Special Commentary: Learning Lessons from Afghanistan: Two Imperatives

Hew Strachan

Afghanistan’s Lessons: Part I

Seth A. Johnston
Howard G. Coombs
Martijn Kitzen
Christophe Lafaye

World War II: 75th Anniversary

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The Autumn issue of Parameters opens with a Special Commentary by Sir Hew Strachan concerning lessons Western militaries learned, or ought to have learned, during their campaigns in Afghanistan. His commentary sets up this issue’s first forum, Afghanistan’s Lessons: Part I.

In the opening article, Seth Johnston’s “NATO’s Lessons” underscores the importance of the Alliance’s role as a facilitator of multinational collaboration. He presents a favorable view, arguing NATO’s established processes succeeded in enabling countries with limited resources to participate fully in the mission in Afghanistan. Howard Coombs follows with a contribution concerning “Canada’s Lessons.” Among other things, he maintains Canada’s whole-of-government approach resulted in great gains while Canadian Forces were actively involved in combat. Nonetheless, Canada seems uninterested in maintaining this capability as a framework for responding to other crises.

The third article in this forum is Martijn Kitzen’s “The Netherlands’ Lessons,” which highlights the benefits of having a small military that enjoys networked learning. Although the Dutch military seems to be reverting to enemy-centric thinking, the author encourages its leaders to retain an adaptive mindset that will facilitate adopting a more population-centric approach when necessary. In “France’s Lessons,” Christophe Lafaye explains how combat in Afghanistan contributed to the tactical and doctrinal evolution of the French Army. With decades of relative peace since the Algerian War, French soldiers began their service in Afghanistan with little experience and inadequate materiel. They quickly developed into a combat-ready force capable of responding rapidly to a variety of military emergencies as the need arose.

Our second forum, World War II: 75th Anniversary, features two contributions concerning famous US generals. Conrad Crane’s, “Matthew Ridgway and the Battle of the Bulge” illustrates examples of Ridgway’s strategic thinking at work during the German’s surprise attack and ensuing crisis. Alexander G. Lovelace’s “Slap Heard around the World: George Patton and Shell Shock” analyzes Patton’s possible motives for slapping two soldiers in during the Sicily campaign in 1943.~AJE
Learning Lessons from Afghanistan: Two Imperatives

Hew Strachan
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On October 7, 2001, the United States began bombing Taliban communications and air defenses (such as they were). So began a commitment to the security of Afghanistan that continues to this day. Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan was designed to use only a light footprint, leaving the bulk of the fighting to the mujahideen whom the United States had supported in their fight against the Soviet Union. In March 2002, after its quick success in toppling the Taliban, Washington turned its attention to Saddam Hussein. Between 2002 and 2009, Iraq, not Afghanistan, dominated American counsels. Here too initial operations were rewarded with quick success, largely characterized in terms of state-of-the-art conventional warfare. Signs of guerrilla warfare and irregular resistance were dismissed, and it was often junior commanders who detected the changing character of the war they were fighting. The standard assumption of the late 1980s, shaped by the Cold War, persisted: an army that prepared for operations at scale against a peer enemy could adjust to “low-intensity war” against an enemy lacking in discipline, organization, and sophisticated weaponry.

By 2005, it had become clear the received wisdom was not working, and that its hold was preventing soldiers from fully understanding the sort of conflict in which they were engaged. The experience of Iraq prompted the US Army to reshape its doctrine for what it increasingly described as counterinsurgency campaigns. The Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth began work in earnest in October 2005, when Lieutenant General David Petraeus took over its command after his second tour in Iraq. Petraeus turned to his West Point classmate, Conrad Crane, to oversee the development of new doctrine, or in some respects the recovery of old but neglected knowledge. Crane drew on inputs from both theaters of war, Afghanistan as well as Iraq, and on the US Marine Corps as well as the Army. Field Manual 3-24, also branded as Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, was ready by December 2006.

In 2007, Petraeus was back in Iraq, masterminding the surge. A war that the United States had been losing was turned around, at least for the time being. The success in Iraq in 2007 made counterinsurgency the most obvious lesson learned from the post-9/11 wars, and when the US Army returned its attention to a now much more dangerous situation in Afghanistan it took the message of counterinsurgency with it. Field Manual 3-24 was itself commercially published, and a raft of books and articles on irregular war both preceded and followed its appearance.
In the United Kingdom, the epiphany was both slower and less dramatic. Britain thought it knew about “small wars” from its experience of imperial conquest and colonial settlement, and about counterinsurgency specifically from the “success” of its post-1945 withdrawal from the empire. That phase of its history ended, comparatively ignominiously, in the withdrawal from Aden in 1967 and with the decision to close British bases east of Suez in the following year. The 30-year conflict in Northern Ireland, which followed almost immediately, began badly: counterinsurgency principles applied in a colonial context had to be rethought for use closer to home. But the lessons of Northern Ireland proved a false friend when its units deployed to Iraq in 2003. Many officers had only seen the tail end of a campaign, which by then they were winning: conditions were much more favorable in the 1990s than they had been in the 1970s, and by then the army had the upper hand in intelligence, tactical know-how, and public support.

Basra was in every way a tougher operating environment than Belfast, the troop-to-population ratio was much less favorable, and language, religion, and culture all presented unfamiliar challenges. By 2006, humiliated in southern Iraq and confronting fierce fighting in southern Afghanistan, the British Army began to realize the need to revisit its background in counterinsurgency. However, it did so reluctantly and late. Only in October 2009 did the British Army publish an updated doctrine, and in the same year, the British Ministry of Defense produced Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40, on stabilization operations.

During the crisis years of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, especially 2006 to 2009, the soldiers of American and British armies, as they convened conferences and workshops that addressed these themes, referred with regret to their own absentmindedness and that of their predecessors. After the Vietnam War, the US Army had opted not to learn its lessons, but to treat the experience as an aberration, or so the prevailing narrative ran. Its doctrinal response, Field Manual 100-5, Operations, particularly in its 1982 edition, focused on the conventional level of war, and prepared American soldiers to defend the inner German border against the Soviet Union. The British narrative was not dissimilar. Those units who fought in Northern Ireland were “double-hatted,” their principal strategic function being, as for their American allies, the defense of western Europe against the Soviet Union.

In both cases, preparation for war against a peer-competitor took priority over counterinsurgency. Economies of scale demanded flexibility. That seemed to be a reasonable expectation of two armies that were now regular and professional. If they could do the first, and implicitly harder, task, then—so the wisdom ran—they would be capable of dropping down a rung, to do the “lesser” work of small unit patrols, hearts and minds, and stabilization. The slowness of both armies’ adaptation after 2002, five years for the Americans and seven for the British (longer than either of their individual experiences of the Second World War), suggested those assumptions were wrong. An army is a big beast, its training protocols are reinforced by its hierarchy, and
it struggles to adapt quickly from one sort of war to another. For those thinking about lessons learned from 2005 to 2009, the conclusion was simple: do not do after these wars what they had done in the 1980s. They mocked the naivety of their predecessors of a quarter of a century before for their readiness to see war in only one dimension. Too much recent real war had proved “asymmetric” for conventional war to be the dominant paradigm, however much the latter might shape doctrine and theory. Experience was a more profound lesson, and their generation, that of the veterans of Al Anbar or Helmand, could not possibly forget that as those of the 1980s had done.

But many of them have forgotten, or at least they have to an extent that would surprise those reflecting on these issues a decade ago. In 2019, the debate is once again dominated by peer-competitors (China for the United States and Russia for its European allies), counterinsurgency has dropped out of fashion, and some well-informed commentators have persuasively argued that its principles have been overstated. A military tendency to look not back, but forward, to look to the next war not to be captured by the last, has been reinforced by policy.

In 2009, Barack Obama embraced a strategy that used airpower (including drones) in conjunction with special forces and local proxies, rather than “boots on the ground.” Armies conducting the counterinsurgency campaigns of the early twenty-first century incurred casualties, which made overseas interventions unpopular. So democratically accountable politicians have sought other ways to wage war. The new strategy, not unlike the old, has contained the problem for the time being. But it is too early to say whether it will produce lasting results. Soldiers argue presence on the ground, and in sufficient numbers to have effect, is the only way to implement a satisfactory and stable outcome. Moreover, the employment of drones and proxies raises legal, ethical, and political issues, which may not in the long run be compatible with the norms of democratic states.

So the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and America’s wider circle of allies are at an inflection point where it ill behooves them not to reflect on the lessons from Afghanistan and to incorporate them into their thinking for the future. This does not mean that wars like those fought in Afghanistan are necessarily a model for what will happen again. History does not repeat itself, but it certainly deepens understanding. For a start, allied forces are still in the country, although most of their publics seem unaware of the fact. Moreover, it would be rash to suggest that NATO is not going to find itself fighting another counterinsurgency in, say, the next 25 years. Lessons may be negative (that of Vietnam: “we certainly will not do that again”) as much as positive (that of Malaya: “this is a model for how to win the support of the local population”). The absence of debate and discussion is the worst possible outcome. It can leave preconceptions unchallenged, and it throws away the wisdom garnered through hard work, suffering and loss.
Neither the United States nor Britain has gone through the process of learning lessons from Afghanistan on a scale commensurate with the effort put into the war. In Washington, the political will has not been there, and in the Army, the views on counterinsurgency and its principal exponents have become too politicized, and in some respects personalized, for an avowedly apolitical army to collate them effectively. Thanks not least to the persistence of Raymond T. Odierno when, as the Army’s Chief of Staff, a history of the US Army’s role in the Iraq War was initiated. It provides a potentially rich foundation for the learning of lessons, but whether it will do so is yet to be seen. A similar project on Afghanistan will require a similar drive from the top.

Britain too has paid more attention to Iraq than Afghanistan. The British Army sidelined two internal studies on Iraq, before Prime Minister Gordon Brown, commissioned a government enquiry on the war in 2009. Since the Chilcot report was published in 2016, the Ministry of Defense has tackled the lessons to be learned from with commendable seriousness. However, the delays and costs incurred by the inquiry have removed any impetus for something similar on Afghanistan. Unlike the United States, Britain has lost the appetite for official histories: there is no enthusiasm for one on Operation Banner, the campaign in Northern Ireland, perhaps itself a reason for British officers applying the wrong lessons in Iraq. Nor has the Army revisited its counterinsurgency doctrine since 2009, thus forfeiting the opportunity to embody the lessons from the severe fighting in Helmand in 2009–13. The revision of Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40 on stabilization operations, begun in the immediate aftermath of Libya in 2011, has floundered.

The United States and Britain possess the two NATO armies with the clearest sense of continuity in counterinsurgency operations, however discontinuous their attention to the subject has been in practice. Afghanistan, unlike Iraq, was an alliance undertaking. Common approaches to the conduct of operations, as well as agreed and standardized procedures, are the bedrock of NATO cohesion. Its members’ armed forces speak to each other in terms that they all understand. Policy differences provide volatility, but they are offset by military commonalities.

Counterinsurgency doctrine is a major exception to this generalization: NATO collectively does not have one, nor do most of its individual members. For the states of continental Europe, irregular and guerrilla warfare is linked historically to major war in ways that do not apply to Britain and the United States, who are both secured by the natural defenses provided by the sea. Such forms of war were the only option left to the states that were overrun and then occupied by Germany between 1940 and 1942. And the same might have applied during the Cold War if the Soviet Union had launched an invasion. Partisan war was an option to be exercised at home because conventional war was no longer possible: it was politically destabilizing and its conduct was ruthless. It bore little relationship to the idealized if somewhat fanciful ideas of counterinsurgency in the Anglophone world, applied at a distance.
in wars that could be characterized as “limited.” For America’s and Britain’s partners in Afghanistan, overseas operations were associated with peacekeeping and policing, and were conducted under a resolution of the United Nations Security Council.

As the United States and the United Kingdom reembraced and rethought their counterinsurgency doctrines, they opened a divide between themselves and their European allies, which they struggled to comprehend. They could not understand why the Germans, Norwegians, or Poles did not also develop and adopt comparable solutions. In particular, they failed to understand how the other NATO member with a clear inheritance in counterinsurgency, France, interpreted the war in Afghanistan. France, like Britain, had conquered and pacified an empire in the nineteenth century, and then had lost it after 1945—in fighting that proved far more politically divisive and existentially defining than had Britain’s campaigns in Malaya, Kenya, or Cyprus. Successful counterinsurgency itself carried revolutionary implications for France: it had done so after 1792 and 1870 within metropolitan France, and it redivided the “nation in arms,” shattered in 1940, in Indochina and Algeria in the 1950s. Americans understood this experience through an atypical lens, David Galula’s report for RAND, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956–58*, which became a core text at the operational level but was not set in its political context: the end of France’s Fourth Republic and the establishment of the Fifth Republic.

Galula was not translated into French until 2009. Vincent Desportes, then responsible for defense doctrine, set out to link France’s contribution to NATO in Afghanistan by drawing the attention of its soldiers to their colonial inheritance, citing the examples of Joseph-Simon Gallieni in Indochina and Madagascar and Louis-Hubert-Gonzalve Lyautey in Morocco. In reality, he might have done better to go even further back, to Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, duke d’Isly in Algeria. The pattern of colonial conquest that he promoted put battle at its heart (as—it is worth pointing out—did Charles Callwell in his textbook, *Small Wars*, adopted by the British Army in 1896), not winning over the local population by “hearts and minds.” Afghanistan was France’s first major NATO operation following its decision to rejoin the military alliance, and so it saw it less as a commitment to a “small war” than as its reentry to the big league. As subsequent operations in Mali and elsewhere have shown, students of the American and British armies should not see France’s approach to counterinsurgency and irregular war as more of the same or as corroboration of what they do.

Learning lessons from Afghanistan, therefore, has two imperatives. The first is that of the needs of coalition warfare. At its peak over 50 states contributed to the war in Afghanistan, making this probably the most impressive alliance effort in military history. That achievement has been overshadowed by the tokenism of many of the contingents sent into theater, by national caveats surrounding their employment, and by the part played by domestic politics in the timing of their withdrawals. The focus on these dysfunctionalities has been reinforced
by Washington’s constant reprimand, voiced as much by the Obama administration as by that of Donald Trump, that NATO member states are failing to contribute two percent of their gross domestic product to defense. The United States was reluctant to accept the support of its allies in the direct aftermath of 9/11, when NATO immediately invoked Article 5, and has been reluctant to give thanks for their readiness to serve outside NATO’s core area, in a country in which none of them had a direct national interest, in war waged on behalf of the United States. If the United States anticipates fighting future wars with allies, it needs NATO collectively as well as individually to draw lessons from Afghanistan, and to do so in ways that reflect the full range of what the member states experienced.

The second imperative follows from the first. This search for lessons must not just be in pursuit of commonalities. Such an exercise is in danger of looking at and recognizing the experience of others through the prism of the United States, and so ignoring differences—like that of France—which may themselves be instructive. Just because the US Army may deem something not to have been “invented here” does not mean that it is therefore unworthy of consideration. After all, that too-ready dismissal of others’ experiences and of their possible applicability was a major source of exactly the problems the US Army confronted from 2002 to 2004.

The challenge inherent in that statement should not be exaggerated. The overwhelming conclusion in the forum that follows is the power the United States exercises over its allies.
ABSTRACT: This article identifies the importance of NATO’s role as a facilitator of multinational collaboration. The Alliance’s established processes and standards worked well, enabling countries whose available resources might otherwise prohibit their participation to fully-contribute to the mission in Afghanistan.

Today’s North Atlantic Treaty Organization is no Cold War alliance. Few developments illustrate NATO’s capacity for adaptation more than its 21st century role in Afghanistan.\(^1\) NATO allies invoked the collective defense provision—Article 5—of its founding treaty for the first and only time just one day after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.\(^2\) Few present at the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949 could have imagined it would be invoked by European countries and Canada seeking to support the United States or that the Alliance’s largest and longest military operation would occur in central Asia. Fewer still might have predicted NATO allies would agree to the mission so soon after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, a crisis the then US ambassador to NATO described as a “near death experience” for the Alliance.\(^3\) Yet NATO assumed control of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2003 and has remained in Afghanistan for the better part of two decades.

As the United States has begun negotiating a political settlement to the Afghanistan conflict with a view to the eventual withdrawal of international forces there, an assessment from the overall NATO perspective will complement the national initiatives.\(^4\) This effort will also support ongoing efforts to reassess NATO’s priorities in the face of other security challenges.\(^5\)

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Although NATO has undertaken formal studies of its activities in Afghanistan, recent scholarship by Heidi Hardt, Jörg Noll, and Sebastiaan Rietjens cast doubt on the efficacy of formal lessons learned processes in international organizations generally and in NATO specifically. This article offers an external and an unofficial assessment of the Alliance’s efforts and provides initial suppositions. In sum, NATO’s impact in Afghanistan may not have been enough to mitigate national shortcomings or to achieve victory on its own, but it was significant and positive. The Alliance’s adaptability and highly institutionalized character are at the root of these contributions.

Moreover, the mission in Afghanistan affected NATO in ways that promoted allied political cohesion, organizational effectiveness, and military interoperability. The chief implications of these findings are that while national political leadership and strategy formulation remain paramount in war, NATO remains a proven and effective instrument of organizing and implementing coordinated multinational efforts. The most important lesson learned from NATO in Afghanistan may therefore be about NATO’s more general value to the United States and other members.

**NATO: Alliance and International Organization**

In contrast to national assessments, this analysis focuses on the formal institutions of the Alliance. NATO is unique among alliances in that it is not only a treaty-based agreement among member states, but also an international organization—and a highly institutionalized one at that. Since its early years, NATO has been comprised of a permanently staffed formal political headquarters supported by a network of military and civilian organizations. Particularly noteworthy is NATO’s integrated joint multinational military structure, a unique innovation without equivalent among other alliances or international organizations.

This integration, capped by the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Belgium, extends through various echelons and included the ISAF headquarters and other NATO structures in Afghanistan. Thus, for this article, “NATO” refers to the various formal institutions and not the group of allied countries. Likewise, the focus is on the collaborative conduct and not that of the United States, other allies or partners, the government of Afghanistan, or other regional actors. Nor does the article address the efficacy of counter-insurgency warfare.

International relations theory would emphasize the formal institutions of NATO have very weak independent power and agency.

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7 NATO’s integrated military command structure technically boasts two strategic commands of officially equivalent status: Allied Command Transformation, based in Norfolk, Virginia, and Allied Command Operations at SHAPE.
But although NATO consists of such formal institutions, the Alliance remains an alliance among states. All decisions at NATO Headquarters are taken by consensus among member states (which will soon number 30). Politics among those countries happens, and the relative influence of individual member states is closely associated with their power. NATO’s institutions matter chiefly because of how they facilitate and structure the relations among the states. Like any other international organization, states may derive value from such institutions because they provide benefits such as establishing predictable structures and routines for decision-making; increasing information sharing; improving efficiency and reducing transaction costs; and defining roles, status, and identity. The most important questions for NATO in the context of assessing its role in the Afghanistan conflict is whether and how well it has performed these functions.

An important theme in the assessment of NATO’s role in Afghanistan regards the reciprocal impact of the Alliance and Afghanistan, as Alexander Mattelaer and others have noted. Thus, one kind of lesson relates to NATO’s effect on the mission and the implications for future coalition expeditionary warfare; another, the future of the transatlantic Alliance.

**NATO and Strategy in Afghanistan**

The causes of NATO’s involvement in Afghanistan appear logical: an international terrorist group based in Afghanistan attacked the United States. Citing the North Atlantic Treaty, NATO allies declared the attack on the United States as an attack on all allies. The participation of allied countries or the whole-of-NATO in a US-led response in Afghanistan seemed straightforward. How NATO became involved in Afghanistan was in fact murkier. The United States initially preferred not to involve established alliances after 9/11. As then US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld memorably explained, “The mission determines the coalition, and the coalition must not determine the mission.” When the United Nations authorized the ISAF in 2001, with a limited functional and geographic mandate around Kabul, the lead countries of the ISAF coincidentally tended to be members of NATO.

In planning for an ISAF rotation in 2003, the lead nations realized they could achieve some capability enhancements and cost savings by applying NATO resources. Still struggling meaningfully to demonstrate the consequences of its post-9/11 invocation of Article 5 and searching for a way to reconcile allies divided over the Iraq War, NATO saw an opportunity: supporting or participating in the Afghanistan campaign could reinvigorate the Alliance; encourage rapprochement between the United States and those (mostly western European) allies opposed to

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the Iraq War; and offer others (mostly newer eastern European allies, NATO aspirants, and global partners) an occasion to cultivate even more positive relations with the United States and NATO.¹⁰

For its part, the United States warmed to the idea of greater allied involvement in Afghanistan as the cost of the Iraq War increased. For the allied institution, therefore, the initial entry into Afghanistan had broad politico-diplomatic benefits for transatlantic relations as well as some small practical advantages for some countries. But it occurred without much clear debate or unified strategic ends in Afghanistan. Tellingly, the North Atlantic Council, NATO’s top political decision-making body, did not issue an “initiating directive” with guidance for the development of military plans for Afghanistan. This decision may be understandable insofar as NATO deferred thinking about those ends to the United States, and the UN authorization of ISAF, which NATO was taking over. But Afghanistan itself may have been a secondary concern. Evidence suggests at least some NATO countries explicitly expressed reservations about the purpose of the Alliance’s involvement in Afghanistan but supported it anyway.¹¹

Such early inattention to strategy in Afghanistan caused at least two major problems. The first concerned time. As the years passed, NATO was drawn incrementally further into the conflict and the lack of clear and agreed strategic ends at the institutional level became increasingly troublesome. Expanding the ISAF from an organization with a predominantly noncombat and geographically limited mandate around Kabul to one responsible for conducting a full range of military operations throughout Afghanistan by the end of 2006 elevated the prominence of this issue. The confusion over NATO’s strategic ends became most apparent in southern Afghanistan where the insurgency raged but different ISAF countries acted almost autonomously within their respective areas of responsibility, with greatly varying priorities in counterterrorism, local security, development, security force and governance assistance, counternarcotics, and other aspects of the counterinsurgency approach that had gained currency in US military circles by this time but were not widely shared among NATO allies.¹²

Short tour lengths and frequent changes in commanders compounded


these problems, as new personnel naturally applied their own priorities and interpretations of strategic ends.\textsuperscript{13}

NATO had embarked on a security assistance mission but ended up in a war without much discussion of war aims. The Alliance ultimately confronted this problem and, by 2008, had achieved consensus on a clear and detailed strategy.\textsuperscript{14} But this occurred five years after NATO’s initial involvement in Afghanistan and seven years into the conflict. The duration of the war was becoming a significant political concern by this point, and following the entrance of a new US presidential administration in 2009, the United States soon adopted a new strategy that called for large troop increases and a goal of starting troop withdrawals by 2011.\textsuperscript{15} The international mission was thereafter extended only incrementally two or three years at a time, reflecting tension between the domestic political reality among allies and the ambition of the strategy and its counterinsurgency approach.

The second, related problem with NATO strategic ends concerned their suitability in Afghanistan. The agreed strategic goals depended on the creation of effective and sustainable Afghan government and security institutions. The 2009 Afghan presidential election debacle underscored the difficulty of such a goal. ISAF commander General Stanley McChrystal rightly recognized this difficulty in describing the capability of the Afghan government and the Taliban as obstacles to victory.\textsuperscript{16}

Proponents of counterinsurgency in general may conclude the Afghan government’s troubles in this case were so great that a strategy may have required resources beyond what NATO and ISAF member countries would be able to give. Those more skeptical about the general efficacy of counterinsurgency may conclude Afghanistan is yet another case demonstrating the inherent limitations of foreign powers to reshape other nations. Either way, the lesson for NATO’s strategic ends recalls the idea from Carl von Clausewitz that policy ought not ask of strategy that which its chosen means cannot deliver.\textsuperscript{17} Admittedly, this question may be less about NATO specifically and more about counterinsurgency and other such missions in general. Yet this question has resonance not only because of Afghanistan but also because of the demand for NATO

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\item 15 Barack H. Obama, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan” (speech, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, December 1, 2009).

\item 16 Stanley McChrystal, \textit{Commander’s Initial Assessment} (Kabul, Afghanistan: International Security Assistance Force, August 30, 2009).

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involvement in similar situations. In Kosovo, for example, the Alliance has maintained a peacekeeping force and imperfect relationship with local government for 20 years after the 1999 intervention. Allied countries also grapple with such questions and the prospect of similar calls arising from elsewhere. Thus, the Alliance has a stake in the debate.  

A ready critique of the conflict in Afghanistan is that resources were either too small or too slowly applied to bring about the desired strategic ends. This critique might point out NATO’s original 2003 involvement in the ISAF was motivated by short-term cost savings on the part of a few allies; the expansion of ISAF under NATO leadership was a tacit acknowledgment that the United States chose to economize its commitments in Afghanistan as an effort to address the concurrent deteriorating situation in Iraq; and the buildup of US forces in 2009–10 may have been too little, too late—unpersuasive to a Taliban adversary that viewed the time-limited withdrawal intentions as its own plausible path to victory. But this critique of means has less to do with NATO than with the impracticality of matching means to uncertain ends, as described above. Moreover, the provision of means to any allied initiative or strategy depends less on the Alliance and more on the will of participating countries. National responsibility for resources is the essence of the burden-sharing issue not just for Afghanistan but for all NATO activities.

The Alliance’s main role in resourcing a strategy is therefore to clarify and organize what countries provide. NATO deserves credit for its positive contributions in this respect. The Alliance’s overarching NATO defense planning process (NDPP) and the mission-specific combined joint statement of requirements (CJSOR) for Afghanistan are well-organized processes for identifying and communicating requirements as well as integrating resources provided. Even when nations did not always fully resource every requirement in the CJSOR, which was usually the case, the process helped serve as an assessment tool and benchmark for intra-alliance politics and negotiations. The United States, for example, has used information from the CJSOR to tailor specific requests to other countries in bilateral diplomacy with a view to filling out the comprehensive statement of means. Moreover, NATO offered common doctrine, standards, and even some training to facilitate interoperability for allies and nonmember partners participating in the coalition. This architecture facilitated the integration of forces

18 Official 2, interview. As in Afghanistan, local actors in Kosovo have frustrated NATO efforts to achieve its strategic goals for lasting peace and stability. Kosovo’s assertion of national independence through its intention to create an army has enflamed relations with Serbia and occurred despite NATO’s protest, to cite a recent example.


and capabilities from the more than 40 countries that participated in the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan.21

The effect of the mission on the Alliance is a more positive story in several respects. First is the durable commitment of NATO and its allies to the campaign, which includes remaining in Afghanistan as long as the United States does. Non-US members of the coalition have suffered more than 1,000 combat fatalities, spent billions of dollars, and maintained this commitment for more than 15 years.22 This commitment is even more remarkable given the domestic political unpopularity of the conflict in many of the participating countries and the absence of a direct interest in Afghanistan for most of them. As one senior European official said to a group of Americans at a recent meeting of the NATO Military Committee, “My country had no direct security interest in going to Afghanistan. We did it for you [the United States].”23 The maintenance of the allied cohesion on involvement in Afghanistan thus benefited the United States. It also says something larger about the convening and staying power of NATO in general. The allies’ commitment to an unpopular conflict that was at best tied only indirectly to most countries’ security interests is an indicator of the importance states attach to the Alliance in general.24

Notwithstanding conclusions about the quality of the strategy for the Afghanistan conflict, NATO played a positive and useful role in offering a structured forum for the strategy-making process. The Alliance demonstrated the potential for aggregating this process—always complex and difficult, even for one nation—among all the allies and partners in the coalition. The institutions, including the various committees at NATO headquarters, as well as higher-level foreign and defense ministers meetings and summits, provided both a structure for deliberation and routine political accountability.25 This structure facilitated the articulation of strategic ends as well as the iterative process of matching ways and means to those ends.

Compared to ad hoc multinational coalitions, the NATO structure encourages political cohesion and staying power because nations have a mechanism for their interests and concerns to be heard on a political as well as a military level.26 Compare, for example, the NATO effort in Afghanistan with the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria): all NATO allies and the institution are members of the coalition devised during the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales. And the military forces of the coalition are interoperable, to a great degree.

23 NATO Military Committee meeting, Washington, DC, March 14, 2019.
24 Afghanistan: Lessons Learned.
26 Official 2, interview.
because of the members’ common NATO experiences. But there is no inherent mechanism for political consultation among the coalition’s members. Arrangement of coalition meetings thus fell to the United States and other countries on a multilateral basis. A significant part of the rationale for NATO institutions joining the coalition was so the Alliance could host or convene meetings of the coalition, again often on the sidelines of a NATO-only meeting.\(^{27}\)

The Alliance extended this deliberative structure to include the participating nonmember partners in the Afghanistan mission.\(^{28}\) The increased prominence of the office of an ambassador-level NATO senior civilian representative in Afghanistan after 2010 further institutionalized this political coordination. These derivative benefits of NATO’s partnership program and longstanding tradition of civilian engagement and political dialog facilitated multinational contributions to the mission in Afghanistan. Even with the elusiveness of victory and the marginal significance of Afghanistan in the direct national security interests of coalition members, the longstanding commitment of allies to the NATO mission in Afghanistan reflects positively on the perceived value of the Alliance.

Organizing for Afghanistan

An advantage of NATO has been its role as a forum for coordinating decision-making and action among allies. Results depend mostly on what allies decide and do. But NATO institutions can assist countries in collective decisions and facilitate implementation. Though NATO’s role in offering a process for strategy-making in Afghanistan has been positive, aspects of organization and implementation in the Afghanistan conflict, particularly in the military area, deserve closer examination.

Command authority is one such issue. The political reality of coalition warfare necessarily complicates military authority and gave rise to several challenges in Afghanistan. One prominent challenge concerned the caveats imposed by most troop contributing nations on the employment of their forces. Some limitations affected material capabilities, such as the range of vehicles or equipment to operate at night. Legal or political considerations, such as rules of engagement or the taking and treatment of prisoners also played a role. Many of these restrictions stemmed from the lack of consensus on strategy, especially during the first years of NATO involvement. National caveats, especially the previously unstated or those not specified in advance, were some of the clearest consequences of strategic differences and frustrated NATO

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\(^{27}\) Official 1, interview by the author, May 22, 2019; and “Meeting of the Ministers of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS” (US Department of State, Washington, DC, February 6, 2019).

\(^{28}\) The inclusion of non-NATO contributing partners in political deliberations at NATO Headquarters was not immediate. Australia, one of the larger non-NATO participants in the Afghanistan mission, made a particular point of advocating for the opening these discussions to partner nations. The effect of this effort has been significant, as nonmember partners are now routinely included in relevant NATO deliberations and information on a range of allied initiatives. Afghanistan: Lessons Learned.
Successful commanders made the most of the available resources, of course, but the caveats increased the burdens for planning staff, reduced commanders’ flexibility, and negatively affected camaraderie and perceptions of fairness among the troops. Yet they were the price of broad international participation and political cohesion. Stronger political agreement and strategic clarity may reduce the salience of caveats. But risk discouraged broad participation. Similar trade-offs will continue in Afghanistan and in future missions.

Another problem involved overlapping authorities. “Dual-hatting” is a common practice in NATO that can produce neutral if not positive effects. A prominent example is the role of Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), who is customarily an American who also commands the US European Command. Although this officer must split time between the two responsibilities, each headquarters has its own staff and the authorities of each office tend to reinforce the other. The SACEUR can prioritize and lead NATO military efforts to reinforce US initiatives, and vice versa.

In Afghanistan, however, the greater number and types of hats placed on senior leaders did not always produce reinforcing effects. To take one example from the air domain, a single US Air Force general officer toward the end of the ISAF mission in 2014 was wearing at least five hats representing various command and staff duties in both national and multinational NATO contexts. Particularly when roles did not come with additional resources, such as the dual-hatting of entire staffs or organizations, the unavoidable practical effect was prioritizing some roles and inattention to others. This challenge especially affected US servicemembers who were relatively less familiar or experienced in NATO doctrine and standards compared to their counterparts from other countries in the Alliance.

A compounding factor in Afghanistan was the relatively distinct missions of the NATO-led ISAF and the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom, with the latter placing greater emphasis on counterterrorism. The United States largely tolerated the separation between NATO and US missions until the approach approved by President Barack Obama in 2009 enabled General Stanley McChrystal to enforce a degree of

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29 Official 1, interview; and Saideman and Auerswald, “Comparing Caveats,” 67–84.
30 Official 4, correspondence with the author, February 9, 2019.
32 In the words of one (American) NATO commander, “The NATO country whose troops understand NATO the least is the United States.” This difference in familiarity with NATO practices is an understandable consequence of the global nature of US military commitments; US servicemembers are more likely to serve in Asia or other non-NATO environments. But insofar as the learning curve for NATO leadership was steep compared with other national roles, the incentives to “go with what you know” did not favor the prioritization of NATO responsibilities for US leaders dual-hatted in NATO positions. Official 3, interview by author, June 6, 2018.
33 This distinction remains an issue in Afghanistan today as the NATO-led Resolute Support is a noncombat “train, advise, assist” mission while that of US Forces-Afghanistan has broader authorities. Many Resolute Support and US Forces-Afghanistan key leaders are dual-hatted.
previously unseen integration. This change was due in no small measure to McChrystal’s credibility within the US special operations community as well as his understanding of the NATO mission and counterinsurgency approach.\textsuperscript{34} But however commendable this integration was, one of the leading methods for achieving it was through dual-hatting.

The Alliance’s organization and chain of command outside the theater further frustrated NATO’s efforts in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{35} Formally, the chain of command ran from the commander of the ISAF through the Netherlands headquarters of NATO Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFCBS) and then to SHAPE and SACEUR. Yet the commander of JFCBS had little practical authority and headquarters was not resourced to provide much support to the Afghan theater. By subordinating ISAF to an operational-level JFC headquarters, the NATO chain of command implied ISAF was tactical, a classification that made little sense even before the creation of the ISAF Joint Command in 2009 expressly facilitated the higher ISAF Headquarters’ focus on operational and strategic matters.\textsuperscript{36} Moreover, four-star US commanders in Afghanistan reported in their national capacity to the commander US Central Command, who could provide significant enabling resources and was a peer to the US European Command commander, the SACEUR. Bypassing JFCBS in the NATO chain of command may have seemed sensible or appropriate from a nationally oriented resource and protocol point of view, but the practice reflected negatively on the NATO command structure.\textsuperscript{37}

One non-US member of the NATO military structure who had a prominent supporting role for the Afghanistan mission was the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander (DSACEUR), customarily a British officer. The principal role for DSACEUR involved force generation, and specifically management of the CJSOR process, which to some extent, reflected the importance of the process to NATO’s overall contribution to strategy in Afghanistan being procedural rather than substantive. But this trend may have created unintended consequences for the future capability or readiness of the DSACEUR office actually to command, as envisaged for example in the case of a European Union mission using NATO resources as agreed under the Berlin Plus agreement or successor arrangements.\textsuperscript{38}

Another component of NATO organization relevant to Afghanistan concerned training, doctrine, and lessons learned. Allied Command Transformation (ACT) plays a large role in the NATO exercise program

\textsuperscript{34} Official 1, interview. This distinction between US and NATO mission roles has reemerged since the end of ISAF and launch of the expressly noncombat NATO Resolute Support Mission after 2014.
\textsuperscript{36} Schreer, “Evolution of NATO’s Strategy,” in Edström and Gyllensporre, \textit{Pursuing Strategy}, 140.
\textsuperscript{37} Official 4, correspondence.
and maintains training institutions such as the Joint Warfare Centre in Stavanger, Norway, and the Joint Force Training Centre in Bydgoszcz, Poland. In theory, these resources can and do prepare allied forces. In practice, training is predominantly a national responsibility, and national commitment to NATO standards is often a more important factor in determining the readiness and interoperability of forces.

NATO established a Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre (JALLC) in Monsanto, Portugal, under the auspices of ACT in 2002. Originally intended to assess NATO exercises, the JALLC adapted to take stock of real operational lessons learned from Afghanistan and other places. But, as with training, the real impact of the lessons depends largely on national priorities. Finally, formal changes to NATO doctrine and standards is often slow. The first edition of its doctrine for counterinsurgency, for example, Allied Joint Publication (AJP) 3.4.4, was not published until 2011, years after NATO had adopted such an approach in Afghanistan.

A final critique of NATO composition concerns the complexity of relationships with non-NATO organizations in Afghanistan. In the efforts to develop the Afghan government and its security forces, for example, allied and coalition organizations included the ISAF mission broadly, the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan, the US-led Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan, the provincial reconstruction teams, and bespoke organizations such as the anticorruption Combined Joint Interagency Task Force Shafafiyat. Coordination with other non-NATO actors in the environment such as the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, nongovernmental organizations, third countries (such as Iran, Pakistan, India, China, and Russia), and above all, the Afghan government compounded the complexity.

The current NATO Resolute Support Mission focus on “train, advise, assist” is less ambitious and less complex, but also more reliant on the actions of non-NATO entities to achieve its goals. NATO acknowledged as much by greatly increasing its emphasis on external partnerships in its 2010 Strategic Concept, which was promulgated concurrent to that year’s Lisbon Summit decision to terminate the ISAF combat mission by 2014. NATO reaffirmed this emphasis through the establishment of the aforementioned office of the NATO Senior Civilian Representative and by the unprecedented step of inviting the governments of Afghanistan and ISAF countries to participate in its 2012 summit deliberations and declarations on Afghanistan in Chicago.

39 Tom Dyson, Organisational Learning and the Modern Army: A New Model for Lessons-Learned Processes (New York: Routledge, 2019); and Hardt, NATO’s Lessons in Crisis.

Field Support Services

Some of the most significant developments of NATO’s involvement in the Afghanistan conflict have been in the lesser-known areas of support and sustainment services. Logistics may be the most notable of these developments, particularly given the challenges of Afghanistan’s rough and landlocked topography and the remoteness of central Asia from NATO’s traditional geographic area. According to the principle of “costs lie where they fall,” transportation and sustainment in NATO is a national responsibility. But few NATO nations possessed the capability to transport their forces to Afghanistan and to supply them once there. Yet NATO troops in Afghanistan have rarely suffered for want of fuel, ammunition, spare parts, food, water, or other supplies in Afghanistan. Successful diplomacy deserves credit for keeping supply lines open through neighboring countries that have not always had smooth relations with NATO and the mission in Afghanistan, including Pakistan and Russia. NATO’s role in the allocation of common logistic services in Afghanistan is one of the clearest examples of how the Alliance can facilitate multinational cooperation.

Particularly for countries with a light footprint in Afghanistan, the burden of establishing independent supply chains for a small national contingent may be prohibitive. But the ability to access a common logistics system relieves those concerns by lowering costs and increasing the potential for broad international participation. Benefits existed for larger countries as well. American and British logistics systems at the beginning of the conflict were, for example, initially incompatible with NATO systems but later reconciled.  

In 2009, the United States decided to rely on a NATO platform for fuel acquisition and distribution in Afghanistan, expanding access from large installations to forward operating bases. This measure increased both the amount of fuel delivered and the flexible capacity to sustain other allies and partners in those locations. The key NATO institution for organizing many of these logistic services is the NATO Support and Procurement Agency, which had its origins in Cold War era supply organizations but was reorganized in 2010 with a clearer focus on support to operations like Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the direct success of these efforts to keep NATO forces supplied, negative consequences included the distorting effect of foreign money and goods

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on the Afghan economy and the attendant potential for crime and corruption—a problem hardly unique to NATO.\textsuperscript{43}

Intelligence is another example of the potential for NATO to offer a process for multinational cooperation that also depends on national participation. NATO offered a system and the standards for classifying intelligence at the institutional and ISAF mission levels as well as an architecture for sharing that intelligence. The mixed results of this effort in Afghanistan likely occurred because the quality of such allied intelligence depends largely on input from each nation. Countries were usually willing to share low-level information related to force protection, but tended to guard higher-level intelligence and information that might reveal capabilities, sources, or methods. This reluctance is inherent in multinational environments, and there are often trade-offs between the number of countries participating in a mission and the willingness of those countries to share intelligence with the entire group.\textsuperscript{44}

NATO and ISAF experimented with several different models for facilitating intelligence sharing given these constraints. Models that were more likely to result in sharing involved a NATO or ISAF hub with spokes to national intelligence cells that shared what they could. The more common model of intelligence organization was housing the institution’s intelligence function within a national structure. The latter model prevails at the highest echelons of the NATO mission in Afghanistan, where the NATO intelligence staff is dual-hatted with that of US Forces-Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{45}

Another lesson from Afghanistan involved communications, which further exemplifies some of the challenges identified above, including unity of command and intelligence sharing. Throughout the conflict in Afghanistan, headquarters personnel often monitored more than four communications and information technology systems representing various coalition groupings, classifications, and technical capabilities. This fragmented information environment was inefficient and taxed users, even though it created a redundancy that guaranteed a working communications channel. Early in the coalition expansion effort, NATO realized a single, secure network for missions would be necessary for NATO and non-NATO partners. Fielding of the network demonstrated NATO’s capability as a process facilitator.

\textsuperscript{43} Furthermore, much of the NATO logistics work was contracted to private companies which were largely responsible for their own security. The profusion of armed private contractors was yet another challenge to unity of command and created at least the potential for violence or destabilizing effects that worked at cross purposes to NATO’s overarching campaign objectives. See Elke Krahmann, “NATO Contracting in Afghanistan: the Problem of Principal-Agent Networks,” \textit{International Affairs} 92, no. 6 (2016): 1401–26.


\textsuperscript{45} Cleared US veterans of the Afghanistan campaign may recall the common but bizarre prevalence of “NATO” documents classified or processed on US systems labeled “Not Releasable to Foreign Nationals” (NOFORN).
Best practices from NATO Europe, such as the creation of the Afghan Mission Network Operations Centre in Kabul, were implemented in theater. Countries or organizations that had built their own classified networks, such as the battlefield information collection and exploitation system [BICES], to NATO standards had interoperable field-ready systems, demonstrating the potential value of NATO standards and processes. But ISAF also relied on Afghanistan’s civilian wireless communications backbone. The relative luxury of confronting an adversary that was not a significant cyberthreat, however, limits the application of any technical lessons learned from Afghanistan to contexts involving advanced cyber and electronic warfare capabilities.

**NATO Is Not a Shooter**

NATO’s command of the International Security Assistance Force mission from 2003 to 2014 was the largest and longest running conflict the Alliance has faced in its 70-year history. That mission continues today under the more modest Resolute Support Mission to train, advise, and assist the Afghan government and security institutions. This article offers a preliminary Alliance-wide assessment of NATO institutions as well as some initial suppositions that may complement national initiatives to learn from Afghanistan as well as efforts addressing future NATO adaptation. In terms of strategy and organization, NATO’s contributions to the international effort in Afghanistan were procedural rather than substantive. Its structures and processes facilitated multinational cooperation. But national actions mattered most. Although NATO’s efforts did not entirely mitigate each nation’s shortcomings, they were effective.

Perhaps the most significant example of NATO’s value is the fact that allies remained cohesive and committed in Afghanistan over such a long period, and in spite of so many political and strategic obstacles. On an implementation level, NATO’s involvement in Afghanistan both demonstrated and spurred further development of its field support services, especially logistics, which enabled many countries to participate and facilitated cost sharing. Furthermore, the mission in Afghanistan provided training and experience to the participating national militaries, promoted their interoperability, and led to the development of several NATO functions and common standards. The chief implications of these conclusions are that while national political leadership and strategy-making remain paramount in war, NATO remains a proven and effective instrument of organizing and implementing coordinated multinational efforts.

But will NATO ever attempt something like its Afghanistan mission again? The answer may be different for the territorial defense of a NATO

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46 For an up-to-date summary of challenges facing NATO, see Lute and Burns, NATO at Seventy. Significant for NATO not only because of the official end of the ISAF mission, 2014 also marked the rise of Islamic State terrorist attacks in Europe, Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and Russian aggression against Ukraine. These events refocused the attention of NATO allies on security threats closer to NATO’s traditional geographic area.
member state than for an expeditionary operation. Today the Alliance is understandably focused on threats closer to home, and its attention to future challenges will be increasingly motivated by technological changes and looming shifts in the global balance of power, such as the rise of China. Variation in the capabilities and the investments of each nation’s defenses is a contention within the Alliance. Yet nearly every source consulted or interviewed for this article judged that only two entities in the world are capable of running a large-scale multinational military campaign: the United States and NATO. This reality and recent history strongly suggest NATO will at least be considered when its European or North American members seek to undertake military action.

The cases of Libya in the Arab Spring, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and even current attempts to provide maritime security in Strait of Hormuz demonstrate this lesson in different ways. Many of the basic questions for evaluating the appropriateness of NATO involvement are political: does a mission require the participation of non-NATO countries or entities? If so, do the benefits of NATO’s convening power and institutional capacities outweigh the costs of adapting NATO to something new? Does a consensus exist among allies to address the issue through NATO and to involve the necessary non-NATO partners?

Such questions are reasonable and would need to be addressed and decided based upon the merits of future cases. In many situations, the best answer may be no. But reflexive complaints about NATO bureaucracy or process are less well-founded. Some kind of process or method will be needed for any multinational activity. If not NATO, then the United States and other countries would need to establish something that offers many of the same features. In the likelihood that such a coalition would be composed substantially of NATO member countries or global partners, those countries would benefit from the interoperability of NATO’s common standards. As the counter-ISIS campaign illustrates, even a well-developed multinational military coalition is unlikely to have the built-in political consultative mechanisms. And the often overlooked but essential logistics, communications, and field-support services that NATO developed and improved in Afghanistan facilitates countries’ participation and cost sharing.

So, if NATO did not exist or was not involved, the United States and other allies would need to create it or something like it to carry out the mission. This all argues powerfully for the value of NATO in Afghanistan as well as future conflicts.

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47 Lute and Burns, *NATO at Seventy*, 35–38.

ABSTRACT: This article reflects on the evolution of Canada’s whole-of-government approach in the context of international cooperation in Afghanistan. Although the effort resulted in great gains when Canadian Forces were actively involved in combat roles, the nation does not seem interested in maintaining the capability as a framework for quickly responding to current or future international crises.

Political scientist Stephen M. Saideman captured the incomplete state of Canada’s post-Afghanistan learning with this simple advice: Canada should “not to do it again.”1 Five years after the commitment ended, national introspection has been left to scholars attempting to understand the consequential changes. To comprehend the modifications resulting from Canada’s experiences in Afghanistan, one must understand the shifts that occurred within the government during the conflict and then scrutinize the outcomes.2 Finally, reflection can occur to determine if the efforts changed how Canada engages in post-Afghanistan missions and if there are lessons that have been learned and implemented.3

The unprecedented level of interdepartmental cooperation and involvement that was necessary to advance objectives in Afghanistan obviously made the effort unique. By the end of the combat mission in 2011, needs for integrated strategic coordination, planning, and guidance, as well as requirements for interoperational departments were accepted and applied. These were necessary to produce integrated effects, or impacts, in the mission area. Notably, other countries involved in this North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) commitment, such as the United States, faced similar challenges, which also resulted in adaptation and innovation. This article demonstrates that, despite Canada identifying and implementing these lessons during the Canadian combat mission...
in Afghanistan, the interagency, or whole-of-government, learning activity has not been integrated into national and international activities in the post-Afghanistan era. Ultimately, these “lessons identified” are not “lessons learned.” This lapse may have a deleterious impact on the ability of the Canadian government to address the challenges of such interagency cooperation in current and future interventions.

**Afghanistan and Canada**

Canada’s early involvement in Afghanistan was depicted by Canadian researchers, Janice Gross Stein and J. Eugene Lang in their 2007 work, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*. Initially, Canada’s participation was to be limited to a post-9/11 combat mission in tandem with the United States during 2002. But this led to a much longer Canadian involvement in Afghanistan. The initial commitment of a light infantry battalion group within a United States Army brigade was followed with more than three successive years of continued involvement in the Afghan stabilization mission. In 2003, Canada generated the headquarters for a multinational brigade and an infantry battle group based in Kabul. The following year, Canadians assumed command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

These obligations were succeeded by what was supposed to be provincial stabilization and capacity building that included establishing the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT). By 2006, Canadian Forces had inexorably migrated into participation in low-intensity conflict through counterinsurgency operations.⁴ Canada’s role changed again in 2011 as it shifted from fighting in southern Afghanistan to giving advice and assistance within the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan. By the end of the involvement in 2014, there were 165 Canadian deaths (158 soldiers, 7 civilians) and more than 1,800 wounded soldiers.⁵

The mission also tested the defense, diplomacy, and development approach created in 2003 as Canada expressed its foreign policy in conflicted regions.⁶ This concept evolved into the ideas represented by the more inclusive “whole-of-government” expression of integrating all instruments of governance and development to produce a desired effect linked to national strategy. The growth of this integrated approach to the conflict in Afghanistan was well recognized by the end of Canada’s final year in Kandahar. Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper stated:

> Friends, behind every girl now in a classroom, behind every healthy baby in its mother’s arms, behind every farmer who can feed his family without taking up arms, behind all of this progress are innumerable acts of heroism,

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of selfless devotion to duty by you, the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, our diplomats and our aid workers.  

Ultimately, if any discernable lessons arose for Canada from this conflict it was those associated with this methodology. The rebuilding of Afghanistan required integrating the efforts of those involved with defense, diplomacy, and development to achieve positive and lasting results in regenerating this war-torn nation.

**Canadian Whole-of-Government Operations**

Canada’s intergovernmental efforts in Afghanistan evolved from nascent beginnings. The foundation of this campaign was laid in January 2004 when then Lieutenant-General Rick Hillier, the Canadian commander of the ISAF rotation V (ISAF V), entered into discussions about national challenges with President Hamid Karzai, who was leading the Afghanistan Transitional Authority (ATA). They identified the lack of unified action by Afghanistan, Canada, international community members, and NATO toward rebuilding Afghanistan. Without a common plan or a coordinating mechanism, the lack of coherency was weakening the potential of many positive nation-building outcomes. The lack of a shared approach also prevented ISAF V from moving beyond lower-order (tactical) military activities that could achieve immediate effects to higher-level, enduring strategic objectives.

Hillier understood that without a coherent strategic concept that allowed all involved parties—military, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, donor institutions, the international community, and most importantly the ATA and Afghan people—to participate, no operational-level campaign could be created. He also believed “rebuilding failed states or failing states was not a security, governance or economic problem; it was all three.” Accordingly, he used his ISAF V staff, and later two Canadian officers with advanced planning backgrounds who were specifically tasked with assisting the

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11. Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War* (Toronto ON: HarperCollins Publishers Limited, 2009), 389; and Serge Labbé, interview by the author, June 6, 2019. Labbé, the deputy chief of staff to Hillier’s headquarters, highlights Hillier’s emphasis on an interdepartmental approach as part of the mission, as well as his efforts to implement this within ISAF and through NATO Senior Civilian Representative Hikmet Çetin. Sadly, these ISAF efforts to engage NATO in a holistic approach did not seem to persist beyond Hillier’s departure in 2005.
Afghan Transitional Authority, to begin articulating a strategic concept released as “Creating a National Economy: The Path to Security and Stability in Afghanistan.” Though developmental, it specified ideas that were used to assist with developing governance and security. The core ideas later emerged within the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, an overarching Islamic Republic of Afghanistan policy document guiding the multiple activity streams working to rebuild Afghanistan.12

Recognizing the success of this effort, Karzai requested similar support after Hillier became the chief of the Canadian Defense Staff (CDS). Regrettably, this Strategic Advisory Team-Afghanistan only ran from 2005 to 2008, roughly the duration of Hillier’s tenure in the role. Since capacity building and assistance was not viewed by some in the former Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade as a Canadian military mission, it met its untimely demise as a result of interdepartmental politics.13

The termination of the strategic advisory team indicated the early challenges Canada faced in producing a whole-of-government approach. Difficulties ranged from orchestrating processes between different organizations, to overcoming uneasiness with civil-military cooperation, to calming outright hostilities and suspicions.14 This friction translated into less than stellar results—for example, British General Sir David Richards, who commanded the ISAF in 2006, observed that it took months for Canada to deliver nonmilitary assistance in regions of Kandahar that had been affected by intense fighting. This delay exemplified the need for a whole-of-government approach to ensure the immediate gains of military forces could be followed with stabilizing effects from governance and development.15

Over the course of Canada’s involvement in Afghanistan, there were two heavily debated parliamentary votes—one in May 2006 and the other in March 2008—concerning the extension of the mission and its essential character.16 The latter debate was informed by the results of the Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan convened by the Conservative Party in 2007 to make recommendations on Canada’s involvement in the mission. Based upon the interviews and the associated research, the panel conducted to consider the Afghan, Canadian, and allied perspectives, the Manley Report stated any recommendation would need to take the following factors into account: Canadian efforts and progress made to date in the course of stabilizing the security situation

15 Stein and Lang, Unexpected War, 272; 259–83.
in Afghanistan; the significant investment of resources, energy, and infrastructure already made by Canada; the possibility of deterioration in the security as well as the development aspects of potential future options; NATO and United Nations (UN) objectives to create better conditions for Afghans and prevent the reestablishment of terrorist groups in Afghanistan; and Canada’s reputation internationally.

The report outlined a few possible options regarding the level of continued Canadian engagement in Afghanistan during 2009 that ranged from leaving the Afghanistan mission to continuing full involvement as well as variations between these two extremes. But it ultimately concluded—considering Canadian efforts and sacrifice to date, NATO and UN commitments, and the need to make life better for Afghans—Canadian involvement should continue. The findings raised fundamental questions: “How do we move from a military role to a civilian one, and how do we oversee a shift in responsibility for Afghanistan’s security from the international community to Afghans themselves?”

The Manley Report argued security forces needed to be strengthened, agriculture encouraged, government institutions strengthened, and national infrastructure restored. The Canadian portion of this plan could only be achieved through a holistic governmental approach with clear benchmarks that supported the “Afghanistan Compact” on achieving peace and security in Afghanistan and a body for strategic-level coordination, assessment, public reporting, and achieving these integrated objectives.

Hillier notes an important outcome of this period of debate in Canadian politics was the development of a defense policy that provided the overarching strategy for the use of Canada’s military. The Canada First Defence Strategy mandated the Canadian Forces “be a fully integrated, flexible, multi-role and combat-capable military, working in partnership with the knowledgeable and responsive civilian personnel of the Department of National Defence. This integrated Defence team will constitute a key element of a whole-of-government approach to meeting security requirements, both domestically and internationally.”

Furthermore, this very public political debate created recognition of the breadth and complexity of the Afghan challenge, which in turn contributed to a substantial evolution in both the strategic whole-of-government coordination framework in Ottawa as well as the corresponding mission structure and civilian resourcing in Afghanistan. The Manley Report, and the new defense policy, ushered in a new Canadian political perspective on the whole-of-government concept.

19 Hillier, Soldier First, 470–71.
Resultantly, by early 2008, Canadian efforts in Afghanistan were, for the first time, overseen by a cabinet committee on Afghanistan that was supported by the newly created Afghanistan Task Force in the Privy Council Office. The activities of the Afghanistan Task Force were reported by the clerk of the Privy Council directly to the prime minister and supported the Cabinet committee. Although mainly staffed by senior officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the task force included representatives from several other departments including the Department of National Defense and the Canadian International Development Agency. This whole-of-government innovation was a first in Canadian political affairs.\(^{21}\)

In March 2008, the Canadian government unveiled a detailed set of six whole-of-government policy objectives for the mission derived from the Manley Report and the “Afghanistan Compact.” These were: “Enable the Afghan National Security Forces in Kandahar to sustain a more secure environment and promote law and order; strengthen Afghan institutional capacity to deliver basic services; provide humanitarian aid to vulnerable people; enhance border security with facilitation of Afghan-Pakistani dialogue; help advance Afghanistan’s democratic governance; and facilitate Afghan-led political reconciliation.”\(^{22}\)

Benchmarks were developed to help report on the progress achieved on key priorities that included four regional objectives for Kandahar and two national objectives for Afghanistan. The first regional measure, a secure environment and establishment of law and order would be accomplished by building the capacity of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. Supporting efforts were identified in the areas of justice and corrections. Second, jobs would be created, education would be provided, and essential services, such as water, would be made available. Third, humanitarian assistance would be delivered to people in need. Fourth, the management and security of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border would be improved. The national measures included encouraging Afghan institutions that were central to Canada’s Kandahar priorities and supporting democratic processes such as elections. The ultimate objective was that the Canadian efforts would contribute to Afghan-led political reconciliation efforts aimed at weakening the insurgency and fostering a sustainable peace.\(^{23}\)

Subsequently, these six policy objectives and their corresponding efforts facilitated the integration of Canadian officials into Canadian


military operations. It was the expression of political interest in and the coordination of a comprehensive governmental approach through the Privy Council Office and the Cabinet. This teamwork was further encouraged by the requirement to provide corresponding detailed quarterly assessment of activities to the Parliament of Canada. As a result, by the end of the combat mission, this whole-of-government process included not only the Canadian Forces, the Department of Foreign Affairs and National Trade, and the Canadian International Development Agency, but also other government departments like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Correctional Service of Canada.  

It should be noted, however, that even with increased harmonization among the efforts of all partners throughout this time, strategic communications and public affairs remained inconsistently visualized and carried out by the various participants. Former Director of Communications of the Afghanistan Task Force Colonel Brett Boudreau observed the coordination structures created when the task force was established had a positive impact:  

This forcing function to work together better, faster and in a more integrated fashion over time showed real value from a policy and communications perspective both in theatre and at respective departmental [headquarters] HQs—it is perhaps why public support for the mission and particularly for “the troops,” remained generally consistent even in the face of a significant number of Canadian killed and wounded, as well as the considerable financial cost. By 2012 though, after a major national effort of 10 years, the lack of positive results or much substantive evidence of real progress on the ground coupled with the public perception that NATO (excepting the [United States], [United Kingdom] and Netherlands) had “abandoned” Canada in the South during heavy fighting there, continues today to negatively impact Canadian public perceptions of the Afghanistan mission.  

From this, one could opine that the strength, and the weakness, for the Canadian mission over these years was its overarching focus on building Afghan capacity. As much as the international community collectively underestimated the strength of the insurgency, it overestimated the ability of Afghan leadership, in governance and in security efforts, to assume full responsibility for responding to the challenges posed by the insurgency. Under these circumstances, Canadian activities in Kandahar revolved around balancing efforts to enable Afghan civilian authorities and security forces, while at the same time neutralizing the insurgents.  

With the success of the 2007 American military surge in Iraq and the renewed commitment to ISAF after President Barack Obama was elected in 2008, the United States became reinvested in the dilemmas of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Accordingly, the Americans provided a strategic vision and the resources necessary to create a multinational counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan. With an influx of tens of thousands of American troops, and more clearly defined international
objectives in late 2009, the various national campaigns became more fully integrated into a broader international counterinsurgency and nation-building campaign. Taken as a whole, this improved strategic coherence—on top of the flow of American personnel and material—renewed international interest in Afghanistan and gave fresh impetus to NATO efforts to resolve the expanding violence. It was within this increased security context that a relatively robust Canadian whole-of-government approach developed in Kandahar province and the role of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team evolved.26

In 2008, NATO created a similar comprehensive approach. In 2009, General Stanley McChrystal, then commander of the ISAF, identified a lack of coordination between military and nonmilitary operations as inimical to achieving ISAF security objectives. As a result, many of the major nonmilitary organizations operating in Afghanistan met for a conference in Kabul in 2010. Mark Sedwill, NATO’s senior civilian representative in Afghanistan, then raised the issue of implementing an effective comprehensive approach and the necessity of a NATO-level coordination mechanism through the NATO Senior Civilian Representative Report: A Comprehensive Approach Lessons Learned in Afghanistan. The ideas put forward by Sedwill never came to fruition and arguably the ability of ISAF to facilitate the provision of a secure environment was, in turn, diminished.27

**Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team**

The objectives in the Manley Report were achieved as Canada exercised the whole-of-government approach in Afghanistan at the regional and national levels during the final year of the combat mission. Quarterly reports by the Afghanistan Task Force kept the Canadian government apprised of the progress. The reconstruction team, which had become a combined Canadian-American effort, included 62 Canadian civilians. The group worked closely with Afghanistan’s governing structure, through the Office of the Provincial Governor, the Provincial Ministries, and the Provincial Council, to identify and to support the implementation of priority projects throughout the region. The Canadian staff in this organization was comprised of diplomats, aid workers, corrections officers, and civilian police who shared the mission of reconnecting Kandaharis with an effective, representative government. In support of these efforts the reconstruction team collaborated with Canadian Forces, American civilian and military partners, and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The group partnered with the Attorney General’s Office and the Provincial Court on justice issues, the Afghan National Police, the Afghan National Army, and the Central Prison Directorate.

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27 The initiative was never implemented. Labbé, interview.
The Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team worked intimately with Tooryalai Wesa, then governor of Kandahar, and his office. As the appointed provincial executive officer, Wesa’s direction and leadership was important to Canada. As such, the team assisted him with planning, budgeting, and coordinating major projects. In this fashion, the organization and its efforts were aligned with provincial ministry projects, plans, and budgets to support the people of Kandahar.

The reconstruction team had a strong relationship with the Provincial Council. As a body of elected representatives who listened and mediated disputes in the Afghan tradition, the council encouraged people and the civil society to participate in governance. This effort provided an important adjunct to the provincial administration by helping the people find common ground with the government.

District stabilization teams, comprised of small groups of American and Canadian government advisors with military assistance, worked closely with their Afghan counterparts outside the provincial capital, in the district ministries, and alongside district governors to increase local capacity. The measurable growth of governance between 2010 and 2011 was, in no small part, due to the efforts of these teams of dedicated professionals.

Moreover, the six policy objectives linked with the Afghanistan Compact, served as an overarching term of reference for the civilian components of the mission—for example, Canada created a unique operational capacity that increased the civilian role in Kandahar. This expanded whole-of-government approach enabled a more robust partnership with the Afghan provincial government, and it was supported by programs financed by Canada’s Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Canadian International Development Agency. Some of these initiatives included the Arghandab Irrigation Rehabilitation Project, which involved one of the largest dams in Afghanistan; the development of 50 schools; eradicating polio; improving the primary detention center in the region; training police; and improving government infrastructure.

As Canada’s plans in Kandahar were achieved, the Canadian staff of the KPRT gradually relocated to Kabul or returned to Canada. In January 2011, Canada transferred leadership of the reconstruction team to the United States as part of the Canadian process of winding down its activities in Afghanistan. And, Canadians and Americans served together closely until the end of the Canadian combat mission in 2011 so as to achieve significant progress in both Afghan development and governance.  

28 Throughout this period, the Chair of the Provincial Council was the powerful half brother of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Ahmed Wali Karzai, known as AWK. AWK was murdered by a bodyguard in July 2011. “Bodyguard Kills Hamid Karzai’s Half-Brother,” CTV News, accessed May 19, 2012.

29 Tim Martin, representative of Canada in Kandahar from August 2010 to July 2011 (speech, Kandahar Provincial Council, Kandahar City, Afghanistan, March 6, 2011).
Task Force Kandahar

Canadian and American military forces in the Canadian-led brigade known as Task Force Kandahar implemented Manley Report-based initiatives in conjunction with the KPRT to ensure all military activities were coordinated within a whole-of-government framework. Security aims were to recruit, equip, and organize community policing; to train, mentor, and partner with an increasingly independent Afghan National Army; and to deny insurgents influence on the population. Governance goals included creating responsible and responsive district leadership that subordinated to the governor; developing representative subnational processes, such as community meetings called *shuras*; and establishing a capable ministry staff that delivered basic services. Finally, development objectives included establishing functional district development committees, village development representation, and increased economic capacity.

The task force worked toward a number of integrated measures of effectiveness in its whole-of-government approach. Within the area of security, it was necessary to ensure adequate numbers of capable Afghan police who were addressing village requirements and protecting, not preying on, the people. The Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) led both combined- and single service operations as well as integrated command and control, which was responsive to the district governor and village elders (such as maliks). When examining support to governance, it was necessary to reinforce and assist with creating responsible and responsive district governors and staff; representative and functioning district and village *shuras* and subnational processes; and provincial ministry representatives working at district centers and reacting to village requirements.

The task force developed the support needed to help with the establishment of functioning district development committees that represented the needs of local Afghans and managed centrally controlled funds. In turn, this village development representation connected to all the development activities that were coordinated through district governors. This cooperation enabled district governors to meet priorities set by the district, in conjunction with the villages, and a working rural and urban interface of markets, transportation, and so on.30

Canadian Whole-of-Government Lessons

The Manley Report resulted in an amalgamation of various interdepartmental perspectives, objectives, programs, plans, and activities that directly underpinned the creation of a Canadian whole-of-government approach in Afghanistan over the last few years of the mission. This concept involved Canadian field partners and members of the international community as well as Afghan authorities at all levels. It was creative and responsive to the exigencies of Canada’s most current intervention. While some detractors argue Canada’s approach

30 Milner, presentation; and Coombs, presentation.
to whole-of-government activities in Afghanistan has been replete with flaws, others more optimistically reframe this perspective and note Canada’s engagement in the region is rich with lessons to be learned.

In early 2011, the Afghanistan whole-of-government lessons-learned project was launched by the Afghanistan Task Force. Subsequently, the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team organized a conference on the lessons learned to examine the multiagency experiences of the whole-of-government effort. Participants looked at cross department civil-military binational cooperation, the evolution of the reconstruction team, and strategic communications, as well as contracting and implementing a “rule of law.” Representatives utilized the 2010–11 experiences of the whole-of-government team in Kandahar to derive a series of recommendations for the Afghanistan Task Force:

1. The need to have expertise across the domains of security, governance, reconstruction, and development was highlighted. Without balanced civilian expertise and support, the host nation is unable to extend its influence into the communities. Two areas cited as lacking key Canadian civilian expertise in the conflict-ridden environment of Kandahar were agriculture and justice.

2. The need to integrate with other government departments, particularly the Canadian military prior to the deployment, was brought forward. Understanding other departmental cultures and modes of operation would have reduced friction between different organizations, as well as improved communications and effectiveness.

3. It was thought the binational, civil-military nature of the reconstruction team was effective. It reached across the province to the districts and assisted greatly in the handover of structures, programming, and operations.

4. The need for the deployed civilian field agencies of the Canadian government to be able to communicate to the media was emphasized. While the Canadian Department of Defense had great latitude in dealing with the media, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Canadian International Developmental Agency did not, with a commensurate negative impact in informing the Canadian public of their activities and achievements. This disparity was stark and the Afghanistan Task Force focused considerable effort toward resolving it. Unfortunately, success was never truly achieved.

5. There is a need to standardize contracting procedures across the Canadian whole-of-government effort. While the practices of the Department of National Defense and the Canadian Forces are flexible

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and were deemed to represent the best practices, those of other departments were, at times, seen as problematic and cumbersome.

6. While Canadian expertise was recognized in the area of rule of law, a more comprehensive and detailed program that would reach to the districts and their people would have been more efficacious.32

The Afghanistan Task Force later put together the results of various inputs, like that of the reconstruction team, to create high-level perspectives on the results of Afghanistan’s whole-of-government experience. These strategic observations reflected the evolution of the Afghanistan Task Force and its activities. Leading the list was the requirement for an interdepartmental assessment to establish clear national objectives and priorities. Related to this was the requirement for an interagency planning exercise to create common understanding and intent, plus establish operational guidance. Directly connected to the formation of the Afghanistan Task Force was the need to create coordinating bodies at the political level to produce an integrated approach across and within departments.

The necessity of enhancing cultural and process understanding between departments to set the conditions for successful intergovernmental collaboration was also suggested in a fashion similar to the recommendations expressed by the reconstruction team. This cooperation could be achieved through cross-department assignments, colocation, and shared predeployment preparations.

The need for deployable civilian capability was also highlighted. Such a resource would need decentralized authorities who were able to make appropriate and timely decisions and who would be part of a unified whole-of-government effort from the very beginning. In a nod to the quarterly reporting process implemented in Afghanistan, the need for a benchmarking framework to monitor and to report on whole-of-government activities was also brought out by highlighting the importance of measuring progress. Finally, the requirement to build a nuanced and multifaceted engagement strategy to gain and maintain popular support from the public and partners, which had been lacking for the KPRT, was emphasized.33

Not apparent in this narrative was the hard work necessary to make the whole-of-government construct work. These exertions occurred daily throughout the years of Canada’s involvement in Afghanistan. The friction produced by integrating dissimilar departments and organizations was very real, and operationalizing this integrated approach required the labor and good will of many public servants and military personnel. Also, critical to success was the strong leadership from the highest levels, embodied in the structure of the Afghanistan Task Force. Only in this way did the mission become, and remain, a whole-of-government effort.34

32 DND, “3350-1 (JLLO)”; and Canada, “Kandahar Lessons Learned Workshop.”
34 Boudreau, email, May 19, 2019.
Conclusion

Canadian efforts to build coordinated interdepartmental activities in Afghanistan evolved in conjunction with the growth of the NATO mission, national debate, and the end of the combat mission in 2011. This discussion and the record it generated is wide-ranging and contains much value from the strategic and tactical perspectives. Points of immediate importance for future whole-of-government practices can be derived from this collaboration. Of all this discussion, the need for more intragovernment contact, understanding, and collaboration prior to such missions is critical. This need was highlighted by Lieutenant-Colonel Kimberley Unterganschnigg, Canadian Armed Forces retired, who led the joint lessons-learned cell in Task Force Kandahar during 2010–11:

Interdepartmental civilian-military cooperation was essential to address the broad scope of security, governance, reconstruction, and development activities that were undertaken by the KPRT and TFK in the final year of Canada’s involvement in Kandahar. Looking back, rather than a strategy document focused upon fixed signature projects, a more comprehensive framework and approach to the [whole-of-government] mission that provided clarity on the roles and responsibilities of each of the departments, particularly with respect to activities in support of governance and development, would have improved our effectiveness, as it would have guided consistent progress over the years.35

Although they have been identified as an essential element of mission success in documents from the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team and the Afghanistan Task Force, integrated effects, nor concrete recommendations to facilitate whole-of-government understanding and outcomes, have yet to come to pass in a permanent manner. Even in 2009, prior to the lessons-learned exercises documented in this discussion, Canadian development specialist Andy Tamas argued the necessity of the creation of a “hybrid” organization consisting of “an integrated team of soldiers, development workers, diplomats and others who can protect themselves.”36 This organization would be funded and resourced sufficiently to deploy quickly and to commence working effectively wherever required, regardless of security concerns to produce integrated effects. The ability to create, deploy, and sustain such a structure over the duration of the mission, along with established strategic planning and coordination mechanisms, would permit Canada to maintain the skills and relationships so arduously gained in Afghanistan.

Tamas’s ideas support the KPRT and Afghanistan Task Force conclusions. Twenty-first century interventions require teams of people that are familiar with each other and their capabilities. In turn, this suggests establishing integrated professional development systems and increasing interdepartmental assignments to increase operating familiarity within the departments of the Canadian government. These steps, in conjunction with developing whole-of-government

organizations that contain a necessary cross-spectrum of skills and attributes and that can deploy quickly where ever needed, would increase Canada’s pool of deployable capabilities. Sadly, none of the lessons-learned have been systemically operationalized in an enduring manner.

As the Canadian government looks toward future involvement in other fractured environments, it needs to heed the lessons identified from its contribution in southern Afghanistan, particularly over the last year of the combat mission. Canada must ensure the observations captured by the Afghanistan Task Force and the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team, as well as the activities of Task Force Kandahar, are addressed to improve the effectiveness of its future whole-of-government activities. In order to create success in current operations, such as those in Iraq and Syria, as well as future interventions, the Canadian lessons identified over the course of the mission in Afghanistan must be operationalized, institutionalized, and sustained. Only in this fashion will lessons identified truly become lessons learned.
AFGHANISTAN’S LESSONS: PART I

The Netherlands’ Lessons

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ABSTRACT: This article highlights the benefits a small military enjoys with regard to networked learning through the lessons the Netherlands’ learned while contributing to the NATO mission in Afghanistan. Although the force seems to be reverting to enemy-centric thinking, the author encourages leaders to retain an adaptive mindset that will allow the force to adopt a more population-centric approach when necessary.

The Netherlands has been involved in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. That event prompted the international community to start reconstructing the country for long-term stability. In addition to developmental aid and diplomatic support, Dutch soldiers started deploying to Afghanistan on January 1, 2002. Since then, the Dutch armed forces have contributed to the international coalition in many different forms and places, including various contributions to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): an infantry company in Kabul (2002–03), a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) in Baghlan (2004–06), a task force in Uruzgan province (2006–10), and a police training mission in Kunduz province (2011–13). Also, Special Forces and air assets such as F-16s and attack helicopters have deployed in support of these operations as well as the wider coalition efforts that took place under the banner of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

By the end of the ISAF mission in 2014, the Netherlands had participated in training Afghan National Defense and Security Forces in northern Afghanistan as part of Resolute Support, a mission that was extended through December 2021. Since the first Dutch soldier landed in Kabul in 2002, an estimated total of 30,000 Dutch soldiers have deployed to Afghanistan. That is almost two-thirds of the current overall strength of the Dutch armed forces (39,839 active duty and 5,046 reserve).

The various contributions to the Afghan campaign have had a huge impact on the relatively small Dutch military. Moreover, this impact coincided with the completion of the transformation process that...
reshaped the Dutch military from a Cold War force to an expeditionary organization. Consequently, Afghanistan marked the first serious test for the newly acquired ability to conduct military operations in conjunction with other departments and as part of an international coalition. So, in the eyes of the Dutch armed forces, their contributions to the Afghanistan War were not only vast in intensity, but also challenging in nature, a major experience for a small military.

The various deployments to Afghanistan have provided the Dutch military with a wide range of experiences over the past seventeen years. This article focuses on understanding how Dutch soldiers adapted to the specifics of their mission and to the challenging Afghan operational environment. The Dutch military is encouraged to not only take notice of such observations, but also to explore the ways the military community has disseminated and processed newly obtained insights. In other words, when seeking to obtain an insight on the lessons learned by the Dutch armed forces in Afghanistan, one should not only study the lessons observed, but also the extent to which they have become lessons institutionalized. This article, therefore, answers the question of which lessons the Dutch military has learned in Afghanistan first by presenting observations on adaptation in the field and subsequently analyzing the way the Dutch military has institutionalized them.

**Lessons Observed**

The most substantial Dutch contributions took place during the ISAF campaign. The end of this North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) campaign coincided with new Dutch missions against the Islamic State in the Middle East (as part of Operation Inherent Resolve) and the deployment of a contingent in support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. This marked the end of an era in which the Dutch armed forces had almost exclusively focused on Afghanistan. The four-year deployment (2006–10) of the brigade-size Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) stands out as the defining experience during this period. The mission in Uruzgan province was the largest Dutch military operation since the Indonesian war of decolonization and the first time since the Korean War that Dutch soldiers saw intensive combat.

The TFU experience itself demonstrated that the Dutch military is capable of a high standard of performance in international operations in a complicated environment. Some international observers have attributed this success to the Dutch approach, a subtle, nonviolent way of conducting operations by use of defense, diplomacy, and development (3D) activities that focus on the local population and the government.

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rather than on fighting the insurgent opponent. Yet the successful deployment was the result of field adaptations that gradually shifted the task force’s emphasis from an enemy-centric, kinetic approach toward a more balanced population-centric approach tailored for Uruzgan’s complicated operational environment. Since a similar pattern is witnessed among almost all other national contingents that contributed to the ISAF mission, the TFU case not only offers an excellent insight in the lessons observed by Dutch soldiers, but is also highly relevant from a comparative perspective.

The first and perhaps most important adaptation of the Dutch task force concerned the evolution of its military strategy. Before the start of the mission, politicians and decisionmakers in The Hague determined the mission’s goal as fostering stability and security in Uruzgan. This effort included guidelines prescribing methods for augmenting the local population’s support for the Afghan government mainly through civil-military cooperation and reconstruction activities. Combat troops would provide security assistance to create a permissive environment for these activities. Yet, this provided hardly any tangible direction for implication by the task force. Basically, the TFU deployed on August 1, 2006, without a proper campaign plan, and its commanding officer, Colonel Theo Vleugels was told “to do what we [the TFU staff] told them [the defense staff in The Hague] we would do.” Consequently, the first TFU rotation set out to design its own plan within the framework of high-level policy. Despite this process being initiated during predeployment training, the definitive Master Plan was only completed two months into the actual deployment. This plan laid out a military strategy following the effects-based approach and aimed at obtaining 23 key effects in


6 For a complete overview of the Dutch Uruzgan campaign see Martijn Kitzen, “The Course of Co-option: Co-option of Local Power-Holders as a Tool for Obtaining Control over the Population in Counterinsurgency Campaigns in Webleke Societies” (dissertation, Amsterdam University, 2016), 329–524. For the population-centric turn in TFU’s approach, see also Martijn Kitzen, “Close Encounters of the Tribal Kind: The Implementation of Co-option as a Tool for De-escalation of Conflict—The Case of the Netherlands in Afghanistan’s Uruzgan Province,” Journal of Strategic Studies 35, no. 5 (2012).


8 Brief van de Ministers.


order to increase security and stability in all main population centers over the next two years—initial commitment was until 2008.

Unsurprisingly, it soon became clear that the Master Plan was unsuitable as its goals proved too ambitious and its approach inappropriate for facing the complicated neo-Taliban insurgency in a highly fragmented local society. There had been only limited geographical expansion of the TFU’s “ink spot”—the main population centers from which TFU influence would gradually expand its influence—and most of the intended effects were not met as planned.\(^{11}\) Therefore, the fourth TFU rotation in 2008 set out to develop and adopt a new strategy, the Focal Paper.

The Focal Paper was not only a consequence of the urgent need for a more suitable campaign plan, but also of the Dutch parliament’s decision to extend the mission for two more years, up to August 2010.\(^{12}\) Heavily influenced by counterinsurgency thinking, the new plan and its framework of operations clearly echoed the ideas on counterinsurgency introduced in the United States.\(^{13}\) Thus, the TFU officially adopted counterinsurgency as its mission. The main task now became assisting the local government in providing a stable and secure environment by maintaining and augmenting the security situation, while simultaneously obtaining the support of the local population.

Furthermore, the TFU would focus on facilitating the development of governmental structures, security forces, as well as development efforts of the Afghan authorities.\(^{14}\) The new campaign plan combined the military’s methodology of structured backward planning for the long-term with the understanding of Uruzgan’s operational environment acquired in the first two years.\(^{15}\) This led to the remarkable—yet realistic—insight that Uruzgan, as a province of the new Afghan state, would be sufficiently developed to provide the majority of the population with a middle income and meet their basic needs by 2050 and to have a local government in full control of all development and security efforts.\(^{16}\) However, the extension of the TFU mission until 2010 rendered this year as the “beacon on TFU’s planning horizon,” and the end state for the TFU campaign, subsequently, was to provide “the first step towards a viable and favourable future for Uruzgan in 2050.”\(^{17}\) The TFU’s short-term counterinsurgency effort, thus, was to establish an

\(^{11}\) Kitzen, “Course of Co-option,” 419, 427.

\(^{12}\) Kitzen, “Course of Co-option,” 419.


\(^{15}\) See also Harskamp, interview; and Lieutenant Colonel Wilfred Rietdijk (commander provincial reconstruction team [PRT]-4), interview by the author, September 5, 2008.


\(^{17}\) TFU G5, “Focal Paper.”
underpinning for the Afghan government and its local and international partners to work toward long-term stabilization goals.

Another key element of the Focal Paper was its exclusive focus on the main population centers of Tarin Kot, Deh Rawud, and Chora. These districts and their surrounding areas were divided into seventeen so-called focal areas. This allowed for a systematical, event-driven approach for consolidating and expanding the TFU “ink spot,” as soon as the security situation in a focal area would be sufficiently stable, the task force would transfer authority to the Afghan government and security forces and could shift its attention to the next.19 While this approach meant a huge leap forward in terms of realistic objectives for the expansion of TFU and local government control, its design contained a fundamental flaw as Uruzgan’s challenging terrain dictated the borders of the focal areas. Consequently, these borders sometimes cut through interconnected communities. Nevertheless, the Focal Paper was a proper population-centric counterinsurgency campaign plan that provided realistic guidelines and objectives for TFU operations until the end of the mission in 2010.

In mid-2009 the Focal Paper went through another alteration as it became clear the mission would most probably not be extended for another period. This ultimate plan, called the “Uruzgan Campaign Plan,” predominantly aimed at creating the unity of effort needed for a smooth transfer of authority to either the Afghan government and its security forces or international coalition partners.20 The plan provided common ground for underpinning long-term stability in Uruzgan by providing an intellectual framework for reconstruction and development and identifying key disablers (spoilers) and enablers of this process in the province.

The “Uruzgan Campaign Plan,” however, was labeled “NATO Secret,” which made it impossible to share with Afghan partners and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the province. Yet, the plan itself provided a proper guideline for the upcoming transfer of authority—ultimately, Australia and the United States would take over. Furthermore, the “Uruzgan Campaign Plan” addressed the problem with the borders of the focal areas as these were replaced by thirteen areas of influence that allowed for optimal engagement of local communities as their confines were determined by following socioeconomic and social characteristics instead of terrain features.21

19 Although the PRT staff had been consulted with regard to the disposition of communities and tribal distribution, geographic features—traditionally used to divide the battle space in a military operation—still prevailed over societal borders. Harskamp, interview; and Rietdijk, interview.
Thus, TFU’s military strategy had evolved from the rather ad hoc and overambitious Master Plan into the solid counterinsurgency plan provided by the Focal Paper, and ultimately became the “Uruzgan Campaign Plan,” which provided an underpinning for long-term efforts after the Dutch withdrawal. All these plans originated from the various TFU staff rotations, which illustrates the bottom-up character of the military-strategic process during the Uruzgan mission. This lack of strategic guidance from above also echoed in the outcome of the mission. Especially the Focal Paper and “Uruzgan Campaign Plan” allowed for the creation of a broad and balanced alliance of local subtribal communities connected to the provincial government. For the time being, this effectively enhanced security and stability as it diminished support for the Taliban among Uruzgan’s populace. Yet, due to the lack of strategic vision, this ad hoc political order failed to materialize as an underpinning for long-term stability.22

The increased comprehensiveness of the TFU’s organization encompassed a second key adaptation that enhanced the task force’s ability to fulfill its mission effectively. While initially envisioned as a 1,200-strong task force, military planners urged for more troops as the 2006 surge of the neo-Taliban insurgency led to a deterioration of the security situation. As a result, the Dutch military deployed more soldiers, and total TFU strength during the entire mission varied between 1,400 and 2,000 soldiers—with peaks occurring during rotations.23 The numerical emphasis within the TFU lay on the 600-soldier battle group, which was to provide security, assist the Afghan government and its security forces, and enable PRT operations. This latter unit, while numerically inferior, was key to the task force’s success as it was the prime tool for enhancing stability by promoting good governance and facilitating reconstruction.

The PRT was responsible for the development and diplomacy activities within the aforementioned 3D approach. Despite the nonmilitary character of these activities, the PRT consisted almost exclusively of military staff led by a military commander. Initially only two civilians operated as part of this unit, a development advisor and a political adviser. This all changed with the deployment of TFU-5 in July 2008 which saw a surge of civilian staff.24 A total of 12 political, development, and cultural advisers were added to the task force, with most of them operating within the PRT.

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The influx of these new advisers was part of a reorganization aimed at strengthening the development and diplomacy expertise of the task force. This reorganization also introduced a system of dual command. From July 2008 onward, the task force was jointly led by a duumvirate consisting of the military commander and the highest-ranking diplomat, the civilian representative (CIVREP). This greatly enhanced the status of civilians—and their advice—within the TFU and therefore allowed for a balanced approach that combined military, development, and diplomatic activities. This status further increased in March 2009 when command over the PRT also came to rest in the hands of the CIVREP—in practice, often exerted by the deputy CIVREP.

While the full consequences of this reorganization will be dealt with below, it should be mentioned here that the increased involvement of civilians enhanced the cooperation with NGOs and United Nations organizations. When the TFU first deployed there were only 6 NGOs in Uruzgan. By 2009, their number had increased to 30, and in 2010 some 50 NGOs were active in the province. These organizations focused on a whole range of activities varying from health services and education to rural development and veterinary assistance. Dutch diplomats and development workers in the field therefore managed to create circumstances in which NGOs were joining the reconstruction effort and thereby greatly increased the comprehensiveness of the TFU.

The third key adaptation witnessed during the TFU campaign was the gradual shift in emphasis from enemy-centric toward population-centric intelligence. Population-centric intelligence had been included from the planning phase of the mission, yet it was subordinated to classical military intelligence focusing on the opposing militants and the challenging terrain. Moreover, dissemination proved troublesome as the TFU’s military intelligence section remained focused on the Taliban despite TFU commanders stressing the need for a population-centric approach or making statements such as “it’s all about the Afghan people.” Even after a specialized tribal adviser was appointed at the end of 2006, this situation remained unchanged. This adviser either met stiff resistance when pointing at the importance of understanding local society or decided that sharing information with the military was of no use and could possibly endanger key informants.

The PRT, however, which held a traditional nonmilitary role, proved fertile soil for the knowledge provided by the tribal adviser. This led to the emergence of a renewed understanding of the conflict ecosystem, which conceptualized the situation in Uruzgan as multifaceted and consisting of multiple layers. Instead of the much-used Taliban-Government dichotomy, the conflict was gradually understood as evolving around political and economic power struggles involving local strongmen.

25 See also Kitzen, Rietjens, and Osinga, “Soft Power,” 176; and Kitzen, “Course of Co-option,” 443.
27 Kitzen, “Course of Co-option,” 404.
former mujahideen factions, various subtribes, and a mesh of solidarity networks interconnecting all these different strands.\footnote{Kitzen, “Course of Co-option,” 397–99. See also Colonel Nico Tak, “PRT Briefing,” (briefing, Amersfoort, Utrecht, Netherlands, September 4, 2009); TFU Development Cooperation Tribal Advisor, interview with the author, March 1, 2010; Colonel Gerard Koot (commander PRT-2), interview by the author, December 19, 2009; and Vleugels, interview by the author, December 7, 2009.}

This insight became firmly embedded when during TFU-2 the Taliban launched an all-out attack on the Chora district. Dutch forces managed to fend off the insurgents by first blocking further incursions with the crucial assistance of hastily mobilized local militias and the subsequent staging of a counterattack that drove the enemy from the district. Local allies, thus, were instrumental to the successful outcome of this battle. The effective rallying of their militias by the PRT was a direct result of the thriving cooperation between the tribal adviser and PRT staff, and clearly illustrated the benefits of a thorough understanding of the local social landscape.

The battle of Chora, therefore, created “awareness and an operational sense of urgency to adapt” and, therefore, might be considered the key “adaptive moment” of the TFU campaign.\footnote{Kitzen, Rietjens, and Osinga, “Soft Power,” 175. See also Frans Osinga and James A. Russell, “Conclusion: Military Adaptation and the War in Afghanistan,” in Military Adaptation, 293–94; and Kitzen, “Close Encounters,” 722.} Henceforth, the TFU would integrate tribal and political analyses in its military planning process, which enhanced the task force’s understanding of the local operational environment. The aforementioned influx of additional civilian expertise greatly accelerated this process of integration. In 2009, TFU-6 commander Brigadier General Tom Middendorp clearly illustrated the insights that followed from this approach when he stated “the Taliban [in Uruzgan] are less of a threat to the tottering structures of the Afghan state than feuding local tribes and predatory warlords. . . . This seems to have created lasting turmoil which is exploited by the Taliban.”\footnote{“Dutch Model”} TFU-7 CIVREP Michel Rentenaar even went a step further when he declared after the end of his tour in 2010 that not only the emphasis in intelligence had shifted from enemy-centric to population-centric, but that this also had evoked a similar shift in emphasis in operations.\footnote{Hans Ariëns, “Interview: Michel Rentenaar,” One World, April 4, 2010.}

This brings us to our fourth and final key adaptation, the shift in operations from almost exclusively kinetic to a more balanced approach emphasising nonkinetic methods.\footnote{On the adaptations in the field of operations, see Kitzen, Rietjens, and Osinga, “Soft Power,” 176–81.} Despite the fabled claims of a nonviolent Dutch approach, the use of force had dominated TFU operations from the beginning of the mission. Of course, the local security situation rendered frequent kinetic confrontations with the Taliban unavoidable. Yet, the absolute emphasis on kinetic operations was mainly the result of the traditional military skills that had been imprinted on the soldiers’ minds. Predeployment training initially neither reflected the complicated nature of the mission, nor the intricacies of the operational
environment in which it was conducted. This gradually changed when
the insights from subsequent TFU rotations were incorporated in the
work-up program and more attention was given to cultural awareness
and nonkinetic tasks, such as key leader engagements. Moreover, the
final exercise that brought together the various subunits of a TFU
rotation (called Uruzgan Integration) became increasingly realistic, as it
was supervised by officers who had actually served in Uruzgan.

During the whole four-year period of the TFU mission, patrols
remained the main modus operandi for delivering effects. Typically, an
infantry platoon augmented with a PRT mission team and other elements
(including enablers, such as forward air controllers and explosive
ordnance disposal engineers) would be tasked for multiday missions, in
which they would spend the night at patrol bases or temporary overnight
locations. Frequently encountering firefights, as well as the increasing
threat of improvised explosive devices, these patrols were forced to
take a robust stance. Force protection was bolstered by acquiring mine-
resistant Bushmaster vehicles and relying on air support.

While such patrols took place among the local populace, their
primary mission typically concerned disrupting Taliban activities,
with PRT affairs, gathering of information from the people, and
psychological operations as secondary tasks.33 This gradually changed
as more population-centric intelligence became available, and the
awareness arose that this conflict was all about Uruzgan’s highly
fragmented social landscape. From 2007 (after the battle of Chora),
patrols were increasingly dispatched to enable PRT activities aimed at
obtaining influence over various communities and connecting these
people to the provincial government. Population-centric patrols came to
dominate TFU operations, a development which was partly accelerated
by the influx of additional civilian advisers who provided much-needed
expertise for delivering development aid and assisting local authorities.
Thus, patrols became the main platform for nonkinetic engagement
which greatly enhanced the TFU’s influence over the local population.

With regard to large-scale operations, a similar shift can be
observed. Whereas the TFU initially had lacked the means for holding
the areas it had cleared from Taliban presence, this changed at the end
of 2008 when Afghan security forces became available in sufficient
numbers. From then on, operations could be planned with the aim of
establishing control over local communities in the target area. This was
first pioneered during Operation Bor Barakai in October 2008, when
at the end of the operation, a patrol base was constructed in order to
consolidate the results. Yet, this proved unsuccessful as the base was
located at a hilltop on the outer boundary of the target valley. Operation
Tura Ghar in January 2009 proved more successful in applying the new
approach as it not only established a patrol base in the middle of the

33 See for instance, Lieutenant Colonel Andy van Dijk, “Personal Diary” (unpublished personal
record, 2007, private collection); and Captain Gijs-Jan Schüssler, “Experiences Platoon Commander
TF-7 in Uruzgan” (presentation, 13 Mechanized Brigade Counterinsurgency Seminar, Breda,
Netherlands, September 3, 2008).
troublesome Baluchi Valley, but also included shaping operations, such as establishing “below the radar” contacts with key tribal leaders (of whom some resided in Quetta, Pakistan). Thus, large-scale operations followed the pattern of patrols and increasingly became focused on delivering nonkinetic effects and thereby also contributed to the increase of TFU influence in the province.

In summary, it can be concluded that four key adaptations that occurred in the fields of strategy, organization, intelligence, and operations contributed to an evolutionary process that turned the TFU from a predominantly enemy-centric, kinetic military force into a capable counterinsurgency and stabilization force that emphasized nonkinetic methods for influencing the local population and connecting these people to the Afghan authorities. The key lesson to be learned from the Afghanistan War, therefore, concerns the ability to adopt a population-centric approach—when necessary—from the onset of a campaign.

It should also be mentioned that this approach should be enhanced through logical and lucid strategic guidelines provided by policymakers at the political level. In case of the TFU, however, such clear guidance was lacking. Key adaptations during the Dutch mission were mainly a consequence of bottom-up initiatives by either the TFU staff or its subunits. Moreover, while Dutch soldiers showed a remarkable ability to adapt, the absence of clear strategic guidance and vision from The Hague would haunt the TFU after the eighth and final rotation redeployed.

Due to the lack of high-level coordination with American and Australian successors, the results of the Dutch mission were squandered within four months as the new Combined Team Uruzgan opted for another approach to local affairs which led to the crumbling of the so carefully crafted tribal balance. Future missions, therefore, should be deployed with clear political guidelines based on a thorough understanding of the local situation and the conflict as well as the international operational environment in which troops are deployed. Only then might a contribution by the relatively small Dutch military provide an underpinning for long-term stability. Doing so, however, first requires the military to learn the lessons from Uruzgan and be prepared to adopt a population-centric approach whenever necessary. Therefore, it is important to discuss the extent to which the lessons from the Uruzgan campaign have been institutionalized within the Dutch armed forces.

**Lessons Learned?**

Paradoxically the numerical weakness of the Dutch military is both a strength and a weakness. Thanks to its small size, it possesses the ability to learn quickly from operational experiences through informal information sharing, especially within the tight community of the officer corps. During the TFU mission, this networked learning allowed for the rapid dissemination of new insights from the field. Best practices

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34 Kitzen, “Course of Co-option,” 507.
as well as information on the local situation freely flowed through the organization. When the mission proceeded, this process was further stimulated by facilitating the transfer of knowledge between rotations during predeployment training. Yet, this informal character of learning during actual operations comes at the expense of institutional learning, which is notoriously weak within the Dutch armed forces.

As early as February 2008, an attempt was made to capture the insights from the field when a draft pamphlet entitled *Observations on Operations in Afghanistan* emerged.\(^{35}\) This report was prepared by army officers who had served in the first two TFU rotations and in the staff of Regional Command South. These key officers had meticulously recorded their observations on new experiences at the operational, tactical, and technical level. Most importantly, the bulletin emphasized the need to adapt the mindset from enemy-centric kinetic operations to nonkinetic population-centric counterinsurgency warfare. However, for no obvious reasons, this carefully prepared bulletin was never officially disseminated within the armed forces.\(^{36}\) The traditional informal learning process, yet, guaranteed the draft paper was distributed among future TFU rotations and informed predeployment training. The insights of the pamphlet were also to be incorporated into a new army doctrine. Nevertheless, when this doctrine was published in 2009, it was hard to find any trace of the lessons from the field as even the term counterinsurgency was hardly mentioned.\(^{37}\)

In 2010, with the end of the TFU mission in sight, a new impulse was given to the institutionalization of lessons from Afghanistan. An official report was published on the performance of Dutch officers and noncommissioned officers in an operational environment characterized by joint, combined, and interagency operations. Recommendations included a better integration of civilian expertise and additional training in counterinsurgency to foster a population-centric mindset.\(^{38}\) These recommendations were echoed in the official governmental evaluation of the TFU mission that appeared in 2011.\(^{39}\) The armed forces themselves had started to collect lessons identified and best practices in order to kick-start the institutional learning process. The army gathered the combined

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\(^{35}\) Pieter Soldaat and Dirk Jan Broks, “Concept Informatiebulletin 08/01, Observaties over Operaties in Afghanistan” [Concept information bulletin 08/01: observations on operations in Afghanistan], (draft doctrinal pamphlet, Opleidings- en Trainingscentrum Operatiën, Amersfoort, Utrecht, Netherlands, 2008).

\(^{36}\) Eventually the authors took the initiative to publish the bulletin as two articles in the professional military magazine *Militaire Spectator* in mid-2009. See Pieter Soldaat et al., “Observaties rond operaties in Afghanistan (I)” [Observations concerning operations in Afghanistan I], *Militaire Spectator* 178, no. 5 (2009); and Pieter Soldaat et al., “Observaties rond operaties in Afghanistan (II)” [Observations concerning operations in Afghanistan II], *Militaire Spectator* 178, no. 6 (2009).


\(^{38}\) Commandant der Strijdkrachten, *Van Eerdivisie naar Europees Voetbal* [From premier league to European competition] (The Hague: Defensiestaf, 2010).

insights from all TFU commanders and invited soldiers to submit their experiences as well. For this purpose, 21 committees were established to process these contributions and feed them into the learning process.

Furthermore, the defense staff published an extensive report on lessons identified that were to be preserved for future operations. Ultimately, insights from Afghanistan echoed in the 2014 army doctrine, which elaborates on stabilization operations, the comprehensive approach, and nonkinetic tasks. The importance of a population-centric mindset is even stressed in the preface which concludes with the statement “operations with and amongst people: the strength of the Royal Netherlands Army.” Moreover, by this time the Dutch military had formally adopted NATO’s new Allied Joint Publication-3.4.4 *Counterinsurgency* as its official doctrine for counterinsurgency operations.

Thus, it seems the Dutch armed forces had finally succeeded in capturing and codifying lessons from Afghanistan. Yet, lessons have only been learned when they are also incorporated by the very troops that should bring them into practice during new operations. A 2015 study revealed this was not the case; knowledge on counterinsurgency and stabilization had virtually evaporated (even in the case of experienced officers) or was completely absent, and nonkinetic tasks were rarely practiced. Training and exercises were almost exclusively enemy-centric and focused on conventional, kinetic military tasks. The traditional, informal character of learning in the Dutch military had prevented the ideas and concepts of the new doctrines to feed back into the units that had initially observed these lessons in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the renewed dominance of enemy-centric thinking and large-scale, kinetic operations was stimulated by the military’s top brass. This, of course, was augmented by the reemergence of the Russian threat. As of yet, the Dutch military again is fully focused on conventional battle.

In the end, therefore, the conclusion has to be drawn that while a lot has been learned in the field in Afghanistan and an attempt has been made to institutionalize these lessons, they cannot be considered learned. At the moment, the Dutch armed forces are caught in a familiar pattern: the pendulum has fully swung back to enemy-centric thinking and large-scale kinetic operations, which renders population-centric concepts and nonkinetic tasks to perceived inferior importance. While this has occurred more often in Western military history, our times

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42 Accepting NATO doctrine as national doctrine has not been without critique. While the Dutch were leading the writing of Allied Joint Publication-3.4.4, this doctrine was clearly the result of a precarious process of international consensus, and therefore, it is not as strong as the American FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* or the Ministry of Defense, *Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution*, Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40 (Shrivenham: Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Center, 2009). Although an improved version was published in 2016, the doctrine is still inferior to other state-of-the-art manuals.
require the urgent breaching of this dichotomous pattern of enemy-centric and population-centric warfare.\textsuperscript{44}

Modern warfare typically requires the ability to deal with hybrid threats (state and nonstate alike) through kinetic as well as nonkinetic actions. Current instability in Africa and the Middle East might lead to new interventions in order to foster stability. The Dutch military is exemplary in this regard as it is predominantly training for high-end conventional warfare, but all actual deployments concern either stabilization or counterinsurgency-like missions. Dutch soldiers are still active in Afghanistan, and in Iraq. The time has come to learn the lessons from the Afghan Campaign and imprint the population-centric mindset in the military toolbox so it can be utilized whenever necessary.

\textsuperscript{44} See also Martijn Kitzen, “Conventional and Unconventional War Are Not Opposites,” War Room, March 28, 2019.
ABSTRACT: This article explains the role combat in Afghanistan played on the evolution of the French Army. With decades of relative peace since the Algerian War, French soldiers began their service in Afghanistan with little experience and minimal materiel, but quickly paid the price for developing into a combat-ready force that quickly responded when terrorist activity increased in Mali shortly after the Afghanistan involvement.

The French Army experience in Afghanistan is synonymous with the return of high-intensity fighting in the context of allied coalitions. Between 2001 and 2014, some 70,000 soldiers were deployed, creating the first generation of combat-proven soldiers after the Algerian War. Within 10 years, missions evolved toward more violent fighting. Between 2002 and 2006, troops stayed in Kabul to stabilize the capital. Between 2007 and 2009, the force rediscovered counterinsurgency and counterrebellion. It was a time of intense training and adaptations. Between 2009 and 2012, France was fully engaged in the war against the Taliban. President Nicolas Sarkozy (2007–12) decided to concentrate military assets in the Sarobi district and the Kapisa province, and French Task Force La Fayette was created.

Why did France decide to intensify its involvement in Afghanistan? The major political and diplomatic goal was to make sure France would keep its influence in the world as a member of the United Nations Security Council. Keeping its defense capabilities seemed absolutely essential. According to Sarkozy, France needed to play a more important role within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). That meant paying in blood together with the French allies in Afghanistan.

In the heart of the summer of 2011, the revised strategy changed the nature of French involvement in the conflict. The responsibility for counterinsurgency operations was gradually transferred to the Afghan National Army (ANA), and French forces left Afghanistan on December 31, 2014, enriched by an intense and meaningful combat experience.

Involvement of the French Army

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the first French naval, ground, and air units were sent to Afghanistan in accordance with Article 5 of NATO’s founding treaty providing for collective defense. Operation Heracles was the name given to the French contribution to the Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan (OEF). After the fall...
of the Taliban and the Bonn Agreement was signed, France joined the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) as part of Operation Pamir. The Afghan army training and its mentoring were part of Operation Epidote. French special forces contributions to OEF, called Task Group Ares, were deployed in the Kandahar province. Forces were withdrawn in December 2006. Instructors were provided for the Afghan commando school between 2007 and 2011. After two French journalists were kidnapped and Task Force Lafayette was created, the Jehol unit of the French special forces went back to Afghanistan until the fighting forces withdrew. Within 12 years, 20,000 Afghan soldiers were trained by French instructors thanks to Operation Epidote.

Between 2002 and 2006, the French battalion engaged in Operation Pamir was based at two forward operations bases, Cazeilles and Kersauron, in Kabul. During those four years, insecurity grew steadily as the Taliban’s insurrection was reinforced. Kabul quickly became an unsafe zone. Thus, the French Army was given the mission to secure the city and its surroundings, focusing on Kabul airport, the north region of the city, the police districts 11 and 15, as well as the Shomali plain.  

At the time, French politicians did not allow the French Army to join full combat around Kabul. Moreover, before the troops were deployed, combined arms training in France was not particularly emphasized. In the early years of French involvement in the Afghan conflict, some observers saw the triumph of the French reach, a kind of glorified legacy of the colonial age, considering the relative safety of its area of responsibility. It was an illusion. The French Army fought very difficult battles from its forward operating bases in the provinces of Sarobi and Kapisa. Until then, the troops sent to Kabul had been assigned to different missions.

The years 2006–7 were a real turning point in the French involvement in the country. In the summer of 2006, the Region Command Capital was created under NATO’s command. The Sarobi district was integrated into that new territorial division as a Coalition Joint Operational Area (CJOA). As a result, each nation in charge of the coalition command sent a combined unit to Forward Operating Base Tora to control access to Kabul. As a consequence, French soldiers commanding the combined battalion wondered whether it would be appropriate to rapidly change, or reverse, the style of the action being undertaken. Did the level of their equipment and their training enable them to lead high-intensity fighting against the Taliban? An answer was clearly given by President Jacques Chirac in October 2006, when he refused to send reinforcements to assist Canadian troops trapped in the Helmand province.

From 2007, the French Army became an essential actor of the international coalition. France was the fourth largest contributor after the United States, Great Britain, and Germany. Little by little, France shifted from a careful attitude to fully contributing to the war against

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terrorism and to the counterinsurgency strategy against the Taliban’s insurrection in the Region Command East area. In the spring of 2007, French soldiers participated in the first operational mentoring and liaison team unit. Mentors accompanied their Afghan kandak (battalion) on missions to finalize their combat training and to provide them with close support.

In fact, French participation took a different form when Nicolas Sarkozy was elected in May 2007. During 2008 and 2009, the doctrinal adaptation process addressing the issue of guerilla warfare accelerated. During the Bucharest Summit (April 2–4, 2008), Sarkozy announced the summer deployment of a new combined battalion (700 soldiers) in Kapisa. France took charge of two strategic areas northeast of Kabul that were along a major supply route and had been longstanding zones of Taliban resistance—Sarobi district and the Kapisa province.

A deadly ambush in the Uzbin valley on August 18, 2008, that killed 10 soldiers prompted the French Army’s to increase the number of radio-frequency jammers and improve the quality of individual protective equipment. Training for deployments was increased from four to six months and included more guidance on countering improvised explosive devices (IEDs). In January 2009, a counterrebellion doctrine was published by the Employment Doctrine Center. This document underscored the basics of counterrebellion fighting. Afterward, the military commanders in Kapisa and Sarobi launched a series of tactical experiments. In order to separate the local population from the Taliban, French colonels tried several different tactics such as “Cloche à fromage” with Colonel Nicolas le Nen, “counterreaction” with Colonel Francis Chanson, and “Mikado theory” with Colonel Benoit Durieux. All these tactics announced, in a way, the first campaign plan of Task Force Lafayette that was created on November 1, 2009.

As French military troops gathered in Kapisa and Sarobi, the French Army commitment in Afghanistan moved from the fifth phase, counterinsurgency, to retreat (2009–12). The tactical situation became more complex after two French journalists were captured on December 30, 2009. The prisoners were kept in the Alasay valley, which prevented the French Army from engaging in combat operations in the Taliban’s sanctuary zone. Before releasing the journalists on June 29, 2011, Taliban fighters could negotiate for truces or resume fighting on their own terms.

The French brigade’s first campaign plan mainly focused on “winning the hearts and minds” of the population. Forward operational bases spread gradually over the area under French command in order to control and to pacify the territory. Military engineers worked very efficiently and successfully in the context of Operation Synapse (March 1–7, 2010) to build a combat outpost on the 46th parallel in the Gwan valley. Operation Promising Star (September 26, 2010–October 5, 2010) enabled the French to establish a new advanced outpost, the Sherkhel combat outpost, aimed at controlling Vermont, a main supply route facing the entrance to the Bedraou valley.
The NATO conference in Lisbon (November 19–20, 2010) marked a clear and strategic turning point. As a matter of fact, when the Western forces set the deadline for the troops to withdrawal by the end of 2014, they basically gave the rebels a timetable. It unofficially spelled the end for counterinsurgency operations and little by little, the goals of the campaign plan for Task Force Lafayette changed. The new objective became the weakening of the insurgency forces so the ANA could then take command of the remaining operations. The main supply road had to stay open too.

The next two commitments of French troops turned out to be much more aggressive. The nomadic strategy launched by Colonel Bruno Heluin in the winter of 2010 to 2011 to break the Jangali stranglehold was a real success. After December 2010, French troops embarked on long-term operations. The French soldiers set up camp on the spot and in local houses, cordonning off vast areas and conducting systematic searches. The results were more than encouraging: weapon and ammunition caches, which were vital for the Taliban, were found one by one. The Taliban, at that point, asked for a much-needed truce to negotiate the release of the kidnapped French journalists, which gave them the opportunity to reorganize.

Operation Storm Lightning, which coincided with renewed fighting, enabled the French to secure Vermont and Jangali, much to the delight of their American allies. In the meantime, French troops went on crisscrossing the area between Kapisa and Sarobi, creating new combat and observation posts in the green zone. The fourth commitment of Task Force Lafayette corresponded to the political and military disruption concerning the nature of the battles the army had to wage in Afghanistan. To keep the positions won during the winter campaign, heavy fighting was necessary and the whole situation was harder since American troops had left Kunar. Within three months, one battle group recorded a toll of 8 dead soldiers and 30 injured men, another suffered 4 fatalities. After an operational break during the summer, operations resumed until September, when Lieutenant Valéry Tholy of the 17th Parachute Engineers Regiment was killed. After that, French forces never returned to the valleys.

Counterinsurgency operations were gradually transferred to the ANA: concepts of “ANA first,” “ANA led,” and finally “ANA only.” The ANA was given sole charge of the fighting, the first step to the French withdrawal. The election of François Hollande as France’s new president sped up this process, which had been endorsed during the Chicago Summit (May 20–21, 2012). Task Force Lafayette was disbanded on November 25, 2012, after the responsibility for Kapisa and Sarobi was transferred to the Afghan forces. The last phase of the

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French withdrawal (2012–14) consisted of the logistics transfer, which was complex and risky.

**French Strategies**

From a strategic point of view, the three French presidents during the period of France’s involvement in Afghanistan personified three very different attitudes. Chirac favored sending only a few troops in the field and relying on special forces to fulfill his alliance with the United States in Afghanistan. Sarkozy, supported by General Jean-Louis Georgelin, army chief of staff (2006–10), opted for an increase of up to 4,000 more soldiers in the field during 2011. Moreover, he decided to concentrate military assets in Kapisa and Sarobi. After the battle of Mobayan on September 7, 2011, during which Tholy was killed, French troops remained stationed in their forward operating base. After the fratricide incidents during the winter of 2011–12, Sarkozy decided to speed up the withdrawal of French troops. Hollande gave deadlines for the French combat troops to withdraw by December 31, 2012, and the remaining French soldiers to leave Kabul by December 31, 2014.

Why did France decide to intensify its involvement in Afghanistan during 2007? As stated, the major political and diplomatic goal was to make sure France would keep its global influence as a member of the UN Security Council. Whatever battle plans are made to win, or not to lose, they have to yield before political decisions that might pursue other objectives, other priorities, and other goals. National policies can always impose new decisions and change battle plans.

This issue was worsened by the fact that the Taliban used a strategy designed to influence Western public opinion to force foreign forces to withdraw. This weak spot was particularly well identified by France’s opponents. When the Taliban hit France hard on the eve of the French national day on July 13, 2011, it managed to deal a tremendous blow to French resolve—not the resolve of the troops in the field, of course—but the resolve of the politicians who happened to have another agenda.

The French withdrawal also questioned the coalition’s global strategy and its ability to rely on realistic, concrete political goals which needed to be limited in time. Adding up tactical successes is not synonymous with complete victory. The French Army did not win in Algeria with its countersubversive strategy. Neither did the new counterinsurrection process in 2007 enable France to enjoy an overwhelming victory in Afghanistan. That conflict emphasized the helplessness of modern democracies when confronted with irregular warfare in the 21st century. These lessons are yet to be learned.

**Transforming the French Army**

The French Army’s involvement in Afghanistan was accompanied by a deep transformation of its capacities. At that time, this army was a

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young professional one. It improved its performances in Afghanistan, in terms of leading a counterinsurgency strategy, making a quick, doctrinal adaptation process, adopting appropriate organization with a combined joint coalition in the battlefield, facing fire experience, maintenance (soldiers, materials), fast procurement process for new equipment, training and mentoring a foreign national army, counter-IED processes, combat first aid, live-fire combat training, training process in general, individual and collective physical preparedness for a challenging military operation, and a “way back home” process for soldiers.

The French Army equipment was renewed and extensively proven under combat conditions—for example: individual equipment for the soldiers (helmets, elbow supports, knee braces, bulletproof vests, combat kits, digital transmissions, and Fantassin à Equipements et Liaisons Intégrés [FELIN] future infantry soldier system equipment), the new French air force and naval air force combat aircraft (Dassault Rafale and Rafale M update for the navy), the deployment of the French carrier battle group (Charles de Gaulle carrier), precision artillery pieces (CAESAR 155-mm howitzers installed on 6x6 truck chassis), the Tiger multirole helicopter, vehicles such as the Véhicule Blindé de Combat d’Infanterie [VBCI] armored infantry combat vehicle with two turret-operated 30mm cannons, unarmed drones, and route clearance equipment and search unit.

The French Army had not participated in such a large allied military operation since the Persian Gulf War (1990–91), but underwent drastic change in Afghanistan. A fast procurement process for new equipment allowed the French Army to fill its capacity gaps. From 2008 to 2013, a budget of €580 million was dedicated to this capability at the risk of creating isolated groups of equipment difficult to maintain in complete operational condition.

The French Army had thus shown its value to its allies: faced with a combative, unpredictable, and determined adversary, it rediscovered the culture and the fundamentals of combat. Psychological operations were back in the French Army doctrine. Colonel Roger Trinquier had practiced “hearts and mind” theory, a well-known part of the French countersubversive strategy, during the Algerian War. On the terrain, the balance of this doctrine was mixed. The competition between two radio stations supported by the French Army illustrated this impasse. Sarobi radio sought to “free hearts and minds” by broadcasting poems and newscasts written by local villagers and OMID radio only broadcast the French brigade’s messages. The impact of these two radio stations on people’s perceptions was limited. The French commitment in Afghanistan promoted joint cooperation from the top to the bottom of the alliance, from general to lieutenant, which was an asset for France’s next commitment in Sahel.

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Train as You Fight and Fight as You Train

After the deadly ambush in the Uzbin valley, the French Army established a streamlined, systematized, and hardened training cycle for troops going to Afghanistan. Soldiers spent a year training for, and fighting in, Afghanistan. The training consisted of a two-month individual training phase and a three-month collective training phase. The most important and useful exercises in this training included survivability in combat, joint counter-IED process, live-fire exercises, operational English, physical conditioning, and improving attitudes and coordination in combat situations.

In 2009, the French Army had created an operational instruction unit detachment that attached to the 1st African Armored Infantry Regiment in Canjuers. They bought an entire forward operating base specifically for instructional use. Soldiers lived and behaved as if they were in Afghanistan. This idea matched perfectly with the famous saying: “Train as your fight, fight as your train.” Soldiers on the evaluation team had recently returned from Afghanistan and shared the lessons they had learned with the soldiers preparing to deploy. The French Army assessed each unit to confirm it was qualified to perform specific combat-related tasks. After arriving in Afghanistan, the unit had to perform an ISAF validation course and a counter-IED trail.

While training in France for high-intensity fighting, a commander had a lot of available firepower—jets, tanks, artillery, missiles, drones, combat helicopters, machine guns, and mortars. Naturally, temptations to use this firepower when troops were in contact with the Taliban developed. In counterinsurgency situations, however, this option was not always appropriate. Winning hearts and minds meant not killing them, or destroying their goods, or damaging cultivated fields. The French soldiers were ready for high-intensity fighting, but not necessarily for complex counterinsurgency operations. The devil is in the details. Then Colonel Benoit Durieux caused the bewilderment of his legionnaires when he chose once or twice to avoid fighting with the Taliban to gain the support of the population of Sarobi in 2009. In late November 2010, this bewilderment was reduced when the road map of Task Force Lafayette changed. After that, looking for and destroying the Taliban and keeping the main supply road open, were the French Army’s main goals.

The commitment of the French Army in Afghanistan revealed deficiencies in its equipment and its state of modernization. The army deployed its most modern equipment in Afghanistan to the detriment of the units remaining in the homeland. In France, a quick reaction force that was ready to respond to international crises and soldiers in training had to make do with used equipment. There was a shortage of night scopes, machine guns, modern bulletproof vests, and modern armored combat vehicles. Each brigade in France was forced to give a portion of its own modern equipment to Task Force Lafayette in Afghanistan. In January 2013, during Operation Serval, the French Army started the war against terrorists in Mali with used equipment. Fortunately, the French
Army was still effective. Step-by-step, units were equipped with modern weapons as the withdrawal from Afghanistan continued.

**The Return of the Counterguerilla Warfare**

French commanders rediscovered the importance of surprise and taking the initiative when facing an enemy that operated among the people and knew the terrain perfectly. The Taliban used hugging tactics to neutralize close air support opportunities, which caused heavy population losses. That is why movement and firepower were essentials to defeat an opponent accustomed to infantry combat. Fire discipline, which is acquired through long training and combat experience, was an important key for success. Any effective targeted strike required positive identification of the enemy while it was firing. Massive retaliation would only cause a high human casualty toll. The action of the French foreign legion’s 2nd Foreign Parachute Regiment was exemplary in Afghanistan as part of Task Force Altar in 2010.

The nature of combat also pointed out the importance of heavy weapons in infantry units and in combat support units to face counterguerilla warfare. French soldiers had to deal with stress. When the troops were in contact, the battle could last many hours. In contrast to the Indochina or Algerian Wars, the night belonged to the French soldiers not the Taliban. This benefit came from soldiers’ night vision scopes and observation capabilities delivered by Persistent Ground Surveillance Systems. French soldiers tracked Taliban logistic movement with multiple cameras. The Taliban avoided night combat because they could not take advantage of their surveillance system based on the local population. Mountain troops were also important because of the geography of the country and of the fighting occurring during very cold winters and very hot summers. Helicopters once again proved their importance in counterguerilla warfare. But French resources were no longer those of the Algerian War. The French helicopter battalion spent 7 percent of its operational flight time on airmobile operations, 49 percent of this time on tactical transport and 30 percent on VIP transport. To plan major operations, Task Force Lafayette had to request support from coalition helicopters such as the CH-47 Chinook.

**Military Operations with Political Constraints**

Throughout France’s involvement in Afghanistan, its army and operational planning faced strong political constraints. Sarkozy limited the French commitment to 3,500 troops in 2008, without distinguishing between combat personnel and support. In 2011, the total number of military personnel reached 4,421. This political limit weighed heavily upon the conduct of French military operations. This limit forced high operational tempo, often putting soldiers at risk. It was sometimes difficult to find sufficient staff to carry out operations.

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The French brigade was conducting its main actions in specific areas, while other areas remained in the hands of the Taliban. Global action was impossible. With the building of combat outposts all along the main supply road, many soldiers were posted to watch “the green zone.” The French brigade lost its tactical maneuver capability. During the summer of 2011, the US Army provided a route clearance package detachment to the French battle group for a few months to ensure roads were not mined with IEDs.

Finally, six-month commitments were insufficient to conduct effective counterinsurgency operations. It was difficult to connect with people and to build trust. French soldiers were seen as occupation troops waging war on villages. We can say Georgelin won his bet. After the Afghanistan commitment, the French Army was no longer a vassal army in the NATO organization. It was able to conduct complex operations alone, including first entry in conflict zones. The price paid by the French Army was high: 89 dead, 700 wounded, and many soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Lessons Learned

The French Army learned a lot in Afghanistan. Confronted with an adversary who was accustomed to his country, to using guerilla warfare, and to adapting swiftly, the French Army rediscovered counterrebellion techniques and doctrine. According to Professor Jean-Charles Jauffret: “Almost every French infantry military unit took part in the Afghanistan campaign, being sent overseas between one and three times each, namely a total of a bit more than 60,000 soldiers.” French soldiers contributed in the allied fight against Taliban, paying in blood together with their allies. The French Army took on a new stature with Afghanistan involvement amongst its allies too. We can say benefits from this war were probably reaped in Mali. At that time, the French Army was a formidable weapon developing an accurate fighting experience.

But the combat experience seems now to disappear. Since 2014, many war veterans have left the French Army. The men and women who had deployed to Afghanistan quit the institution. In a French engineer company deployed in Sarobi in 2011, for example, 15 percent of veterans left the unit less than a year later. Meanwhile, funding remains low. Equipment is difficult to maintain in complete operational condition. Important Buffalo mine protected clearance vehicles and mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles are being lost. Spare parts are missing and no longer available in the US supply chain. Hence, the French Army must once again renew its combat equipment. Meanwhile, soldiers have less time to train. They are involved in intense foreign deployments and homeland security missions. Combined arms training is difficult to plan. The lessons learned in Afghanistan are not guaranteed. The future remains uncertain.

One of the richest collections at the Army Heritage and Education Center is that of Matthew B. Ridgway, who served with distinction in World War II as a division and corps commander, in Korea as an army and theater commander, and eventually as chief of staff of the Army. He was in the habit of writing a memorandum for his personal diary every day describing key events. Furnished here are excerpts from his war diary during the Battle of the Bulge, when he commanded the XVIIIth Airborne Corps. Events were moving so fast for him that he had to consolidate his entries for the first few days. But he still took time to create longer entries for key decisions. His account provides a rich picture of the decisions a senior leader may face in large-scale combat operations.

Ridgway rarely gets proper credit for his role in the Bulge. As described in his diary, his corps, in the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force strategic reserve in the United Kingdom, was alerted on December 17, 1944, for movement to the continent. He soon detached his 101st Airborne Division to VIIIth Corps to defend Bastogne, while retaining the 82nd Airborne Division, commanded by MG James M. Gavin, to bolster the defense of the north shoulder of the enemy penetration under control of First US Army. He was also eventually given command of all (or elements) of the 30th and 84th Infantry Divisions and three armored divisions, along with the shattered remnants of the 106th Infantry Division, a total force more the size of an army than a corps.

One of Ridgway’s key early decisions was to abandon, finally, the key town of St. Vith, heroically defended by the 7th Armored Division. That thorn in the German side had significantly slowed their advance and helped channel their drive west instead of north. Ridgway included in his diary letters from BG Robert “Bob” Hasbrouck, commander of the 7th, and records of conversations with MG William Kean, chief of staff of First Army. Ridgway wrestled with many problems. He had to quickly absorb the new units into his corps and create relationships with their commanders. He had to figure out what to do with MG Alan Jones, who had two of his regiments surrender and had only parts of his 106th division left, but technically outranked Hasbrouck in St. Vith. (Ridgway eventually moved Jones up to be his deputy.) As the battle over the town continued, there was a major reorganization of Allied forces, as Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery of the 21st Army Group took overall command of all forces on the north side of the Bulge, another new
personality for Ridgway to deal with. And German pressure on the key bottleneck increased. Hasbrouck’s letters describe his situation clearly, and Ridgway’s recounting of his conversation with Kean show how the corps commander viewed his options and responsibilities for the troops in the town. He also considered the ramifications of heavy bombing of Belgian towns through cloud cover to possibly support St. Vith, an option deemed unacceptable at the time. Ridgway had to balance the needs of the defense with the welfare of the soldiers involved. When withdrawal was finally authorized, it was a near-run thing, with many casualties, among retreating infantry of BG Bruce Clarke’s combat command especially. Hasbrouck and Clarke thought Ridgway should have authorized the withdrawal sooner. But most of the division was saved, and resistance against the German advance was maintained.
Notified to move early on December 18, 1944, Ridgway initially deployed to Bastogne along with his 101st Airborne. Ordered to reorganize his corps and report to First US Army Headquarters (FUSA HQ) for orders, he had to maneuver around German units to escape. By the time he arrived at FUSA HQ, he had already developed a plan of action for his new command.
Called to FUSA HQ on the morning of December 20, 1944, Ridgway received new orders and new units. He arranged a face-to-face meeting with all his division commanders that afternoon, and issued oral instructions for the next 24 hours of operations.
Ridgway’s initial concept of his corps operation.
On December 21, 1944, Ridgway was faced with the crisis at St. Vith, the key position restricting the German advance in the early part of the battle. BG Hasbrouck’s letter is clear describing the situation of his 7th Armored Division, as well as that of other units there. Particularly vexing is what to do with MG Alan Jones, of the shattered 106th Division.
force formed of remnants of the 14th Cavalry Group.

The 14th Cavalry Group was attached to me on Monday afternoon, 18 December and I have had it reorganized into a reduced strength squadron and gave it twenty-four hours rest. It is now being used in various Task Forces to protect my south flank but its combat value is uncertain. I am supplying them. We have various attachments of units, some legal and some we just found and appropriated.

The 106th Division, as nearly as I can find out, comprises one BCT and some service troops. Two of its regiments were surrounded southeast of SCHONBERG (952888) and we were not able to rescue them. Some other elements are somewhere west of the L'OURTHE River. However, Major General Allan Jones, the Commanding General and his Division Headquarters are present in VIKLEALM (703890) with my Tactical Headquarters. He is a Major General, I am a Brigadier so it is probably not legal to attach him to me. Possibly Army didn't realize he and his Headquarters are present. I most definitely do not want to be attached to him and suggest he be directed to cooperate with me in holding our present positions which I know he will do. We have been getting along on that basis alright.

/s/ R. W. HASBROUCK
Brigadier General, USA
Commanding

P.S. Please assist us in getting all the air support possible. We have had none.

I have ordered a radio car to report to your Headquarters in order that we may have communication.

The only maps we have are 1/100,000. Your overlays do not fit them. Please supply us with 1/50,000 maps if possible.

We have no air photography of this area. It would help tremendously if any are available.

/s/s RWH

COPY

COPY
Map by Pete McPhail
RECORD OF GEN. RIDGWAY’S SIDE OF CONVERSATION WITH GEN. MEAN.

328350 December 1944.

Here’s my size-up of this thing. This threat in the south, which has not yet developed, will come on shortly after daylight, in conjunction with powerful thrusts such as succeeded in driving Bob out of St. VITH. I seriously doubt his ability and that of his teammates to hold. I have nothing to put out which can stop an attack of that strength, the 2d SS Panzer. I’ve got three suggestions. I have talked to my Air Officer, and I propose, if we can get the air support, to put mediums on that bivouac area, bombing through clouds if necessary, at 0700, and also on the road from GUIY to LIMEHLE, and finally the town of St. VITH. Certain destruction, certain delay, certain disorganization will be as much as can be done. That, plus a little long-range artillery fire, shooting from the. Maybe they have not the range in those areas, but it is all I can put out. I doubt if that’s going to be sufficient to save the people from surrendering way out beyond. I would like to authorize their withdrawal back to the 82d area tonight. I think it can be made in orderly fashion. I would like to get air support on the division bivouac area reported by the prisoner-of-war in any event. What do you think of that proposal?

I don’t feel the threat from the north has direct pressure on him. The dangerous threat is of the entire division in the south coming around the west flank. Even with his teammates, all he can put in are a few reconnaissance troops, if direct pressure is maintained from the north.

That hit him the day before yesterday. They pounded him and side-slip to the southwest, feeling for a soft spot which they found and went through the opening. They didn’t waste any time fooling with him. What I propose to do is this. I’ve got my Deputy Chief who is to find out Bob’s attitude, and authorize coordinated withdrawal with his teammate if, in his opinion, it is necessary. I was with him until about 1630 this afternoon. There was no information at the time I left him. He told me everything was all right.

He loses that vital road net, but I don’t see it does otherwise; I don’t know the ground out there.

One other possibility, which likewise entails possible sacrifices, is that in connection with this bombing through the clouds, if we could get it, would be to have that force out and attack in a general southwestward direction, so as to strike where the outfit ought to be at that time, southwest of the reported bivouac area. Follow in direct offensive action in connection with the air thing. Probably lose it.
After assessing the options in St. Vith, Ridgway called the chief of staff of FUSA. This memorandum presents Ridgway’s view of that conversation. His description of the critical situation and plea for air support included a discussion of the strategic implications of heavy bombing of Belgian towns. Ridgway eventually received permission to withdraw from St. Vith. The air attacks he desired were eventually executed a few days later in clear weather.
MEMORANDUM

TO : Commanding General, XVIII Corps

Some sort of build up north of our present position is indicated as artillery fire is being received in VIEKSAUM from the north or northeast.

Unless assistance is promptly forthcoming I believe our present position may become very serious for several reasons, namely:

a. Our supplies must come in through a bottleneck over a bridge near VIEKSAUM.

b. We may become subjected to enemy artillery fire from practically any direction.

c. The road net within our position is totally inadequate to the troops and vehicles concentrated therein. The map shows many roads, but on the ground, the majority of these are mere tracks on which even a jeep bogs down if more than two or three travel on it.

d. If the 2d SS Pz Division attack should succeed in driving back the two BCT's of the 82d AB Division now between SALMACHATEAU and HENSONVAL even as little as 3000 yards we will be completely severed from any source of supplies.

Since the chances of assistance in the immediate future do not seem bright, I would like to suggest that consideration be given to withdrawal of the 7th Arm'd and 106th Divisions to a position on the right (west) of the 82d Airborne Division where they may bear assistance in halting a possible advance north by the 2nd SS Panzer.

The withdrawal of CC "E" last night from ST. VITH was expensive. So far we are missing at least one half the infantry of Clarke's force. Of course many of them will show up, but they will be minus weapons, ammunition, blankets and rations as well as at a low physical level. I don't think we can prevent a complete breakthrough if another all-out attack comes against CC "E" tonight due largely to the fact that our original three infantry battalions have at present melted to the equivalent of only two very tired battalions.

/z/ R. W. Hasbrouck
/t/ R. W. HASBROUCK
Brigadier General, U. S. A.
Commanding.

221112

P.S. A strong attack has just developed against Clarke again. He is being outflanked and is retiring west another 2000 yards refusing
Even after pulling out of St. Vith, Hasbrouck’s situation remained dire. Ridgway received this letter asking for permission to withdraw further at 1150 on December 22, 1944.
Within 35 minutes, Ridgway sent orders acceding to Hasbrouck’s request. They were submitted through MG Alan Jones, who was technically the senior officer on the scene. Eventually Ridgway would pull him back to serve as the corps deputy. Early in the afternoon, FUSA, with the approval of their new Army Group Commander, approved pulling the battered division off the line and into corps reserve. Montgomery was up at the front to see the situation for himself.
ABSTRACT: This article addresses the motives behind General George Patton slapping two soldiers in Army field hospitals during the Sicily campaign. With a more comprehensive understanding of the evolution of mental health conditions associated with combat trauma, the complexities of battlefield leadership become clearer.

On a hot August day in 1943 along the northern Sicilian coast, Lieutenant General George Patton slapped a soldier. Arriving at the 15th Evacuation Hospital for an inspection, the general moved along the ward. There he met “the only arrant coward” Patton claimed to have seen in his army “sitting, trying to look as if he had been wounded.” When Patton asked about his injury the soldier replied he “just couldn’t take it.” As one of the doctors remembered, “The General immediately flared up, cursed the soldier, called him all types of a coward, then slapped him across the face with his gloves, and finally grabbed the soldier by the scruff of his neck and kicked him out of the tent.”1 A week later, Patton repeated the scene at the 93rd Evacuation Hospital (also in Sicily) where he slapped another seemingly uninjured private.2

These episodes, collectively known as the slapping incidents, are among the most well-known facts about Patton’s career. Yet little is known about what Patton actually knew about shell shock. Most of his contemporaries, and subsequent historians, simply claim the general did not believe it existed. Dwight D. Eisenhower, for example, wrote Patton “sincerely believed that there was no such thing as true ‘battle fatigue’ or ‘battle neurosis.’”3 And in General Omar N. Bradley’s opinion, Patton “could not believe that men could break under an intense mental strain as a result of [the] hardships endured in war.”4 Patton’s daughter, Ruth Ellen Patton Totten, agreed her father “honestly did not believe in battle fatigue,” while his nephew Fred Ayer Jr. claimed throughout Patton’s

1 Diary, August 3, 1943, box 3, George S. Patton Papers (GSPP), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Bess to Eisenhower, August 19, 1943, Report, box 91, Pre-Presidential, 1916–52, Principal File (PPPF), Eisenhower Presidential Library, Kansas; and Long to the Surgeon NATOUSA, “Mistreatment of Patients in Receiving Tents of the 15th and 93rd Evacuation Hospital,” August 16, 1943, box 91, PPPF.
4 Omar N. Bradley, A Soldier’s Story (New York: Modern Library, 1951), 162.
“career he wrote, and told to all who would listen, that there was no excuse for what was once called ‘shell-shock.’”  

Scholars have generally agreed. Two prominent examples include historian Carlo D’Este, who wrote that Patton “believed that there was no such thing as ‘combat fatigue,’ and those who claimed to suffer from it were there only to shirk combat duty,” and historian Dennis Showalter, who noted Patton believed “battle fatigue was a euphemism for cowardice.” The 1970 movie Patton gave voice to this opinion when the general says “there will be no battle fatigue in my command . . . Battle fatigue is a free ride . . . I am not going to subsidize cowardice.”

Nevertheless, a search of the general’s extensive diaries, correspondence, and writings cannot produce a single reliable statement from Patton claiming shell shock was not an authentic medical condition. Instead, a more complicated understanding of shell shock emerges. Between the two slapping incidents, Patton encountered other soldiers whom he acknowledged were suffering from shell shock. The reason for the different reactions was Patton’s adherence to an older definition of shell shock from his experience in World War I that viewed total immobilization as the only acceptable symptom requiring hospitalization. Any lesser attack of nerves was normal fear and should be dealt with at the unit level. As Patton wrote after the war,

The greatest weapon against the so-called battle fatigue is ridicule. If soldiers would realize that a large proportion of men allegedly suffering from battle fatigue are really using an easy way out, they would be less sympathetic.

Any man who says he has battle fatigue is avoiding danger and forcing on those who have more hardihood than himself the obligation of meeting it. If soldiers would make fun of those who begin to show battle fatigue, they would prevent its spread, and also save the man who allows himself to mangle by this means from an afterlife of humiliation and regret.

If a soldier were able to communicate, Patton did not believe the stage for hospitalization had yet been reached. Though he understood the strain battle put on the human psyche, he also knew it was the commander’s job to maintain fighting strength. Victory, not to mention shorter casualty lists, depended on keeping soldiers at the front. Likewise, Patton’s actions were probably sparked by reports of troops malingering in hospitals immediately before the slapping incidents. It is therefore more likely Patton did not strike the two soldiers because he thought they were shell-shocked, but rather because he believed they were using the hospitals to escape the front.


7 Patton, directed by Franklin J. Schaffner (1970; Twentieth Century Fox).


What one general thought about shell shock may appear of little importance in the wider events of World War II. Yet it parallels other important issues of command and for the armed forces. This scandal demonstrates how military needs and changing medical knowledge can clash. Though the maladies are very different, past discussions of shell shock resemble today’s issues arising from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Both are complicated psychological problems that sap the Army’s strength. The definitions of both conditions also expanded during war.

Patton’s understanding of shell shock was shared by much of the US Army’s leadership during the period. Patton and many of his contemporaries saw shell shock in black and white terms. If a soldier were truly shell-shocked, he lost control of his actions. Anything less than this was cowardice, normal fear, or fatigue that could be corrected outside a hospital to keep soldiers at the front, preventing greater casualties and lost battles. For this reason, many generals determined they could not be too harsh on hospitalized soldiers. Patton was unique in his actions, not his opinions.

Any revisionism of such a controversial incident runs the risk of appearing to defend Patton’s behavior. However, this article suggests Patton’s motives were shared by his peers who held similar views of shell shock that have often been overlooked by historians. By examining Patton’s writings, his belief in the existence of shell shock becomes evident and his actions as deliberate attempts to end malingering become clear. Though this paper can only briefly touch on shell shock, a short history of the changes surrounding it provides context for Patton’s actions.

Shell shock was first diagnosed during World War I and was associated with symptoms such as blindness, paralysis, and problems with hearing, speech, and memory. Yet well before World War II, the term, and the theory that it was caused by concussion, had fallen out of medical use and been replaced with psychoneurosis. The term shell shock, however, remained in popular use. By the beginning of World War II, one study characterized shell shock as consisting of emotional problems, cognitive disorders, physical complaints, and manifestations of hysteria. Another leading study, likely read by Patton, listed the basic symptoms as hysteria, neurasthenia, and “graver temporary ‘mental’ disorder.”

Psychology for the Fighting Man, referred to shell shock as “war neuroses” and listed the symptoms as blindness, loss of control in limbs, loss of memory “and everything connected with his [the soldier’s] identity.” As historian Hans Binneveld observed, the symptoms had not significantly changed between the two World Wars, but the willingness of soldiers

11 Binneveld, Shell Shock to Combat Stress, 94.
to admit fear and anxiety was much more common in the Second.\textsuperscript{14}
Terminology evolved from “combat exhaustion” or “battle fatigue” to the point that the US Army in the Mediterranean initially assigned all psychiatric cases with the category of “exhaustion.”\textsuperscript{15} Thus, by the time of the slapping incidents, all patients with psychological problems were labeled with exhaustion and associated with shell shock even when they did not have disabling symptoms. Thus, the tacitly expanded definition of shell shock was unfamiliar to officers, such as Patton, and soldiers, including those with less severe psychological ailments.

Patton recalled his first painful experience with shell shock while defending his actions in 1943. During World War I, one of his friends had broken down under the strain of combat “in an exactly analogous manner” with those of the two soldiers he struck in Sicily. “Both my friend,” Patton claimed later, “and the medical men with whom I discussed his case assured me that had he been roughly checked at the time of his first misbehavior, he would have been restored to a normal state.”\textsuperscript{16} It has not been possible to determine if the story was true, or if Patton was simply attempting to defend himself. But the insight helps explain his actions in the field hospitals in Sicily.

Languishing in the interwar Army, Patton dedicated considerable time to reading and writing about warfare. In 1927, he published “Why Men Fight.” The essay did not mention shell shock, but it did discuss why soldiers avoided combat.\textsuperscript{17} Though he admitted skulking could be the result of “nervous collapse caused by fatigue,” Patton made no differentiation between this reason and others for avoiding the battlefield. Nor did he make any distinction when reasoning the execution of skulkers was not for the crime of avoiding combat out of mere fear “but for [the] betrayal of [one’s] comrades.” Patton believed if small unit officers and noncommissioned officers took appropriate measures, referred to as “battle discipline,” skulking would be drastically reduced.\textsuperscript{18} But he noted few leaders had the courage to use them.\textsuperscript{19}

Patton also expressed an interest in shell shock. On March 19, 1941, he wrote to the \textit{Infantry Journal} requesting to purchase \textit{Shell Shock in France 1914–1918} by Charles S. Myers, which was a detailed medical study of shell shock during World War I.\textsuperscript{20} Though it is unknown if Patton ever read the book, Myers made several recommendations consistent with Patton’s actions in Sicily.\textsuperscript{21} In a section on malingering, Myers wrote on rare occasions malingerers would pretend to be shell-shocked, adding

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Binneveld, \textit{Shell Shock to Combat Stress}, 94.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Patton to Eisenhower, letter, August 29, 1943, box 91, PPPF.
\item \textsuperscript{17} George S. Patton Jr., “Why Men Fight,” Patton Society, accessed July 1, 2019.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Patton, \textit{War as I Knew It}, 382.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Patton, “Why Men Fight.”
\item \textsuperscript{20} George S. Patton Jr. to \textit{Infantry Journal}, letter, March 19, 1941, folder 5, box 26, GSPP.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Patton was a confirmed scribbler in his vast military library, bequeathed to the Military Academy Library at West Point. But \textit{Shell Shock in France} was not donated. Elaine McConnell (librarian, United States Military Academy Library), email message to author, February 11, 2013.
\end{itemize}
sometimes the attempts were subconscious and could be avoided by keeping suspected malingers separate from other patients.\textsuperscript{22} Myers also stated, “The infliction of pain [to shell-shocked patients] is only justifiable in cases of long-standing neglect or of suspected malingering.”\textsuperscript{23} Patton demanded the two soldiers in Sicily be immediately removed from the hospitals after he used physical force. If nothing else, Patton’s interest in Myers’s book suggests he acknowledged some form of shell shock did exist.

As in 1918, Patton had few qualms about inflicting physical force to motivate his soldiers. On November 9, 1942, Patton landed on a beach outside Casablanca while commanding part of the Allied invasion of North Africa. The scene was chaotic, and the general went about trying to restore order. He wrote in his diary, “One soldier, who was pushing a boat, got scared and ran onto the beach and assumed the Fields [sic] position (pre-natal) and jabbered. I kicked him in the fanny with all my might and he jumped right to and went to work. Some way to boost morale.” Patton then “hit another man who was too lazy to push a boat.”\textsuperscript{24} Since everyone on the beach was under fire, nobody thought to question Patton’s actions. As his friend Major General Everett S. Hughes reflected, Patton “had to boot men off the beach at Casablanca to get them into the fight . . . He gets a [Distinguished Service Cross] for one type of slapping or booting and jumped on for slapping them in the hospital.”\textsuperscript{25} This irony was not lost on Patton.

As the commander of the Seventh Army in Sicily, Patton continued to exert heavy pressure on his soldiers. The route along the northern coast toward Messina was dominated by steep hills and narrow roads cut into sheer cliffs. This terrain provided an excellent defensive position for the Germans, who simply needed to destroy roads along the cliffs to slow the American advance. Patton’s answer to this was to keep up the pressure against the retreating enemy so they could not regroup or complete demolitions.\textsuperscript{26} Competing with British General Bernard Law Montgomery was another factor in Patton’s haste. As Patton wrote the 45th Division commander, “This is a horse race in which the prestige of the US Army is at stake. We must take Messina before the British.”\textsuperscript{27}

The relentless advance began to wear out the Seventh Army. Donald V. Bennett, an artillery officer fighting in the 3rd Infantry Division, recalled, “A significant number of men were wandering around behind the lines, dodging MPs, and, when caught, claiming they were either lost or their nerves had ‘cracked.’ ”\textsuperscript{28} A few days before the first slapping

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Myers, \textit{Shell Shock in France}, 40–41, 51.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Myers, \textit{Shell Shock in France}, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{24} [Patton] diary, November 9, 1942, box 2, GSPP.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Everett Hughes to Kate Hughes, letter, August 17, 1943, box II 2, Everett Strait Hughes Papers (ESHIP), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
\item \textsuperscript{26} [Patton] diary, appendix 48, July 18, 1943, box 2, GSPP.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Donald V. Bennett, \textit{Honor Untarnished: A West Point Graduate’s Memoir of World War II}, with William R. Forstchen (New York: Forge, 2003), 148.
\end{itemize}
incident, Patton asked Major General Clarence R. Huebner how the 1st Infantry Division was doing. Huebner replied the front line was getting thinner, and, along with many legitimate casualties being treated at field hospitals, there were some malingers from combat. “Well, as luck would have it,” Huebner remembered years later, Patton decided to do something about the problem.29

Early on August 3, 1943, Private Charles H. Kuhl was admitted to the 15th Evacuation Hospital and received his third diagnosis of exhaustion (fear): “He entered the hospital because of nervousness and fear of noise from artillery; that he would work anywhere but could not stand the front because it made his nerves raw”; he had no other symptoms.30 At 12:15 p.m., the command car roared up to the hospital and Patton hopped out. The hospital’s commander, Colonel F. Y. Leaver, remembered showing Patton the patients: “He praised each . . . casualty by shaking his hand or patting his head and telling him what a fine job he had done in the war effort.”31 Then Patton came to Private Kuhl who explained he “just couldn’t take it.” Patton wrote, “I gave him the devil, slapped his face with my gloves and kicked him out of the hospital. Companies should deal with such men and if they shirk their duty they should be tried for cowardice and shot.”32 General John P. Lucas, who was with Patton, remembered Kuhl explained he “wasn’t hurt, he was nervous, and added that he had been to the front three times but couldn’t stay there.” Lucas saw nothing unusual about Patton’s response.33 After Kuhl’s forced departure, Patton calmly continued with the inspection. As he was leaving, Patton praised the hospital and Leaver for the care the wounded were receiving but added “a great many of those patients that just ‘couldn’t take it’ were nothing more than cowards.”34 Kuhl was later diagnosed with malarial fever and diarrhea.35

Two days later, Patton issued the following order:

It has come to my attention that a very small number of soldiers are going to the hospital on the pretext that they are nervously incapable of combat. Such men are cowards, and bring disrepute on the Army and disgrace to their comrades whom they heartlessly leave to endure the danger of battle while they themselves use the hospital as a means of escaping.

You will take measures to see that such cases are not sent to the hospital, but are dealt with in their units.

Those who are not willing to fight will be tried by Court Martial for cowardice in the face of the enemy.36

30      “Exhibit 'B,' ” September 14, 1943, box 91, PPPF.
31      F. Y. Leaver to Richard T. Arnest, letter, August 4, 1943, box 94, PPPF.
32      [Patton] Diary, August 3, 1943.
33      Diary, August 3, 1943, box 14, John P. Lucas Papers, US Army Heritage and Education Center (USAHEC), Carlisle, Pennsylvania.
34      Leaver to Arnest, August 4, 1943.
35      “Exhibit 'B.' ”
36      Patton to Corps, Division, and Separate Brigade Commanders, “Memorandum,” August 5, 1943, box 91, folder Patton, George S., Jr. (4), PPPF.
It should be observed neither in his departing comment to Leaver or in the above order did Patton imply all soldiers suffering from shell shock were cowards. He used the phrase “great many” as opposed to “all” when warning Leaver about soldiers faking shell shock symptoms. Likewise, the above order only refers to a “very small number of soldiers,” even though shell shock was common in the Sicilian campaign.

Another important observation is Patton never claimed, either at the field hospital or in his diary, shell shock was synonymous with cowardice. At the time of his visit, nobody knew Kuhl had malaria and his record of two previous stays seemed to suggest he was using the hospital to escape the front. Likewise, Patton’s order did not mention shell shock by any of its many names and simply stated being nervous did not constitute a legitimate excuse for hospitalization.

The problem of soldiers using hospitals to escape the front, as Patton surely knew, already had a well-documented history. Helping wounded comrades to the rear or faking illnesses—favored methods of malingerers during the American Civil War—eventually developed such a stigma of cowardice that even genuinely sick soldiers would insist on going into battle.  

During World War I, shell shock victims were so often assumed to be malingerers the French military manual on the subject, The Psychoneuroses of War, spent considerable space explaining the difference between malingering and shell shock. Malingerers were a “voluntary, conscious act, willed and reasoned, an act which is intended to mislead and deceive. . . . It is difficult for the malingerer to display a complete imitation of a series of neuropathic manifestations such as contractures, tremors, spasms, and certain afflictions of the gait.” The malingerer often exaggerated the symptoms, and a few hours of observation were usually enough for the malingerer to reveal himself.  

The US Army during World War II was not immune from this problem. As historian Martin van Creveld explained, the Army took an “extremely permissive attitude” toward shell shock that was communicated to the troops by semiofficial channels and caused combat fatigue to be regarded as a legitimate, almost normal complaint. While preventing the army from applying the somewhat harsh methods of treatment used by German physicians, this attitude also built golden bridges for men who wanted to escape combat. There even exists evidence that, for some soldiers at any rate, going AWOL, deserting and requesting evacuation on psychiatric grounds constituted alternative courses of action.  

His knowledge of history, combined with Huebner’s report, likely strengthened Patton’s idea to watch for skulkers in the hospitals. The

damage from shell shock to army strength during World War II could often be permanent. Only five percent of psychiatric cases in the North African campaign were returned to their units. Such a high attrition rate forced the military to reevaluate its treatment of the condition.

Captain Frederick Hanson advocated that most shell shock came from fatigue and that it should be treated with a short rest involving good food and sleep. The result was a dramatic rise in the number of soldiers returned to their units. Over time, these numbers continued to improve, and in the campaigns in France and Germany, 90 out of every 100 exhaustion casualties were rehabilitated to some form of military duty. Overall, an estimated 60 percent of shell shock casualties were returned to combat during the war. Of the remainder, a large number were reassigned to noncombatant jobs. Nevertheless, nearly a million American servicemen received psychiatric treatment during World War II. Creveld observes this number constituted 8.9 percent of those who served in the Army during World War II and 43 million days of service were lost. He adds the number of psychological casualties was “about equal to that of all battle and non-battle wounds combined and exceeded the number of those killed by a factor of about three to one. At one time, indeed, more men were being discharged from the army for psychiatric reasons than were added by induction.” Though the US Army eventually rose to the problem, shell shock was still a major drain on manpower.

The problem of treating shell-shocked soldiers was especially complicated during the Sicilian campaign. The speed of the advance caused many shell shock casualties to be evacuated directly to North Africa instead of being treated closer to the front, which significantly decreased their chances of recovery. Apart from the distance and the reality of longer treatment often causing symptoms to worsen, it is also possible some doctors purposefully delayed returning GI’s to combat. “Having heard the soldier’s tales of battle,” historian Ben Shephard observed, “they seldom had the heart to send him back to it.” The result was that out of the Sicilian campaign, only 39 percent of neuropsychiatric cases were returned to combat.

The American high command was well aware of the problem of separating malingerers from legitimate psychoneurotic cases. Writing

41 Drayer and Glass, “Introduction,” 9, 10.
43 Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 95, 96.
an unsent memorandum a few weeks after the slapping incident became public, former Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall mused that once a skulker reached a field hospital, his “potential value to the service is either destroyed or seriously impaired. There he exchanges information regarding his ailment with other patients and from them he learns the symptoms most likely to perplex the doctors. He is recognized and treated as a sick man. . . . Above all, he escapes from those duties which he seeks to evade. He cannot be punished for malingering, therefore the worst that can happen is to be sent back to his organization where he can and will start the same process all over again.”

Marshall believed the problem was exacerbated by officers wanting to get rid of difficult soldiers by sending them to the hospital and by medical personnel who would not turn away a man who claimed to be sick. “No record exists of any psychoneurotic ever having been convicted for malingering,” Marshall noted. “This is because no doctor is either willing or able to state under oath that the pain complained of by the psychoneurotic is nonexistent.” Privately, Eisenhower made a similar observation, explaining “in any army one-third of the soldiers are natural fighters and brave; two-thirds inherently are cowards and skulkers. By making the two-thirds fear the possible public upbraiding such as Patton gave during the [Sicily] campaign, the skulkers are forced to fight.” Lucas, reflecting on the slapping incident, likewise believed, “There are always a certain number of such weaklings in any Army. . . . However, the man with malaria doesn’t pass his condition on to his comrades as rapidly as does the man with cold feet nor does malaria have the lethal effect” of malingering.

British General Bernard Law Montgomery, Patton’s famous rival, had the rumor of the slapping incidents suppressed in his Eighth Army newspaper. As his biographer notes, if Montgomery had “known of Patton’s hysterical outbursts in the two American field hospitals, he would probably have had more sympathy with Patton than did Bradley, Eisenhower, or the American division commanders.” The general sentiment of much of the Allied high command was expressed by General Curtis E. LeMay when a group of flight surgeons requested he give his fliers a rest to prevent shell shock. “Gentlemen,” LeMay told the doctors, “I know you are professionals but we are too. I don’t want you to interfere with the way we’re running the war.”

Thus, despite the endless criticism of the Seventh Army commander after the slapping incidents, the US Army leadership was not far from Patton’s thinking on what constituted shell shock and cowardice. As Hughes noted, “What we used to consider as shell shock or what we

49  Harry C. Butcher, diary, August 21, 1943, box 167, PPPE.
50  [Lucas] diary, August 3, 1943.
52  Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 303.
Hughes’s comment on the changing meaning of shell shock helps clarify why Patton did not believe Kuhl was suffering from it. The day after issuing the order to watch for malingers in hospitals, Patton visited another field hospital and saw “two men completely out from shell shock. One kept going through the motions of crawling. The doctor told me they were going to give them an injection to put them to sleep and that probably they would wake up alright.” What made Patton think Kuhl was a coward, while these two men were suffering from shell shock? Mostly it was a difference of definition and perception. Kuhl was sitting up on a stool coherent enough to tell Patton he could not take the front. The two other men were clearly stunned out of their senses. The definition of shell shock that Patton and much of the US Army leadership were familiar with was a soldier completely unable to control his actions.

On the afternoon of August 10, Patton arrived at the 93rd Evacuation Hospital. All went well until Patton spied Private Paul G. Bennett, who was sitting up shivering. When Patton asked Bennett what was wrong with him, the private began to cry and answered, “It’s my nerves.” “What did you say?” demanded Patton. “It’s my nerves,” sobbed Bennett, “I can’t stand the shelling anymore.” Patton slapped Bennett across the face shouting, “Your nerves Hell, you are just a God damn coward, you yellow son of a bitch.” The general’s voice was audible from outside the tent as he continued, “Shut up that God damned crying. I won’t have these brave men here who have been shot seeing a yellow bastard sitting here crying.” Patton then slapped Bennett again hard enough to knock off his helmet liner, which rolled into the next tent, and shouted toward the receiving officer, “Don’t you admit this yellow bastard, there’s [sic] nothing the matter with him. I won’t have the hospitals cluttered up with these sons of bitches [sic] who haven’t the guts to fight.” Bennett was managing to sit at attention as Patton turned back to him. “You’re going back to the front lines,” the general growled, “and you may get shot and killed but you’re going to fight. If you don’t, I’ll stand you up against a wall and have a firing squad kill you on purpose.” Patton then reached for one of his ivory handled pistols and continued, “I ought to shoot you myself, you God damned whimpering coward.” Patton departed still shouting about Bennett. “I may have saved his soul,” he wrote that evening, “if he had one.”

The surgeon general’s report of the slapping incidents arrived at Eisenhower’s Headquarters two days before a delegation of war

53 Everett Hughes to Kate Hughes, letter, November 30, 1943, letter, box II 2, ESHP.
54 [Patton] diary, August 6, 1943, Box 3, GSPP.
55 Donald E. Currier to Arnest, report, “Visit of Lieutenant General Patton to the 93rd Evacuation Hospital,” August 12, 1943, box 91, PPPP.
56 [Patton] diary, August 10, 1943, box 3, GSPP.
correspondents who confirmed the story. Eisenhower wrote an unofficial reprimand to Patton stating, “I clearly understand that firm and drastic measures are at times necessary in order to secure desired objectives. But this does not excuse brutality, abuse of the sick, nor exhibition of uncontrollable temper in front of subordinates.” He then ordered Patton to apologize to the two soldiers, along with the other medical personnel, and quietly opened an investigation. Eisenhower also requested the theater war correspondents not report the story since Patton was important to the war effort. Of the sixty correspondents, not one reported the story. The silence held until late November when radio commentator Drew Pearson heard about it and “decided it was time to let loose on” Patton. The resulting scoop became front-page news. As one newspaper observed, it was a slap “heard around the world.”

What was lost in the media coverage and later historical scholarship was Patton’s belief that shell shock was a medical condition, which his later statements demonstrate. As he obeyed Eisenhower’s order to apologize he informed the medical personnel “that he had always regarded cases of ‘shell shock’ as being most tragic” and his intention was to shame the soldiers “to try to snap them out of it.” He could not resist adding, however, that the medical personnel should “be very careful in handling such cases so that we wouldn’t be taken in by cowards and malingerers.” On December 21, 1944, Hughes wrote Patton suggesting combat officers who were relieved for combat exhaustion (shell shock) should be examined by a doctor to determine if the officer could be saved by sending him on leave. Patton replied Hughes’s suggestions were being acted on and “Commanders are being directed to require an examination by a medical officer in all cases involving the relief of combat officers as the result of combat exhaustion when there is a probability that reclassification may be necessary.” He added, “Where such action is indicated, the officer will of course be disposed of through medical channels or given the proper treatment including a leave if that appears desirable.” These statements suggest Patton not only believed in shell shock but thought it could be treated without physical and verbal abuse.

Patton believed shell shock was a genuine medical condition, but the two privates he slapped were not suffering from it. He had no problem with soldiers who had lost control of their minds and actions being treated in hospitals. This was the definition he and other US generals who had served in World War I understood. Yet the two soldiers he

57 Butcher diary, August 17, 1943, box 167, PPPF.
58 Eisenhower to Patton, letter, August 17, 1943, box 91, PPPF.
59 Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, 182.
63 “Statement of Captain Henry A. Carr,” September 14, 1943, box 91, PPPF.
64 Currier, memorandum, September 7, 1943, box 91, PPPF.
65 Hughes to Patton, letter, December 21, 1944, folder 18, box 33, GSPP.
66 Patton to Hughes, letter, December 30, 1944, folder 18, box 33, GSPP.
slapped were in control of themselves enough to explain their condition to him. In these cases, the general believed, the soldiers must be made to overcome their affliction by shame, anger, and physical abuse. His actions, however, led most of his friends and family to conclude Patton did not believe shell shock was a genuine medical condition.

In the rush of historians, journalists, and colleagues to defend or condemn Patton, the subtle distinctions of his views were lost. Patton’s actions hardly had universal support in the army’s officer corps. His old friend John J. Pershing harshly and publicly criticized Patton’s behavior. Nevertheless, many of his colleagues agreed, though usually privately, with Patton’s definition of shell shock and the need to prevent malingering. Former Army Chief of Staff Charles P. Summerall wrote Patton that the incident was trifling and he remembered soldiers migrating to the rear and being coddled in hospitals during World War I. “Such cowards used to be shot, but now they are encouraged,” wrote Summerall. “Only those who carry the responsibility of winning battles know the difficulty of making men fight.”

Summerall’s last observation points to the struggle of making soldiers perform in combat during World War II and the concern the US Army leadership had about the problem. Instead of an isolated incident, Patton’s actions more accurately demonstrate one general’s answer to a complex and universal dilemma.

The modern military leader can draw several lessons from the slapping incidents. First, commanders must still balance medical needs with military necessities. In recent years, the great focus in military psychological health has been PTSD. According to the US Department of Veterans Affairs, between 11 and 20 percent of veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq suffer from PTSD. Such a wide gap in the statistics speaks to the controversy over who has PTSD and fears it is underdiagnosed. Conversely, critics have worried the publicity surrounding PTSD may lead to overdiagnosis, a concern shared by some in the medical profession about shell shock during World War II.

The costs are huge, and the military budget is finite. The army that won World War II was largely made up of draftees, but the military of today is comprised of professionals trained at a great cost. A soldier out of action because of PTSD is a major loss and difficult to replace. Finding the correct balance between medical cost and military resources is an ongoing challenge.

Second, like shell shock, the definition of PTSD and what characterizes it changes over time. What was accepted as shell shock...
for Patton and many of his contemporaries in World War I was very different than that in World War II. Yet, the medical definition had expanded to include people who once would have been viewed as simply tired or frightened. Today, PTSD is often used in the popular vernacular to cover a wide range of traumatic experiences. Military officers need to be cognitive of this and work with medical personnel to provide the best treatment.

Finally, the slapping incidents are a reminder of the difficulty of keeping an army fighting. The ultimate duty of a commander is to achieve victory. To do this and keep casualties to a minimum requires keeping as many soldiers on duty as possible. One of the least remembered, but most remarkable, facts about the second slapping incident is the reaction of the other soldiers in the hospital, many of whom apparently approved of Patton’s actions. Leon Luttrell recalled, “none of us felt sorry for the soldier” Patton slapped.72 Donald Bennett, heard the commotion in the next tent and remembered his fellow patients cheered Patton as he left, adding, “There wasn’t a frontline soldier who had the slightest sympathy for the kid Patton slapped.” To Bennett, one soldier’s feelings seemed inconsequential to the death he had seen in Sicily, and he believed Patton meant to instill a message for his army to “show backbone, and get the job done.”73

Patton’s actions were harsh and counterproductive. Even he recognized “my motive was correct because one cannot permit skulking to exist. It is just like a communicable disease.” But he added, “I admit freely that my method was wrong and I shall make what amends I can.”74 He had not acted out of deliberate cruelty, but was instead motivated by a desire to achieve victory and save the lives of his soldiers.

73 Bennett, Honor Untarnished, 148–49.
74 [Patton] diary, August 20, 1943, box 3, GSPP.
Buglers of bad news that examine how military leaders and policymakers have failed to manage wars that go south, such as Dominic Teirney’s *The Right Way To Lose a War* (2015), should be welcomed more in military circles. While the failure of the unfinished wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is well-trodden territory for Beltway scribes, political insiders, and academics, who is to blame and what lessons should be learned remain open questions. It is not enough to boil it down to President Barack Obama’s quip, “Don’t do stupid stuff.” Bureaucracies are stubborn creatures. Leaders are fickle.

To understand what went wrong and why, James Lebovic, in *Planning To Fail*, trains his eye on the military failures in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. He argues policymakers deserve most of the blame, for rushing into war with a set of options that virtually guaranteed military departures short of meeting their objectives. Lebovic does not focus on why we went to war in each case, or map out a set of alternative strategic options. But rather he discusses in painstaking detail how we stumbled into war and then looked for an exit, like a drunk trying to find his keys in a bar.

His argument can be boiled down to this: when it comes to war, US policy-making is often too means driven, groping for limited solutions to problems that require greater commitments of force. Leaders blunder into wars, expanding the mission while squandering precious resources, all the while making it up as they go along, then groping for an exit strategy. A better title for this book might have been “The Powell Doctrine Reversed” or “The Bermuda-Clausewitzian Triangle.”

The reason for these blinders can be attributed to organizational failures, political shortsightedness, and psychological biases. Lebovic paints policymakers as political creatures, myopic and unsympathetic, driven by unclear objectives, organizational biases, and fixed short-term time schedules—suffering from all three of Graham Allison’s pathologies. Yet Lebovic’s process tracing lacks the originality and rigor of Allison, relying as it does primarily on secondhand sources and previously articulated arguments.

Anybody hoping for a groundbreaking new insight on America’s “forever wars” will not find it here. Nor will one find a cogent distillation of civil-military relations during warfare.
Yet, this book still deserves to be read, if not by military strategists and academics, then by aspiring policymakers. His review of what and how the wars went wrong—and so splendidly, like a slow-moving train wreck—is a useful compendium to any reading list of these three wars. Moreover, Lebovic’s analysis of the four stages of intervention, like those for grief counselors, are helpful analytically to pinpoint how decisions by key leaders are motivated by factors like organizational biases, resource constraints, and artificial timelines. Such observations are absent from much of the journalistic accounts of these wars.

Wars, like Tolstoyan families, are not all alike. But policymakers do face similar nodes when it comes to decision-making tree matrices. In the first stage, they decide to engage their military forces. In this stage, policymakers fixate on short-term mission objectives—for example, regime change. Yet too often they fail to articulate or align how these immediate goals should serve long-term grand strategy.

The second stage is to extend military operations—sometimes called mission creep. Here policy often becomes disjointed. At this stage policymakers are further detached from the operational level of the task at hand, and so they both defer to the expertise of those tasked with fighting the war while simultaneously groping for new instruments to use and broadening, whether inadvertently or not, the mission. At this stage, policymakers fall prey both to rational (optimizing the payoff) and nonrational biases (group think, tunnel vision, and so forth).

Stage three is defined by military setbacks, growing unpopularity of the war efforts, constraints in resources, and competing priorities. Suffering from a version of attention deficit disorder, policymakers thus reverse course and seek a strategy of constriction. They limit resources to reduce costs and mitigate risks. Then comes the fourth and final stage, where the goal is disengagement, as policymakers seek to hit the exits as painlessly as possible, handing over duties to often-unready partners, all the while imposing artificial timelines divorced from reality or the conditions on the ground.

Lebovic leaves some fertile ground unexplored. First, he tends to lump the lion’s share of the blame for these wars on policymakers. Military leaders come under only glancing scrutiny. That is a shame. There is a healthy and overdue debate within military circles among too much optimism among senior leaders in the field. Nor does Lebovic really explore the civil-military dynamics of how the various crises contributed to the mission failures. Is McMasterism a relevant factor for “planning to fail?” It is unclear.

Second, part of his theory touches on policymakers’ compressed timelines to get stuff done, even if it is operationally impractical or impossible. Yet he ignores large swaths of literature on this subject, like David Edelstein’s excellent recent book on this very subject, *Over the Horizon* (2017). If politicians are card-carrying procrastinators, as Edelstein and others argue, why not push off invading Iraq for another day? Nor does Lebovic really delve into the preventive-war logic of Iraq,
or the domino folk theories that dominated the foreign policy discourse of the 1960s and 1970s. Was this a blind spot for policymakers unique to that era? Were their concerns unfounded?

Finally, Lebovic appears to assume all doomed military interventions should follow his four phases of failure. But he could use a negative case to balance his analysis. Why, for example, did George H. W. Bush decide to withdraw from Iraq in 1991 after the first stage? In other words, by selecting on his dependent variable, we get three cases which satisfy his theory of policymaker myopia, but how does he explain cases, such as Panama, Kosovo, and the Persian Gulf War, that do not fit this description?

His case studies are meticulously detailed, yet unfocused at times. There is an important variation which is underexplored. In Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, the initial objective was clear: regime change. Whereas in Vietnam, it was muddled and unclear from the get-go. In Vietnam, too, Lyndon B. Johnson was headstrong in not changing course, facts on the ground be damned. Yet in Iraq, George W. Bush's surge caught even his military commanders by surprise for its course reversal. Obama appeared to punt in Afghanistan, seeking a middle path unsatisfactory to all parties—his liberal base, military commanders, and his more hawkish opponents (even to some of his own cabinet).

A discussion of sunken costs makes a brief cameo in the book introduction—I pulled out a bowl of popcorn and expected a delicious read about how the Concorde fallacy or Daniel Kahneman’s theories applied to the “Paul D. Wolfowitz-types” who blunder the United States into war. Instead, there is little discussion of how sunken costs shaped Johnson’s or Obama’s decisions. Instead, we are treated to bland statements like “policy makers must recognize that sound policy requires comprehensive assessment” (190, italics in original).

Finally, and perhaps most troublingly, rare is this modern book on military decision-making by not making even a passing mention to Carl von Clausewitz. Too bad, as this book would have benefited from a discussion of his trinity on raw emotion, rationality, and chance in shaping strategy. Nor, strangely, does Lebovic delve into the emerging currents of grand strategy, or the civil-military relations literature to diagnose the dysfunction cited in his case studies. However helpful his exegesis of some of the organizational explanations of war, there is a “been there done that” to anyone who has read their Graham Allison. Even his dismissal of James Fearsone’s rationalist explanation of war has a familiar ring.

Policy failures are never preordained. While I applaud Lebovic for attempting to pinpoint why nations fail at war, lumping all the blame on policymakers can feel like an academic cop-out. Given the complexity of the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, there was plenty of blame to go around.
In his book, *More Than a Doctrine*, Randall Fowler explores President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s rhetorical strategies in pursuit of his Middle East policies. Scrutinizing presidential speeches, addresses, news conferences, diplomatic communications, and meetings, Fowler argues Eisenhower transcended the traditional use of the bully pulpit, though he certainly exploited that venue by deftly employing rhetorical strategies to frame national security issues, inform and educate the public, persuade Congress and foreign leaders, and deter congressional criticism. Specifically, according to Fowler, Eisenhower practiced rhetorical *misdirection* as a cover for America’s covert operations and foreign policy objectives for the Middle East.

As Fowler points out, Eisenhower’s preeminence in military strategy and national security tempered outright challenges to his command of strategic issues. Moreover, the public trusted Eisenhower, primarily due to his image as a straightforward and congenial leader. Hence, politicians and pundits rarely questioned his competency and motives. Fowler elucidates the administration’s Middle East policy within the construct of the broader Cold War containment strategy. Eisenhower understood the Cold War was rhetorical in nature: words and ideas were the real battleground.Parsing presidential communications, Fowler reveals Eisenhower’s adroit use of narratives, history, and logic to make his case to Congress and the American people.

Within this context, Fowler recounts the strategic factors—the decline of the British Empire and its loss of prestige in the Middle East, the rise of pan-Arab nationalism behind the banner of Egyptian President Gamal Nasser, and the Soviet Union’s intent to exert greater influence in the Middle East—that prompted Eisenhower to commit the United States to the security of the Middle East via the Eisenhower Doctrine. Accordingly, Fowler presents three case studies: the CIA coup in Iran (1954), the Suez Crisis (1956), and the US intervention in Lebanon (1958).

The case studies offer few new historical insights and omit details that would have clarified Eisenhower’s hidden-hand policies. In regards to Iran, how was it possible for one CIA operative—Kermit Roosevelt—to overthrow Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh and reinstate the shah? According to Gary Sick’s *All Fall Down*, the conspiracy was a convenient myth for anti-Shah revolutionaries. Mossadegh had lost the support of the Iranian populace, clergy, and business community, so he sought support from the communist Tudeh Party (1985). In contrast, the shah remained quite popular. Hence, without the active complicity of Iranian authorities, the CIA coup would not have been possible.
For the Suez Crisis, Fowler does not mention the impact of Eisenhower’s operation in June 1956 on the failed Aswan Dam negotiations with Nasser. Granted, Nasser’s maladroit bargaining and diplomacy were factors. But without Eisenhower’s firm guiding hand, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles tactlessly broke off negotiations, which prompted Nasser to nationalize the Suez Canal. For Eisenhower, the ensuing British and French invasion of Egypt, known as Operation Musketeer, undermined the allies’ Cold War strategy. First, the operation coincided with the Soviet invasion of Hungary, wrecking an opportunity to arouse international condemnation of Soviet aggression. Second, Musketeer hearkened back to great-power brinkmanship, spurning the spirit of the new international order and recklessly precipitating a potential war with the Soviet Union. As a consequence, Eisenhower explained the main reason he forced his allies to withdraw was because we cannot “subscribe to one law for the weak, another law for the strong; one law for those opposing us, another for those allied with us.” In the aftermath, Eisenhower concluded Britain and France had lost the moral authority and trust to combat aggression in the Middle East, implementing his own doctrine with the concurrence of Congress.

Fowler’s coverage of the US intervention in Lebanon during 1958 contains some omissions and errors. Although the threat of civil war in Lebanon, triggered by President Camille Chamoun’s unconstitutional bid for a second term, did not fit the parameters of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the unrest did coincide with Pan-Arabism, which threatened to destabilize the entire Middle East, and provided an opportunity for Soviet exploitation. Fowler asserts Eisenhower virtually ignored the situation in Lebanon prior to the Operation Bluebat intervention. In reality, US and UN officials were in constant dialogue with Chamoun months before and during the crisis, urging him not to seek reelection and to support the popular presidential candidate General Fuad Chehab.

Operation Bluebat was an established contingency plan that Eisenhower activated as a result of the July 14 Iraq coup. His concern was that the coup would trigger widespread revolutions in the Middle East, abetted by Nasser. The intervention was limited to Beirut and the nearby airport, with US Marine Corps and Army leaders working closely with Lebanese security forces. Eisenhower’s strategic communications within Lebanon and the greater Middle East effectively conveyed the Americans were there to stabilize Lebanon until the presidential elections. The phased withdrawal of US forces, from mid-August to the end of October reinforced those messages. Eisenhower also dispatched Ambassador Robert Murphy to Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt to allay fears and reinforce the US commitment to the Middle East. Hence, Eisenhower’s swift intervention and messaging reinforced the Eisenhower Doctrine and served to stabilize the Middle East.

Despite these historical errors, More Than a Doctrine complements Meena Bose’s Shaping and Signaling Presidential Policy and Fred I. Greenstein’s The Hidden Hand Presidency fittingly, providing useful insights on Eisenhower’s rhetorical strategies.
Temperature Rising: Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Wars in the Middle East
By Nader Uskowi

Reviewed by Alma Keshavarz, associate, Small Wars Journal—El Centro

Nader Uskowi offers an insightful account of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its Qods Force (QF) in Middle Eastern affairs. He begins with a history and follows a trajectory of Iranian military and proxy activities in the region. Uskowi opens the book by recalling the time he met Ayatollah Khomeini in Paris in which he said to Uskowi, “the revolution is not about just Iran, but the whole region” (xiv). This introductory statement sets the stage for what the book is ultimately about with regards to Iran's military undertakings and geopolitical intentions across the Middle East.

As Uskowi explains, Iran is a country at war in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, with the addition of covert operations in Afghanistan. In large part, the book discusses the importance of the Qods Force—the IRGC's elite branch. Under General Qasem Soleimani's leadership, the Qods Force established the Shia Liberation Army (SLA), which is meant to safeguard Shia interests and push Iranian militant ideology into the region. The SLA consists of Lebanese Hezbollah, Iraqi militias, Afghan militants, and the Houthis in Yemen (17). SLA fighters are recruited and trained in the region before being sent to Iran for additional training in explosives, ballistic missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), among other specialized training with the IRGC.

The author also provides a history of the events that took place during the Iranian Revolution and how the Qods Force came to be in the post-Revolutionary era. While it may act as an independent entity, it draws from the IRGC and Iran's regular army, Artesh. The Qods Force has its own regional directorates known as “the Corps,” which cover Iraq, the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan), the Arabian Peninsula, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Other Corps exist in North Africa, Central Asia, Europe and the Americas (139). But it relies heavily on Shia militant groups. As such, the author also offers a history of Hezbollah—including early attacks such as the AMIA bombing in Argentina in 1994 and the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia in 1996. Other groups have taken on the Hezbollah model. Uskowi discusses the important Iraqi groups—the Badr Organization, Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH)—that form the core of the Qods Force-led Popular Mobilization Force (25). The Qods Force has also had long ties with militant groups from Afghanistan and Pakistan. These include the Fatemiyoun and Zaynabiyyoun groups, both of which have experienced heavy combat in Syria. Over time, Iranian
support extended to some Sunni groups. As the author explains, “Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), al-Qaeda, and the Taliban were seen as fellow revolutionaries whose efforts were against common enemies, particularly the US and Israel” (30).

Uskowi’s chapter on Iraq and Afghanistan is most interesting as he follows a timeline of when Iran seized on opportunities to enter both countries and maintain a presence. Days after the September 11 attacks, IRGC and Qods Force special operations officers were active alongside Northern Alliance commanders in Afghanistan. Following US airstrikes on Taliban targets in November 2001 in Herat, Soleimani saw the province as a gateway into other provinces in Western Afghanistan, which included the Farah and Nimruz provinces that had large Shia populations (51). In Iraq, the Qods Force acted on the US withdrawal to heavily recruit and fund proxy groups to establish a stronger foothold in the country. By the end of 2013, Soleimani appeared to have control over Iraq. Uskowi also addresses how Iranian forces, including their proxy groups, were instrumental in pushing the Islamic State out of key areas in the country. As a result, the population developed deeper ties with the Shia-led Popular Mobilization Forces as they were on the frontlines in direct combat with the Islamic State.

Moreover, the author dedicates a significant portion of the book to Iranian involvement in the Syrian crisis. Key battles are explained in great detail, including the infamous Battle of Aleppo. Following the Aleppo victory, Uskowi explains how Iranian-led forces moved east and established a land corridor from Iran through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon, the Mediterranean, and the Israeli northern fronts (88). These successes from 2017 onward have been major contributing factors to Iranian expansion, which includes influence on the Arabian Peninsula. In Yemen, the Houthis took over the country’s capital, Sanaa, and within days, the IRGC-linked Mahan Air began direct flights from Tehran to the city to send military advisers from a range of Shia groups as well as a variety of advanced weaponry (115). None of these cases could have been made possible without continued Qods Force aid. As the author explains, proxy groups rely on the Qods Force to provide not only funds and training but also weaponry needed to fight their enemies. They have access to the IRGC’s arsenal of ballistic missiles, UAVs, and other weaponry, which Uskowi provides in great detail.

Throughout the course of the book, the reader comes to understand the scope of the Qods Force. It is ultimately a “military headquarters that gathers intelligence, prepares operation plans, provides logistics support, and conducts command-and-control functions for its military campaigns” (13). This is a timely book as it addresses this shadowy organization that has not been given ample attention. Few publications that address the IRGC and its branches. Uskowi’s analysis narrows the focus to the development of Iran’s military following the Iranian Revolution and how the IRGC and Qods Force have transformed Iran’s military doctrine. This book is a significant contribution to the field and a must-read for anyone interested in the subject.
Transnational Organized Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean: From Evolving Threats and Responses to Integrated, Adaptive Solutions

By R. Evan Ellis

Reviewed by G. Alexander Crowther

This book by the prolific R. Evan Ellis discusses one of the main security challenges in the Western Hemisphere: transnational crime. The main argument is that transnational crime is widespread and eats away at the roots of societies throughout the hemisphere and requires a whole-of-government approach to resolve.

This book offers two main contributions: it is authoritative in its discussion about transnational organized crime groups and it may be the most thorough discussion that proposes holistic, integrated solutions. These elements alone make it relevant to senior members of defense communities throughout the hemisphere. But this book also excels in the chapters on “Transnational Organized Crime Groups” and “Comparative Solutions.”

A chapter on transnational organized crime groups is one of the best summaries on this topic that this reviewer has ever read; it is concise yet thorough. The author creates a new typology of cartels, intermediary groups, ideologically oriented groups, and gangs that allows him to discuss a widely disparate group of organizations that have only one thing in common—crime.

The comparative solutions chapter is particularly well done. Its 68 pages provide detailed recommendations on how to move ahead on what could be called a wicked problem. These recommendations cover eight different areas: whole-of-government solutions, interdiction of criminal flows, targeting of transnational criminal organization leaders, use of the military in a domestic law enforcement context, institutional reform within law enforcement, targeting the financial flows and resources of organized criminal groups, prison control and reform, and binational and multinational cooperation against organized crime.

Several of these concepts stand out as must-reads for US strategists and policymakers. Although several are obvious, the sections on the use of the military in a domestic law enforcement context, institutional reform within law enforcement, and prison control and reform are not always understood by US audiences.

In the first case, the US Posse Comitatus Act (18 U.S.C. § 1385) prohibits the use of federal armed forces within the United States except for cases of rebellion or disaster. Because of this law, US decisionmakers sometimes seek to impose that paradigm on our international partners, which robs our partners of their militaries, often their most well-resourced capability.
In the cases of law enforcement and prison reform, many US decisionmakers do not understand the level of corruption in some partner law enforcement and prison organizations. Since the days of the Spanish empire, Latin American countries have often underpaid law enforcement personnel, which allows transnational criminals to avoid punishment and even continue criminal activities from within prison walls. Thus, any holistic approach to resolving transnational crime in the Western Hemisphere will require significant police and prison reforms.

The examples of success in this book provide a menu of changes countries can choose and explain how the changes have worked in similar situations. The variety of Colombian examples is particularly useful. The Colombian government made sweeping reforms throughout society in the early 2000s in its successful bid to defeat the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) insurgency, which survived only due to its transnational criminal activities.

Although the primary sources based on personal contact with senior security service people throughout the region are notable, other sources disappoint. The author speaks Spanish but refers mainly to English language sources. In chapter two, “The Geography of Transnational Organized Crime,” only 31 of 167 citations come from the region, 20 entrants cite the author’s own works.

Although there are minor factual errors throughout, such as referring to the Spanish Gendarmerie rather than the Guardia Civil, they are not as important as the omissions. For instance, the author makes tantalizing mentions of illegal minerals coming from Peru and Bolivia. But the thread is not developed and minerals do not even appear in the index. Even worse is a total omission of Cuba or Haiti. It is impossible to discuss transnational crime in the Caribbean thoroughly without mentioning two of the three largest countries in the region.

This book could have used a more thorough copyediting. It has some errors such as referring to several US Army colonels as “coronel.” Other minor issues include multiple references to criminal bands in parentheses (BACRIM) followed on the next page by criminal bands in quotation marks (“BACRIM”) and later by the phrase “criminal bands,” again in quotation marks, or “Bacrim” (with only an initial cap). For another example, the Red Command is refered to as “CV” without mentioning Comando Vermelho. Even more irritating, “Red Command” is used for subsequent references.

In the end, this strong book addresses an important problem everyone in the Western Hemisphere faces. Transnational crime weakens the societies and governments of developed and underdeveloped countries throughout the area. By using this book to understand the problem better and considering the comparative solutions, US and Latin American strategists and policymakers can improve their capabilities to deal with these issues and mitigate the negative impact transnational crime has on all of our societies.
Radical Inclusion: What the Post-9/11 World Should Have Taught Us about Leadership

By Martin Dempsey and Ori Brafman

Reviewed by Lt Col Derek W. Beck, US Air Force Reserves

Radical Inclusion argues one can attract more bees with honey than with vinegar. The book argues that seeking to include people (a radical ideal in today’s society, per the authors) versus creating walls (as we are prone to do) will lead to greater success, be it in business or civil-military operations in war-torn Afghanistan. Primarily a leadership book, the text is bolstered by stories from the two authors’ lives, though it is heavy on examples from the life of General Martin E. Dempsey, US Army retired, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (2011–15).

As outlined in the preface, the book’s thesis is what the authors call the “digital echo, where information passes from individual to individual more quickly but in the process often becomes distorted” (xii, italics in original). Simply put, this concept is just the faster-moving digital equivalent of how information has always grown more distorted with each retelling. The authors treat this as a neutral force, ignoring actions such as overt efforts to inject misinformation. The preface concludes with six “concrete leadership tools” that are anything but concrete, but aim to inspire inclusion: (1) create a team’s sense of belonging; (2) make each team member’s contribution matter; (3) be an imaginative leader; (4) instead of paralysis by overanalysis, “develop a bias for action”; (5) empower the organization at all levels; and (6) relinquish control to make the team self-sustaining (xiii–xiv). In other words, the book’s preface gives some fuzzy and largely derivative advice as concrete leadership tools, but it is the kind of advice found in nearly all leadership books, albeit described in this one with different buzzwords.

Throughout, Radical Inclusion gives various lengthy examples to make its points. An early example of a narrative’s power comes from coauthor Ori Brafman’s experience. While at the University of California, Berkley, Brafman, a vegan, protested the eating of animals. His initial efforts were not inclusive and included shaming carnivores. As a result, he encountered many obstacles.

Soon after, Brafman and a friend seized upon an idea to set up a restaurant across from a McDonald’s to sell veggie burgers, dubbed the “McVegan.” When he shifted the message from debating with meat eaters to making veganism inclusive, hip, and fun, by selling T-shirts and giving away free McVegan burgers, people got curious. Even carnivores were curious. People loved the shirts. After briefly flirting with pursuing a lawsuit despite local public opinion, in the end, McDonald’s introduced its own McVegan locally (20).

Brafman helped bring veganism into the mainstream, and McDonald’s ultimately benefited—not by fighting against the vegan
burger but by embracing it. That is inclusion: even vegans can come have a burger at Berkley’s McDonald’s. McDonald’s recently began experimenting with a McVegan burger in select markets worldwide, although it is currently not widely available in the United States.

A more pragmatic view is McDonald’s simply responded to market forces just as the Filet-O-Fish was added to its menu when revenues declined in response to Catholic customers avoiding meat during Lent. Without Brafman’s veggie burger, it would have happened eventually. Thus, is this really a story of radical inclusion or merely a natural result of a responsive capitalistic entity seeking to increase profits? Or maybe it was both.

In another example, Dempsey, as a young Army officer in Germany in 1975, had written off some of his less stellar soldiers as “disgruntled draftees . . . including several who were awaiting judicial punishment and discharge for charges involving drugs, racism, and violence” (84). At one point, a local nun arrived on post to talk with those disgruntled soldiers. Dempsey later asked her why she had wanted to talk to them. She responded, “Well, have you given up on them?” Dempsey realized he had, and vowed to do so never again. Decades later, one of those soldiers, then a high-ranking sergeant, thanked Dempsey for giving him a second chance (84–86).

Simply put, leadership is hard and cannot be distilled to being inclusive. Moreover, the book cherry-picks its examples and glosses over them to serve the points it tries to make before moving on. If the reader examines any example too closely, it will reveal more questions than answers. And there is no discussion about the needs of the many (or the country or the service) outweighing the needs of the few that the authors argue need to feel included. The discussions about when the mission must supersede the needs of inclusion are also absent.

As a leadership book, Radical Inclusion is as good as any. But that is a low bar. Radical Inclusion is filled with catchy phrases, such as “digital echo,” “radical inclusion,” and “develop a bias for action,” that give little new insights. Even the concrete examples proposed in the book’s preface are little more than catchphrases derivative of what many other books have described. There is nothing radical about Radical Inclusion.
AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order

By Kai-Fu Lee

Reviewed by Robert J. Bunker, adjunct research professor, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College

Kai-Fu Lee, the author of *AI Superpowers*, is a “social media rock star” with 50 million followers primarily on Sina Weibo, a Chinese social media platform, and 1.61 million followers on Twitter (@kaifulee) in the West. He is a leading expert on China and artificial intelligence (AI) with a pedigree that includes a PhD in computer science from Carnegie Mellon University as well as experience as the former president of Google China. Presently, he leads a Chinese technology investment company with approximately $2 billion assets under management.

While this best-selling book is not a strategically focused military work per se, the emerging military significance of AI and China’s growing capacity in this field more than justifies a review.

AI Superpowers is divided into an introduction, nine chapters, acknowledgments, notes, and an index. The chapters are “China’s Sputnik Movement” (AlphaGo’s triumph over the human Go master Ke Jie); “Copycats in the Coliseum” (China’s predatory and semi-illicit internet sector); “China’s Alternate Internet Universe” (an alternate Silicon Valley ecosystem); “A Tale of Two Countries” (China’s government support for AI trumps US AI expertise); “The Four Waves of AI” (internet, business, perception, and autonomous); “Utopia, Dystopia, and the Real AI Crisis” (the coming crisis of jobs and inequality); “The Wisdom of Cancer” (Kai-Fu Lee’s humanism epiphany); “A Blueprint for Human Coexistence with AI” (human dignity and social investment); and “Our Global AI Story” (global wisdom related to AI disruption potentials for humanity). The index is well developed and the references include an adequate number of sources presented in an italicized sentence fragment notation system found in popular books. Given the work is really derived from Lee’s insider understanding of China and its relationship to AI development, however, such references can be considered secondary to his functioning as the primary source himself.

The main theme of the book is the Chinese work ethic and approach to business (a cutthroat fight over market dominance that can quickly devolve into criminality). The book also addresses China’s massive online data-rich environment, which is required for deep learning that enables AI algorithms and is far more important than the US advantage in world-class human AI researchers (14–17).

This thematic focus takes place in the context of US and Chinese corporate interests that are “construct[ing] the ‘power grids’ for the AI
age: privately controlled computing networks that distribute machine learning across the economy, with the corporate giants acting as ‘utilities’” (84). A distressing side note related to this topic is that Microsoft Research China, founded in 1998 under Lee’s stewardship, has been responsible for training “over five thousand AI researchers, including top executives at Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, Lenovo, and Huawei” (89). From the reviewer’s perspective, this has represented, in hindsight, an epic transfer of technology to mainland China.

However the book has little to say about great-power competition and the potential for military conflict between the United States and China. From Lee’s perspective, a fait accompli has taken place with China expected to be the increasingly dominant global AI power. That such an emerging AI power is authoritarian based—the antithesis of liberal democracy—and is already implementing this advanced technology for domestic social control purposes is never mentioned in the work. Concern over such “AI race[s]” and “international military contests” is viewed as secondary to “what [AI] will do to our labor markets and social systems” (227–28).

While Lee has transcended national and great-power interests within this work—he truly focuses on humanity’s future relationship with the disruptive nature of AI—he is also a man who exists between worlds. A Taiwanese national who was educated in the United States and who has served as an executive of Apple, Microsoft, and Google, he has transformed into a high-technology venture capitalist operating in China. In the process, Lee has become a stateless citizen and denizen of the global capitalist economy.

For those of us with a more pedestrian existence—and who have sworn to defend our constitution—we should be concerned not only with the larger disruptive potentials of what AI may portend for our social class structure but also about the threat of an authoritarian great power to our nation. If China becomes the dominant global AI power, as Lee argues, this scenario may well occur.

Russia against the Rest: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order
By Richard Sakwa
Reviewed by Michael Fitzsimmons

Many debates in Russian foreign policy literature revolve around a chicken-and-egg question: which came first, Russia’s illiberalism at home and abroad or the rest of America’s and Europe’s hostility toward Russian power? Hence, the prominent contending themes of Russian paranoia in Western commentary and of Western hypocrisy in Russian commentary.
British scholar Richard Sakwa gives ample space to both of these themes in his latest book, *Russia Against the Rest: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order*. While the title suggests a tilt toward a critique of Russian paranoia, Sakwa’s arguments are actually quite sympathetic to elite Russian perspectives on international politics. Indeed, the book amounts to a sustained critique of the alternately labeled “Atlantic community” or “Historical West” for failing to transcend the ideological and institutional trappings of the Cold War and thereby alienating Russia. He charts a progression of Russian disillusionment through four epochs of the post-Cold War era: Atlanticism (early to mid-1990s); competitive, peaceful coexistence (late 1990s); new realism (2000s); and neorevisionism (post-2012).

Sakwa’s analysis is comprehensive in scope, and his research is impressively eclectic. The book serves as a sophisticated elaboration of Russian viewpoints on international relations over the past twenty-five years. Western analysts may find chapter 5, which examines alternative visions for organizing Russia’s relationship with Europe and its other Eurasian neighbors, especially useful. An insightful thread running through the book is the continuity of certain principles of Russian conservatism that are evident throughout czarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet thinking. Examples include the importance to Russia of great power status, multilateralism, and exertion of “privileged interests” within its region.

However, Sakwa’s arguments are less than convincing regarding the errors and sins of the so-called “Historical West.” The book’s frequently repeated thesis posits a path not taken in the 1990s—the transformation of the “Historical West” into “Greater Europe”—that would have better integrated Russia into the international system. Rather than fundamentally rethinking institutions like the European Union (EU) and NATO, Sakwa believes, Western nations simply expanded their remit, treating Russia more as a vanquished enemy than as a partner.

Liberal hegemony, a central concept in Sakwa’s analysis, is held responsible for much of the present discord and is contrast unfavorably with pluralism in international affairs. Sakwa claims that “Russian leadership sought to adapt not to Western values and governance norms, but to what were considered universal values and global norms” (324). But he is frustratingly vague in defining pluralism or which universal values are distinct from Western ones.

Multilateralism and the sanctity of state sovereignty are the two principles of this pluralism that seem clear. But the reader is left to wonder if it is mainly the most illiberal features of Russian and Chinese politics that are neglected by liberal hegemony. As Gerard Toal points out in an H-Diplo review of the book, Sakwa is guilty of “creatively configuring acceptance of autocracy as ‘pluralism’” (2018).

Sakwa’s assignment of blame to the hegemonic ambitions of the liberal international order for casting Russia as an outsider is problematic for at least three reasons (46). First, this formulation paints quite diverse
political actors within the Atlantic community with the same broad brush. Second, it denies agency to the peoples of central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics who sought refuge of a sort in the EU and NATO precisely because of Russia’s historical pattern of regional transgressions. Third, it is not at all clear how to distinguish hegemonic ambitions, with all of that term’s overtones of coercion, from the advocacy of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights that enjoy domestic constituencies throughout the world, including in Russia.

The grand strategy Sakwa attributes to Russia seems designed for Russia to have its cake and eat it too. Its premise is, a realist understands, the unique prerogatives of power and a certain measure of deference that is therefore due to Russia’s will, regardless of principles. Yet it is dressed in the garb of international law and the multilateral collective decision-making of an international society.

Russia has repeatedly and brazenly violated its nominal principles regarding state sovereignty when expedient (see Georgia, Crimea, Ukraine’s Donbas, covert political activism in Europe, and election tampering in the United States). A simpler explanation for Russian attachment to multilateralism rather than the principle of a “democratic system of international relations” is that it creates a pretext for Russia to offset its power deficits relative to its competitors (55).

Sakwa at times bends over backwards to absolve Russia’s leaders of responsibility for their behavior. The book is littered with passages that obliquely reference Russian aggression while somehow locating its causes beyond Russian agency. He says, for example, “the fear that its concerns were not being heard prompted the Russian leadership to speak increasingly loudly and forcefully, fostering a rhetorical escalation that in the end spilled-over into violence” (72). He refers to the annexation of Crimea as a reunification and even a transfer. Sakwa seems particularly uncritical of the standard Russian government’s talking points on military issues. He gives space to only the most benign interpretation of Russian nuclear strategy, highlights NATO exercises but not similar Russian exercises, and appears to accept at face value Russian criticism of American ballistic missile defense systems in Europe, despite that argument’s well-known technical dubiousness.

In chapter 8, Sakwa’s criticism of the United States veers at points into absurdity. For example, he decries bipartisan anti-Russian hysteria, doubts the copious evidence of Russian cyberhacking of the 2016 US presidential election, credulously reports Julian Assange’s denials of Russian entanglement with WikiLeaks, equates the pervasive dishonesty of the Trump White House with that of defenders of traditional Atlanticism, and cites a few websites hawking conspiracy theories.

Still, despite these flaws, Sakwa’s wide-ranging analysis offers a thoughtful, useful counterpoint to mainstream analyses of Russian foreign policy. Those looking to devise more a more stable and congenial future for politics and security in Eurasia will need to grapple with the worldviews and historical interpretations that Sakwa presents here.
James M. Scott’s recounting of the World War II battle of Manila is well researched, diligently referenced, and accessibly written. It is, however, not a resource that will be of professional interest to most readers of this journal. Like its significantly less comprehensive predecessor The Battle for Manila: The Most Devastating Untold Story of World War II, this work is less an operational analysis than a compilation of atrocities committed by occupying Japanese forces.

Those looking for valuable insights regarding urban combat operations will therefore find themselves unfulfilled and better advised to refer to the Center of Military History’s official green book analysis Triumph in the Philippines by Robert Ross Smith. Anyone interested in combat plans and ensuing unit actions during the battle for the city will appreciate the tactically-oriented and narrowly-focused resources such as the Sixth Army’s Combat Notes, number 7, and Japanese Defense of Cities as Exemplified by the Battle of Manila; the Combat Studies Institute Battlebook 13-B, Battle of Manila; or Kevin T. McEnery’s staff college master’s thesis, “The XIV Corps Battle for Manila, February 1945.” First person accounts of Japanese occupation in Manila include both those by Filipinos and foreigners who spent the war in prison camps. Many of these were published in the Philippines, among them the unassuming Boy Guerilla: The World War II Metro Manila Serenader by Rudy de Lara with Bob Fancher; the scholarly A Diary of the Japanese Occupation, December 7, 1941–May 7, 1945 by Juan Labrador; the social history The Everyday Life in a Time of War by Thelma B. Kintanar; and an essential reference of camp life in a Manila prison, The Japanese Occupation of the Philippines by A. V. H. Hartendorp. The Philippines Under Japan: Occupation Policy and Reaction edited by Ikehata Setsuho and Ricardo Trota Jose provides an eclectic and often revealing academic view of occupier policies—to include notable failures in efforts to resource the wider war effort that includes “Japanese Administration Policy towards the Moros in Lanao,” “Cotton Production under Japan Rule, 1942–1945,” and “The Rice Shortage and Countermeasures during the Occupation.” That is not to say Rampage does not include some material valuable to military readers or others with operational interests. The initial chapters provide brief biographical sketches of antagonists Douglas MacArthur and Tomoyuki Yamashita, contrasting the former’s failures leading to his flight from the Philippines and the latter’s strikingly successful seizure of Singapore.
Many of its remaining pages concentrate on individual and small group experiences of those interned—and often eventually interred—in the occupiers’ prison camps or others from Manila’s civilian population during the period between its capture in the earliest days of 1942 and MacArthur’s return in 1945. These details along with occasional short descriptions of tactical actions, snapshots of senior leader activities on both sides (to include MacArthur’s grossly premature declaration of the capital’s capture), and US soldier reactions on finding American internees dominate the second and largest component of the text. The trial of Yamashita and select fellow officers comprise Scott’s focus in the closing pages. There is little new in this trio other than material regarding the suffering of specific American, Filipino, and other nationalities’ civilians derived from author interviews or his subjects’ personal writings.

As might be deduced from the above, there has yet to be written a commercial or civilian academic study regarding the battle for Manila that is the equivalent of Brian Linn’s Guardians of Empire or U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899–1902, covering early US actions in the Philippines. We are fortunate to have resources such as those noted above that provide multiple perspectives on what is one of the Second World War’s most significant urban struggles, certainly the most demanding for American forces in the conflict’s Pacific theater. It is intriguing to consider the role its lessons would have offered had the Allies found themselves executing Operation Coronet, the invasion of Honshu and the Tokyo Plain. Any wishing to mine that counterfactual ore—or seeking a single source on the battle to advise the full scope of urban challenges yet to come—will have to rely on information available only via wide-ranging exploration of texts, pending an offering that more greatly focuses on matters of interest to the military professional.

Lossberg’s War: The World War I Memoirs of a German Chief of Staff

By Fritz von Lossberg

Reviewed by Dr. Dean A. Nowowiejski

Few historians write about staff performance instead of focusing on commanders. A similar few have the language ability to translate scholarly works into accessible English. David T. Zabecki has been an exception for years. First, in 2008, he edited a useful two-volume set for the Naval Institute Press entitled, Chief of Staff: The Principal Officers Behind History’s Great Commanders. Next, in 2015, Zabecki turned his attention to translation and editorial comment on important German memoirs in Order in Chaos: The Memoirs of General of Panzer Troops Hermann Balck, a translation done with Dieter J. Biedekarken. Now, he and Biedekarken continue to bring important German military memoirs to light for English reading scholars with Lossberg’s War: The World War I Memoirs of a German Chief of Staff. Lossberg’s War thus combines several important
thrusts into one effort: explaining excellent staff leadership, resurrecting memoirs from the Great War, and exposing important foreign language works in English.

Friedrich “Fritz” Karl von Lossberg, who became known as the fireman of the imperial German Army, rushed to a variety of chief of staff positions throughout the war to turn failing army defenses around. He entered the war as a lieutenant colonel, chief of staff for a corps, and served consecutively to the Armistice when he was chief of staff for a German army group and a major general. David Zabecki said in his chapter on Lossberg in Chief of Staff that, “Lossberg was one of the most important tacticians of the twentieth century.”

The combination of the original memoir, a gripping tale originally published in 1939, and the extensive modern update provided by Zabecki and Biedekarken should serve as an essential primer for those military professionals interested in senior leadership in large-scale combat operations, staff planning, the role of the German General Staff, the value of professional military education, and the essentiality of battlefield calculus. The editors add important notes capturing current arguments and historiography and clarify the few factual errors Lossberg made in his memoir based on recent evidence and their analysis.

Fritz von Lossberg was the imperial army’s specialist in defensive operations. Lossberg was first dispatched by the kaiser himself to rescue the Third Army in the Champagne region when they were threatened with rupture in 1915. The Chief of the German General Staff then sent him consecutively to the First Army on the Somme in 1916 and the Fourth Army in Flanders in 1917. The sequence of his individual rescues is a catalog of critical German defensive successes.

Lossberg’s methodology was regular: when dispatched as a chief of staff to the rescue of a large German defensive formation, he would immediately tour the front in person, speak to all affected subordinate commanders to best understand front line conditions, make his synthetic personal assessment, and then return to brief the affected commander in person. Only after these steps would he engage the new staff of which he had been made chief.

His presence, authority, and actions would turn the situation around. Lossberg would adjust in frontages, reserves, artillery, and logistic support to stabilize the situation. He applied a trained, professional soldier’s assessment of battlefield physics and capacities regarding the importance of defensive frontage, available supporting artillery, particularly heavy artillery, ammunition resupply, communications networks, and lines of communications.

Lossberg was not only skilled in the science of war but also had an innate sense for the human or moral capacity of the formations that he led, often remarking on the willpower of the individual soldier. He had a sense of modern warfare, as his battlefield assessments repeatedly highlighted the emerging, significant role of airpower. He is credited with the ascendance of the German concept of defense in depth.
The serious student of operational art will sense the importance of individual professional development and the study of the art of war between the lines of Lossberg’s detailed account. Lossberg’s expertise as a rescuing General Staff officer was built on the professional knowledge he had acquired through a lifetime of disciplined practice, the rigorous education given to general staff officers, and their long-term relationships within that group.

Lossberg often disagreed with his commanders and respectfully let it be known when he did. His memoir is an alternative telling of the German history of World War I, as Lossberg makes clear when he thinks strategic and operational mistakes were made. He is relentless in his criticism, for instance, of Erich von Falkenhayn’s insistence on continuing the attacks toward Verdun, just as Lossberg is critical of the failure of Erich Friedrich Wilhelm Ludendorff to fall back to new defensive lines and stabilize the front at the end of the war. The reader often wonders what the outcome would have been had Lossberg’s viewpoint prevailed.

There are lessons in the power of relationships throughout this memoir. Most often, when mentioning a new superior or a flank unit or higher chief of staff, Lossberg comments, “We knew each other well from a previous assignment.” Lossberg is dutiful and faithful in his service to a succession of commanders, even when he saw their flaws or disagreed with their decisions. Lossberg proves to be a model of the imperial German Army chief of staff archetype: knowledgeable, loyal, hardworking to the point of exhaustion, but unrelenting in dedication to the success of the mission.

This clarity on the attitude and role of the German General Staff is a strength of this book, carefully explained by the editors in a useful appendix. There is much to commend this book to the shelf of the military professional or historian specializing in the First World War. It credibly contributes to David Zabecki’s long-term effort to help military professionals understand both exceptional chiefs of staff and the German exemplars of them.

**The Forgotten Front: The Eastern Theater of World War I, 1914–1915**

*Edited By Gerhard P. Gross*

Reviewed by Michael S. Neiberg

Given the outpouring of excellent recent historical research on the Eastern Front, one might be forgiven for wondering if it is still the “forgotten front” that it was in years past. We now know a great deal more about the east, especially the magnitude of the impact of events there from the outbreak of war in 1914 to the triumph of the Red Army in the Russian Civil War in 1921.
The east bequeathed the Bolshevik Revolution, the proto-Nazi Freikorps, new states like Poland, and the genocidal battle for what Timothy Snyder has called the “Bloodlands” between Germany and the Soviet Union. No serious scholar of the First World War would even consider a study of the conflict that marginalized or ignored the events of the east.

Still, specifically because of those monumental events, the First World War in the east lives in the shadows. But it is not the shadow of the Western Front that obscures and distorts, but the shadow of the Eastern Front in the Second World War. Virtually every essay in this ambitious and important book references the war of 1939–45 either to offer a comparison, a contrast or, appropriately enough, to ensure that the history of the Second World War is understood in relation to the First World War.

This volume is part of a truly impressive centennial project by the Center for Military History and Social Sciences of the German Armed Forces based in Potsdam, Germany, the same town where Kaiser Wilhelm II signed Germany’s declaration of war in 1914 and where Germany’s conquerors met in 1945 to try to close the 30-year period of conflict. Gerhard Gross and his team have worked diligently and intelligently to bring scholars together, publish primary documents, and ensure that historians can treat the complex history of Germany in this period with all due meticulousness. They deserve a great deal of credit for their work over the past few years.

This volume is no exception to that diligence and meticulousness. It brings together some of the most experienced scholars in the field (Hew Strachan, Stig Förster, and Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius among them), and presents new research on new themes, such as the place of the Eastern Front on internet portrayals of the war. This is an ambitious and wide-ranging book that covers the German, Russian, Austria-Hungary, Slavic, and Polish perspectives. Strachan sets the stage with a thoughtful and analytic introduction that places the war in the east in geostrategic terms.

A few themes from the book’s 20 essays stand out, notable among them the ways that the east differed from the west. Those differences include the nature of geography, the de-modernization of eastern battlefields, the much more diverse nature of the peoples living in the east, and the relatively lower importance of alliances. In the east, Russia fought with no direct ally, and the Germans so thoroughly dominated their alliance with Austria-Hungary that the concept of alliance, as understood in the west, does not apply.

It is also worth remembering that Germany won on this front, as the 1918 Treaties of Brest-Litovsk transferred to the Central Powers effective control of most of what is now Ukraine and the Baltic States, while at the same time effectively making Poland a German satellite. Victory in the east allowed the Germans to plan and resource their 1918 spring offensives, but, ironically, the collapse of Russia also gave Austria-Hungary no reason to keep fighting.
The eastern war also featured movement. Russian armies swept into the Carpathians in 1914, then German and Austrian-Hungarian armies pushed east in the great victory of Gorlice-Tarnów. Armies thus came in contact with new and strange populations, not the least of which were the eastern Jews the Germans called the Ostjuden. German war policy had to decide what to do with them, and how to organize a region that they found disease-ridden, unsanitary, and, because of the panic that attended the Russian retreat in 1915, underpopulated.

However, the land could help the Germans overcome the material shortages they were suffering due to the British blockade. The essays here argue that the Germans did not envision genocide or even forced removals, but a reform of the east to make its agricultural land more productive and its people more modern.

Societies at war in the east also needed narratives, both during and after the war, to explain to their people what had happened. The book contains essays on literature, museums, and memory as tools for this explanation. The war in the east became, in effect, two wars: the war for conquest and the war for memory.

As Förster noted, the eastern front, in the end, had no victor. Because of Germany’s defeat in the west, and the attendant repudiation of Brest-Litovsk, all of the belligerents of the east lost this war. Czarist Russia, Wilhelmine Germany, and Habsburg Austria all ceased to exist, ushering in radical, revolutionary change. That change, we know now, kept the dynamic of hate and competition burning, helping to fuel another round of war. As a result, no one could have written a book called “All Quiet on the Eastern Front.”

That giant shadow of Stalin, Hitler, and the war they led in the east from 1941 to 1945, looms over every essay in this book. It cannot be otherwise. For even if the combatants of 1914–15 (to use this book’s narrow periodization) did not know what was to come, we do. The Eastern Front may no longer be forgotten to First World War scholars, but the immensity of the nightmare to come has reduced it in both history and memory. This fine book should help to correct the balance.
If you are conducting research in the field of security studies, it can be challenging to find scholarly work that accurately depicts military interactions at the tactical level. Yet, to understand how today’s multinational military interventions are conducted, this level of military analysis has become increasingly important to explain variations in mission outcomes. When considering the war in Afghanistan and the fifty or so allies and partners that participated in the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), it is striking to see how individual nations operating under the ISAF umbrella may have experienced the war in dramatically different ways. In Canada, ISAF came to be known as a combat mission and the Canadian Armed Forces suffered a fairly high casualty rate, while in Italy, the mission was always presented as a peacekeeping operation, which was reflected in the daily tasks carried out by the Italian armed forces.

While many factors play into whether military interventions are perceived as successes or failures, a particularly elusive variable is military culture, or how a nation’s armed forces might bring unique characteristics to the battlefield, which in turn translates into different mission outcomes. As Chiara Ruffa notes in her monograph *Military Cultures in Peace and Stability Operations: Afghanistan and Lebanon*, “Military culture is closely related to the national origins of a military unit, and operates as a filter between domestic political configurations and the way the military behaves in the field” (32). It follows, then, that the armed forces of two troop-contributing countries might assess threats differently and respond in kind. To get at these dynamics, you admittedly need a complex research design, which is enough to deter many from pursuing this kind of research. But for all who intend on doing so, Ruffa’s book can serve as a useful guide.

In order to isolate the influence of military culture on tactical behavior, Ruffa compares France’s and Italy’s contributions to two missions: the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and ISAF. The contribution of both countries was of comparable size in each case and the deployed troops were in similar areas of operations and exposed to the same level of threat. When we look at the range of military tasks and how they were carried out, however, some interesting differences arise. While the evidence is far from conclusive (and Ruffa acknowledges as much), the case studies are instructive. For example, she shows how the
French units in Lebanon were mainly concerned with patrolling tasks, while the Italian units prioritized contact with the population and civil-military cooperation activities.

Since the French units were performing these tasks with a security mindset, they placed a premium on force protection and carried out these patrols in tanks, which displeased the locals (tanks are noisy and they destroy roads). Ultimately, this mindset made them less effective in terms of carrying out a UN stabilization operation where success is heavily dependent on the support of local populations and adapting to their needs. By contrast, the Italian units in Lebanon had also deployed with tanks initially but switched to armored vehicles when they realized local communities were against tanks. A humanitarian mindset led the Italians to adapt their dismounted patrols and the frequent contact with the population meant they picked up on this cue rapidly.

Ruffa explains how the different military cultures illustrated different interpretations of what the patrols were intended to achieve. The French prioritized zone patrolling, which was intended to “monitor hostile activities in the area,” while the Italians did contact patrolling, which is meant to “get in touch with the population and collect information about the security situation and people’s needs” (75). Military culture really comes to life in her analysis and the account is compelling, thanks to her extensive fieldwork.

What is less clear from the book is Ruffa’s level of ambition for her framework. At the beginning of the book, she states the following: “I argue that we can make peace operations more successful—in their ability to save lives, protect civilians, and avoid mass atrocities—by better understanding the on-the-ground dynamics” (17). Can the research presented in this book really inform assessments of success or failure? Even in the case analysis, the only cursory assessment of mission outcomes surveys local perceptions or media accounts. To be fair, this critique is commonplace as decisive indicators of operational effectiveness are hard to come by.

To summarize, the book’s main contribution is the examination of how armies differ in terms of their military culture, and how that translates into divergent tactics on the battlefield. While this is interesting in its own right, it does not help us understand why some missions succeed and others fail. Hopefully, scholars inspired by Ruffa’s book will take up the challenge, drawing from her insights on military culture.
The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture: Lessons Learned and Lost in America’s Wars

By Jeanie L. Johnson

Reviewed by Dr. Montgomery ‘Mitzy’ McFate, professor, Strategic and Operational Research Department, US Naval War College

Jeanie Johnson’s book, The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture: Lessons Learned and Lost in America’s Wars, is grounded in the literature on strategic culture, which posits (roughly) that states have a relatively coherent set of practices and preferences regarding policy, strategy, and warfighting. Her objective is to examine the interplay between the organizational culture of the US Marine Corps and American strategic culture with reference to counterinsurgency.

Johnson begins by describing the US aversion to counterinsurgency, stemming from an “acultural and ahistorical predisposition” towards other societies. As a subset of American culture, US military culture shows a “partiality for . . . conventional war,” in which political and military personnel operate within separate spheres (46). She then turns her attention to the Marines, describing how they develop an identity through recruiting, training, narratives, and legends. While this identity, which she describes as “elitist and fight oriented,” has remained stable, the role of the Corps has shifted over the past two centuries from small wars to amphibious assault to expeditionary operations.

While the first three chapters will be generally familiar to most readers with an interest in strategic culture and the history of the Corps, in chapter 4, Johnson drills down into the organization’s norms and values to great effect. She teases apart some of the contradictions in Marines Corps culture, including the exclusion of minorities and women from the “mystical brotherhood,” the clash between the values of form and appearance with the “values of pragmatism or utility downrange,” and the tension between valuing teamwork and valuing the individual (97). Some of her observations are not just astute but also humorous. Johnson notes institutional frugality has made necessity into a virtue that results in Marines excelling at “appropriating” folders, toilet paper, MREs, and refrigerators. “In good DOD fashion, Marines have made an acronym of their pickpocket practice: STEAL (Strategically Taking Equipment to Another Location)” (105). In chapter 5, Johnson discusses how the Marine Corps commitment to “doing windows”—whatever tasks are required by the nation—is buttressed by a set of norms emphasizing flexibility, innovation, and a healthy “disregard” for doctrine.

Part 2 of Johnson’s book transitions from a discussion of the general organizational culture of the Marine Corps to a more specific discussion of how that culture has influenced their approach to counterinsurgency. After short summaries of the ‘banana wars’ and the Vietnam-era Combined Action Platoons, Johnson indicates many of the lessons learned or lost “are best explained as a product of a widely shared
American culture rather than anything the Marine Corps cultivated on its own” (153). Johnson observes naïveté and paternalistic racism of American culture resulted in bad behavior in Central America and during Vietnam the Corps “continued to reflect the prejudices shared across the American public.” Essentially, she gives the Marine Corps a pass by assigning negative behaviors such as racism, forced labor, and unnecessary brutality to American culture in general. Johnson clearly admires the Marines, and sometimes seems loath to criticize them.

Chapter 7 offers perhaps the most insight on the unintended consequences of American nation building, namely “Marines, raised in a democratic system that they viewed as exception and superior, attempted to duplicate this system by undermining nearly every principle on which it is founded.” In her view, Marines attempted to increase the efficiency of Central American republics through centralized authority and in Vietnam through popular resistance rather than centralized government. In chapter 8, Johnson discusses the consequences of the preference for conventional war, including the slow development of doctrine and the aversion to performing nation-building tasks. In her penultimate chapter on counterinsurgency in Iraq, Johnson examines how the lessons learned during small wars were applied in Iraq, including respecting the civilian population, understanding local culture, and employing information operations.

Her conclusion, unfortunately, does not return the reader to the main thesis of her book—namely, the relative impact of US strategic culture on the Corps performance of counterinsurgency operations—but rather offers a series of lessons learned, such as the importance of training indigenous security forces, the importance of intelligence, and the multiplicity of approaches to counterinsurgency. She candidly observes how the Marines often tend to get in their own way: “The reward system and clear hierarchy of the corps means that aptitude in dissecting the sociocultural aspects of the war will remain an under-celebrated aspect of the warfighter personality” (262).

While Johnson’s book is certainly enjoyable and rich in material, she has adopted a strategic culture paradigm to studying an organization. The result is aspects of US strategic culture become difficult to separate analytically from aspects of Marine Corps culture. A more beneficial approach might have been to rely on the copious literature on organizational—such as Studying Organizational Cultures through Rites and Ceremonials by Harrison Trice and Janice Beyer (1984), Organizational Stories as Symbols Which Control the Organization by Alan Wilkins (1983), and Organizational Culture: A Dynamic Model by Edgar Schein (1983)—and apply it to the Marine Corps. As structured, the main argument of the book sometimes disappears in the entertaining and colorful details of Marine Corps culture. Nevertheless, anyone interested in the history and culture of the Marine Corps would certainly profit from reading the book. Johnson’s writing shines when she point out contradictions, discontinuities, and unintended consequences of military culture, and one hopes she will pursue this topic in the future.
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