that is a part of war, while relegating humanitarian and nation-building missions to other organizations. Moreover, equating the governance tasks that occur in all wars with the broader missions associated with peace operations and humanitarian assistance reinforces the tendency to avoid planning for governance operations in tandem with planning for combat operations. The essential point is this: Combat operations and governance operations are both integral to war and occur in tandem. US soldiers in Iraq today are wondering why, if “the war is supposed to be over, we are still being shot at.”4 They remain in Iraq because the war there is not over. The war in Iraq will not be over until a legitimate government is in place and until, as Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz has emphasized, the Iraqi people no longer live in fear.

Furthermore, it often has not been specialized civil affairs personnel who have conducted governance operations, but tactical combat personnel in the

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Before World War II, in fact, specialized civil affairs units did not exist. Even after the creation of these units, the reconstruction tasks in the theater were almost always more than they could handle alone. Thus tactical troops worked side-by-side with more specialized civil affairs officers to restructure corrupt police ministries, organize for local elections, and ensure that new government officials were, in fact, new. The civil affairs community that emerged after World War II did not succeed in integrating these tasks into the Army’s conception of war. The post-World War II reservists worked hard to convince the active Army to recognize the value of civil affairs-related missions. However, by emphasizing the “specialness” of civil affairs tasks and making arguments about the distinct, specialized skills required for civil affairs missions, their approach actually strengthened the prevailing view of governance operations as separate and distinct from conventional warfare. In making the case for their own specialties, civil affairs advocates tended to ignore that in many previous wars, tactical combat forces performed reasonably well in implementing key aspects of political and economic reconstruction. Furthermore, except for one active-duty brigade, all of the Army’s civil affairs units ended up in the reserve component, reinforcing the separation from the active Army’s focus on combat operations and setting governance operations apart from the professional heart of the military.

US Army officers have directly supervised the creation of new governments in many defeated states. They faced remarkably similar governance challenges in all of these contingencies. These include the well-known success stories of Germany and Japan at the end of World War II, as well as cases that garner less attention, such as the Mexican War in the 1840s, reconstruction at the close of the Civil War, and Puerto Rico and Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Interventions that included governance operations took place during the Cold War period, too: the Dominican Republic in 1965, Grenada in 1986, and Panama in 1989. Since the 1800s, in over 13 instances, Army personnel under the theater commander’s operational control supervised and implemented political and economic reconstruction. In virtually all of the Army’s major contingencies, Army personnel remained on the ground overseeing the political transitions that were essential to the consolidation of victory. Furthermore, the continued presence of Army troops in several cases—Germany and Japan following World War II, South Korea after the Korean War—transformed the geostrategic landscape.
Yet due to a host of reasons, most Army and civilian officials have failed to absorb the historical lesson that reconstruction is an integral part of war.

**Governance Operations as “Strange and Abhorrent”**

US civilian leaders always have been reluctant to give the military control over governance tasks, which are fundamentally political in nature. The military’s conduct of governance operations seemed to challenge the principle of civilian control over the military, an ideal fundamental to the creation of a standing American army. America’s founding fathers were determined to subordinate military to civil power and, as such, were careful to create the first standing army in a manner that prevented the acquisition of too much power by one organized group. Allowing the military to develop a capacity to govern could endanger civilian control of the military if these skills were, in turn, used at home.

Civilian discomfort with entrusting the Army with governance tasks persisted through all of America’s wars. During the Reconstruction phase of the Civil War, President Johnson expressed deep concern over the Army’s role in the political rehabilitation of the South, fearing that such power was in “palpable conflict” with the Constitution and a formula for “absolute despotism.” As the Army began the reconstruction of Cuba during the Spanish-American War, President McKinley reassured the public that military government was being established for “non-military purposes.” In the early years of World War II, President Roosevelt and many of his advisors believed that “military government was...a repulsive notion, associated with imperialism, dollar diplomacy, and other aspects of our behavior we had abandoned” and was “both strange and somewhat abhorrent.” After receiving one of his first briefings on occupation plans for Japan, President Truman remarked that civil government was “no job for soldiers” and that the War Department should begin to plan to turn occupation responsibilities over to the State Department as soon as possible. Adding to concerns about military despotism was the persistent ambivalence of Americans with the United States’ role as “an empire” and the Army’s role as “guardians” of this empire, which governance functions essentially represent.

Civilian leaders supported the Army’s leadership over governance operations largely because of a lack of alternatives. Political leaders realized that the Army was the only agency capable of accomplishing reconstruction in the midst of and aftermath of combat. While some World War II leaders expressed concern that civilians could “lose” the postwar world by default (by failing to offer a “comprehensive plan to rival that of the Army’s”), President Roosevelt recognized that only the Army would be able to deliver “prompt results.” Even the Secretary of State, James Byrnes, acknowledged that the State Department did not have the capacity to run an occupation. He compromised by arguing that the State Department would have oversight over policy, with the War Department responsible for the execution of the occupation. During the Vietnam War, there
was an acceptance by the Johnson Administration that civil agencies were not up to the task of overseeing pacification; thus the Civil Operations for Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program was created within the US Military Assistance Command.

Similar concerns about military control over governance seem to have influenced decisions in Operation Iraqi Freedom, contributing to the decision to avoid ceding full operational control of governance functions to US Central Command (CENTCOM). The Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), created before the start of hostilities in February 2003, was charged with administering the country, providing humanitarian aid, and rebuilding damaged infrastructure. ORHA’s relationship to CENTCOM seemed to create dual authorities, with ORHA technically under CENTCOM’s operational control, but with CENTCOM controlling critical resources (such as security), and ORHA itself charged with creating the conditions for Iraqi self-rule. This early organization illustrated the ambivalence of civilian leaders about ceding too much control to the military. Furthermore, the original appointment of a retired Army general, Jay Garner, to head ORHA exemplified the sort of uncertainty plaguing US leaders over who should control governance tasks. A retired general officer offered the benefits of previous Army experience, but without the perceived political ramifications of appointing an active-duty officer to head such a political task.

These concerns seemed to only increase with the replacement of Garner by a stronger civilian leader, L. Paul Bremer, to oversee the newly created Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). While the appointment of Bremer seemed to reflect an effort to improve unity of command in the theater, with Bremer reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense, the CPA remains dependent on CENTCOM for many of the resources needed by the CPA to accomplish its mission. The specific sets of activities that fall under CENTCOM’s purview and the CPA’s purview are being worked out in the theater, and although the situation seems to be improving, there are still disconnects between the two organizations. One example: the CPA lacks the capability to secure areas, and without security, reconstruction in unstable pockets of the country cannot begin. Joint Task Force 7, under CENTCOM’s command, retains responsibility for security, creating a bureaucratic separation between two inextricably linked tasks. The hundreds of CPA administrators control very few resources on the ground. The CENTCOM theater commander almost literally holds all the keys (Army convoys accompany top officials), and CPA personnel remain dependent upon the Army for accomplishing many of their day-to-day activities. CENTCOM has a great deal of control on the ground, without the necessary authorities, while CPA has more control on paper than it does in reality.

These are precisely the kinds of problems and constraints that hampered civil agencies in past wars and led to the decision by US leaders to cede control over governance to the Army. Indeed, with the appointment of Bremer,
US civilian and military leaders failed to appreciate the key difference in Germany at the end of World War II between General Lucius Clay and High Commissioner John McCloy. It was General Clay, serving as theater commander and military governor, who oversaw the toughest political and economic reconstruction tasks, including intensive denazification and demilitarization efforts as well as banking and monetary reform. The civilian leader, John McCloy, arrived in 1949, well after stability had been achieved. In Iraq today, the Army—with appropriate political direction—is the only organization that is capable of asserting the countrywide reach necessary for effective reconstruction to take root and evolve.

Reluctant Military Governors

The Army has never relished the tasks associated with governance. Army leaders have had recurring concerns about the dilution of resources away from Army combat missions. During the Mexican War, Secretary of War William Marcy warned his commanding generals that tasks related to civil administration would be the “least pleasant” part of their duties.12 During and after the Civil War, the Army’s power during reconstruction made General Ulysses S. Grant uncomfortable, and Union generals were reluctant to divert any of their forces to meet the requirements of the military governors: “Fighting generals believed that military objectives should come first: win the war and then worry about the political ramifications later.”13 During World War II, General Eisenhower was reportedly eager to hand duties over to civilian administrators as quickly as possible,14 though in fact this transfer did not occur until political and economic reconstruction was well under way.

Despite these kinds of reservations, the Army often has sought control over governance operations due to military necessity and the desire to preserve unity of command. Army commanders have recognized that operational control over all activities in the theater was critical for maintaining stability and for protecting US forces during the course of the war. During World War II, competition between the Army and civilian planning efforts emerged less because of the Army’s desire to lead governance operations and more because of the Army’s determination to rise above the confusion of civilian planning and preserve unity of command. Frustrating coordination problems had arisen in North Africa in the summer of 1942, and General Eisenhower was determined to avoid a situation in which conflicting civilian and military authority over the same territory existed.15

Furthermore, in practice, combat and reconstruction virtually always occurred in tandem, with the defeat of the enemy forces in rear areas requiring a consolidation of the political situation while remaining troops pushed ahead. In Germany during World War II, US troops overtook towns in rear areas and began to restore order and stability even as the advance into Germany continued. During the Korean War in 1950, the Army actively resisted efforts by the State De-
partment and the United Nations to retain control over governance tasks, not because the Army was eager to assume reconstruction tasks, but because the commanding general insisted upon unity of command.  

The situation in Iraq today reinforces this link between combat and reconstruction—not as separate phases of the war, but as interrelated components. Reconstruction efforts are under way, but American troops remain targets of almost daily attacks by Iraqi irregulars. Indeed, CENTCOM’s regular briefings from Baghdad repeatedly refer to the intermixing of maneuver forces that are continuing to clear potentially hostile pockets while conducting assessments and aiding reconstruction efforts. Combat in Iraq, albeit at a different level of intensity, continues at this writing in late July 2003, and there will be no clear separation between combat and reconstruction until a new Iraqi governing body is elected and reasonably stable.

Lessons for the Future

History offers some lessons for the contemporary situation in Iraq. First, although the ongoing problems in Iraq reflect, to some degree, the inevitable “fog of war,” most observers agree that planning for the reconstruction phase was not as advanced as the planning undertaken by CENTCOM for the first three phases of the war. CENTCOM had responsibility for planning four phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom: setting the conditions for war, the air campaign, major combat operations (the ground offensive), and postwar stability operations. However, this temporal approach to war planning has permitted civilian and military planners to allow CENTCOM to pay less attention to the final phase of the war. The organizational arrangements that emerged on the ground following the main combat operations reflected an eagerness to delegate perceived “postwar duties.”

An acceptance of political and economic reconstruction as an integral part of war would facilitate decisions about appropriate command arrangements, decisions that have been so difficult and incendiary in Iraq. History suggests that leadership over reconstruction efforts should run through US military channels and that the military should have direct responsibility for implementation. Unity of command should prevail. This in turn suggests that the conventional wisdom of allowing greater civil control is wrong and that the tendency to bring in civilian and international organizations too quickly should be carefully considered. Of course, appropriate resources need to be given to the military to allow it to do the job.

Until the opposing regime is fully dismantled, the war is not over, and the Army should remain in control of all governance activities. A formal acceptance of this link between governance operations and war could offset some of the political pressures faced by US leaders as they try to manage international pressure to be inclusive. Relying primarily on civilian international organizations for conducting humanitarian relief activities, as the White House announced in May, could prove to be disastrous for the accomplishment of final American war aims. Con-
sider, for example, the current morass related to the failure of the international co-
alition to rebuild the “ring road” in Afghanistan. Policy can and should be made
by political leaders in Washington, but implementation falls squarely within the
US military’s mandate.

An acceptance of governance operations as a key component of war
also suggests that military planners will need to rethink those tasks that have
traditionally formed the core of the Army profession. Indeed, governance oper-
ations clash with traditional notions of the “military profession.” Samuel Hun-
tington’s classic work on the subject, *The Soldier and the State*, argued that “the
management of violence” sets the military profession apart from others. This
view of the profession has shaped military planning and training. Governance
operations do not explicitly involve “the management of violence” and require
the military to engage in activities that are essentially civilian in nature, such as
rebuilding the civic infrastructure, restoring educational systems, and planning
for new elections. Similarities with civilian life set governance operations apart
from the military profession’s traditional view of itself.

Furthermore, Army doctrine emphasizes the defeat of an enemy’s com-
batt forces—not the concomitant replacement of an opposing state’s political
leadership, which is virtually always required to consolidate victory. Despite the
considerable influence of Carl von Clausewitz on the Army, governance activi-
ties reside in the gray area of Clausewitz’s distinction between “preparations for
war” and “war proper.” Clausewitz does not directly address the operational
steps that military forces need to take to consolidate victory during and following
combat. Clausewitz focuses principally on the “why” of war, since wars are
fought for political reasons. Yet the “how” behind this linkage is equally impor-
tant: governance operations are the operational link needed to consolidate a
state’s final political aims in war. One challenge today is to recruit and train sol-
diers in a manner that makes clear that governance missions are a key part of the
job they are signing up for. By explicitly accepting governance operations as a
part of war, military and civilian leaders can help to offset the kind of disillusion-
ment being voiced by young US soldiers throughout Iraq as they wonder about
their ongoing purpose in the theater.

A rethinking of the role of governance operations will require a recon-
sideration of accepted Army definitions and doctrines. Existing doctrine and the
concepts that shape Army combat service support, counterinsurgency opera-
tions, special operations, and civil affairs missions may need to be modified.
While many outsiders criticized the Army for the decision to close its Peacekeep-
ing Institute at the US Army War College (a decision that has now been put on
hold), recreating it in its previous form should give the Army leadership pause. A
real step toward advancing strategic and operational thinking about governance
operations would be to revive the institute under another name, with a mission
that addresses the strategic challenge of integrating various elements of war,
from combat to governance, with an emphasis on the planning, organization, and
training issues associated with military leadership over governance tasks in war. Furthermore, consideration should be given to how governance operations should be approached at the US Army Training and Doctrine Command and at US Joint Forces Command.

Acceptance of governance operations as an integral part of war also could offer US military and political leaders a stronger and more sensible rationale for limiting US military involvement in other kinds of operations. An acceptance of the reconstruction requirements that are inevitably a part of war would provide political and military leaders with a basis for distinguishing between those activities that are clearly a part of war and those that are not—thus providing a basis for rejecting US military involvement in the myriad of other missions, not related to war. This is not to say such missions should be rejected out of hand. Clearly, such decisions are for political leaders to make.

Finally, US military planners need to consider how combat operations and governance operations should explicitly inform each other, since they are part of the same campaign. As noted earlier, governance operations have always occurred in tandem with combat operations. In Iraq, stabilization measures were occurring in the defeated cities of Umm Qasr, Basr, and An Nasiriyah as the Army’s 3d Infantry Division pressed on toward Baghdad. Just as joint operations are about achieving a synergy among the units of different services to accomplish the objective at hand, so should thinking shift about the relationship between combat and governance. These different elements of war should be viewed synergistically. Accepting this interrelationship will have specific ramifications for the combat phases of war and for how wars are planned, fought, and ultimately won.

NOTES

2. I use the term governance operations here to avoid the various connotations associated with existing terms, which refer to a very wide range of different activities, some of which are not relevant to war itself. This point will be expanded upon in this article.
3. In the 3 October 2000 debate with presidential candidate Al Gore, Bush warned against the problem of extending US troops all around the world in nation-building missions. Candidate Bush repeated this theme in several of his campaign speeches through the fall of 2000.
5. These cases include: (1) the Mexican War; (2) Reconstruction; (3-5) the Spanish-American War (i.e. the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico); (6) the Rhineland following World War I; (7-10) World War II (i.e. Germany, Italy, Japan, and Korea); (11) Korea in 1950; (12) the Dominican Republic in 1965; (13) Grenada; (14) Panama in 1989. There were also the early cases of the Indian wars, in which the Army administered territories throughout the West. See Henry Putney Beers, The Western Military Frontier 1815-1846 (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1935); and Fairfax Downey, Indian Wars of the U.S. Army 1776-1865 (New York: Doubleday, 1963).

9. This phrase is from Brian McAllister Linn, Guardians of Empire (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997).


11. Sources for the information in this paragraph are from the official documents about the CPA, which can be found at http://www.cpa-iraq.org, as well as from conversations with DOD officials.


14. General Lucius Clay wrote that he and Eisenhower had intended to build an organization that could “be transferred bodily to a civil branch of government.” Lucius D. Clay, Decision in Germany (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1950), p. 53. Note also that after the opening of the Army’s first school of military government in 1942, Army leaders recognized that although it was the “sole agency capable of initiating the reconstruction process,” civilian agencies would eventually help too. See Memo, Wickersham, Comdt, SMQ, for PMG, 17 June 1942, PMGO files, 321.19, MG, original citation in Harry L. Coles and Albert K. Weinberg, Civil Affairs: Soldiers Become Governors, United States Army in World War II Series (Washington: Center of Military History, 1964), p. 12.

15. The Army believed this was in contrast to the British system in which civil affairs operations were closely guided by political authorities in London. See Coles and Weinberg, p. 162. See also Msg, Marshall to Eisenhowe, 8 May 43, OPD Msg files, CM-OUT 3586, original citation in Coles and Weinberg, p. 169.

16. Eighth Army had responsibility for all civil assistance activities in Korea, and MacArthur gave Lieutenant General Walton Walker (Commander of Eighth Army) “complete and overall responsibility for the provision of necessary supplies and equipment to prevent disease, starvation, and unrest among the civilian population in Korea.” See CINCFE Directive to CG Eighth Army, Korea, 17 Oct 1950, reprinted in Darwin C. Stolzenbach and Henry A. Kissinger, Civil Affairs in Korea 1950-1951, Working Paper (Chevy Chase, Md.: Johns Hopkins University, Operations Research Office, August 1952), p. 67. There are other documents in this collection which describe the tension between the Army, the United Nations, and the State Department. It is also interesting to note that the Department of the Army actually drew up plans for the occupation of North Korea, anticipating the need for military government there. For a discussion of the occupation plan, see, RAD W 93721, DA to CINCFE 10 October 1950, cited by James F. Schnabel, Policy and Direction: The First Year, United States Army in the Korean War, Office of the Chief of Military History, US Army (Washington: GPO, 1972), pp. 219-20.

17. Although CENTCOM reportedly did some planning for the reconstruction phase of the war in a plan called Eclipse II, some well-placed observers acknowledge that much less attention was paid to this phase of the operation than the previous three. As an aside, it is interesting to note that Eclipse was the name given to one of the early plans that focused on the reconstruction of Germany after World War II.


19. Traditionally, Afghanistan’s unifying transportation artery has been the road connecting Kabul in the east to Herat in the west. This is the key link in Afghanistan’s “ring road,” which also connects its northern provinces with the capital. The reconstruction of this road was seen as an important step demonstrating the US commitment to reconstruct Afghanistan. It was to be done in conjunction with Japan and Saudi Arabia, but progress has been extremely slow. See White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Joint Statement on Road Construction in Afghanistan by the President of the United States, the Prime Minister of Japan, and the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia,” 12 September 2002. See also Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service, “U.S. Honoring Pledge to Help Rebuild Afghanistan,” 27 February 2003, www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2003/ n02272003_200302278.html.


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