Counterinsurgency: Tentative lessons from Iraq

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Counterinsurgency: Tentative Lessons from Iraq

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It was with this primary object of establishing order that [Britain] went into Egypt twenty-eight years ago; and the chief and ample justification for your presence in Egypt was this absolute necessity of order being established from without, coupled with your ability and willingness to establish it. Now, either you have the right to be in Egypt or you have not; either it is or it is not your duty to establish and keep order. … if you do not wish to establish and to keep order there, why, then, by all means get out of Egypt. If, as I hope, you feel that your duty to civilized mankind and your fealty to your own great traditions alike bid you to stay, then make the fact and the name agree and show that you are ready to meet in very deed the responsibility which is yours.

Theodore Roosevelt, speech at London’s Guildhall, May 31, 1910

The U.S. military occupation of Iraq is not going well, because of an insurgency that shows signs of becoming increasingly adaptive and entrenched. There are significant tangible and symbolic American interests engaged in Iraq that will be undone if the United States withdraws or is driven from Iraq in defeat or exasperation. This raises questions about whether the elements of a successful counterinsurgency approach are within reach of the United States.

The United States undertook its military occupation of Iraq to serve an immediate security goal, of ending a threat from weapons of mass destruction posed by the Iraqi government. In addition, the United States aims at a longer-term comprehensive goal of the political and economic transformation of Iraq and the wider Middle East region, in order to reduce future WMD and terrorist threats. Now more than two years into the occupation, the United States has achieved some important steps toward the political reconstruction of Iraq, through elections that have established a provisional government. Yet even in the best of circumstances, building a stable democracy would be problematic in a society such as Iraq, where civil society was so thoroughly destroyed by the prior Ba’athist regime and where the
cross-cutting links among religious and ethnic groups that might foster a liberal and moderate politics are so few and tenuous.

Unless the current disorder and insurgency in Iraq are stemmed soon, the United States faces the prospect that it will fail in both its security and comprehensive goals. And with its current approach in Iraq, the United States will almost surely fail in its counterinsurgency campaign. As the U.S. Army’s own field manual on counterinsurgency notes, time is on the side of the insurgents. The longer the Iraqi insurgency runs, the more entrenched it will become, the more U.S. and Iraqi public support for the military occupation will erode, and the more the legitimacy of the fledgling Iraqi government will be undermined.

The basis for anticipating a U.S. failure in Iraq is straightforward. The U.S. military’s last major confrontation with insurgency was in Vietnam. Rather than resolving to prepare itself to do better the next time it encountered an insurgency, the U.S. Army decided instead there would never be any other Vietnams. So even though thoughtful analysts within the military have distilled the lessons of Vietnam into a perceptive Army field manual on how to conduct counterinsurgency, the U.S. Army plunged into Iraq just as it did in Vietnam, largely ignoring its own best experts on the training, manpower, and operational requirements for the task. Operation Iraqi Freedom was undertaken in March, 2003, with the bare minimum of U.S. forces necessary to defeat an Iraqi army whose combat potential had been severely depleted by a decade of international sanctions. The Army’s failure to anticipate and commit the resources necessary for counterinsurgency was underscored in the nine months following President Bush’s “Mission Accomplished” speech aboard the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln in May 2003. No sooner had Baghdad fallen in April, 2003, than Gen. Tommy Franks arrived to tell the 140,000 American soldiers that by September, all but 30,000 of them would be home. And as the number of U.S. soldiers killed or wounded in action against the insurgency rose from 65 per month to 446, the U.S. military nevertheless plunged along with a 30% reduction in total ground forces.¹ Since then, the U.S. troop level has been elevated to 150,000, without demonstrable effect on the insurgency, whose attacks now run at several thousand per month. And the announced plan is to withdraw U.S. soldiers steadily as 146,000 Iraqi security forces under training progressively take over the counterinsurgency task.² In sum, apparently insufficient American counterinsurgency forces will soon be replaced by unquestionably inadequate Iraqi security forces.
As a practical matter, U.S. ground forces in Iraq cannot be significantly increased except through measures that are politically improbable or operationally unsustainable, such as massively withdrawing forces from elsewhere in the world, or extending by fiat the length of service of current forces. The challenge for the United States is to devise a counterinsurgency campaign that can achieve American goals, within available resources — “to make the fact and the name agree and show that [we] are ready to meet in very deed the responsibility which is [ours].” Success is by no means assured.

The standards for success in Iraq are set by the security and comprehensive goals declared by the Bush administration. The most immediate security goal was to occupy the country in order to find and destroy all chemical, biological, and nuclear (CBN) weapons' components and programs. The administration’s gross misjudgment about how robust these Iraqi programs were, and the inability of the United States to find any such weapons thus far has deflected attention from an enduring security danger. As the UN weapons inspectors found after the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq had made surprising progress in its CBN programs for a country of relatively modest economic and industrial capacity. Although the international economic sanctions placed upon Iraq following the Gulf War were apparently quite successful in preventing the resurrection of Iraq's CBN programs, by 2003 the rigor of such sanctions was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain within the international community. A reasonable conclusion, therefore, is that long-term assurance against the resurrection of CBN programs in Iraq requires an internal regime transformation and a unified and politically-stable country, so that future Iraqi governments will forego such programs on their own volition. In this sense, whatever one might think about President Bush’s hope that a democratic Iraq will trigger a wholesale political transformation of the Middle East region, the immediate security goal sought by the United States merges with its longer-term comprehensive goal of stable democracy in Iraq. The President has made this point himself:

Our strategy to keep the peace in the longer term is to help change the conditions that give rise to extremism and terror, especially in the broader Middle East. Parts of that region have been caught for generations in the cycle of tyranny and despair and radicalism. … It should be clear that the advance of democracy leads to peace, because governments that respect the rights of their people also respect the rights of their neighbors. It should be clear that the best antidote to radicalism and terror is the tolerance and hope kindled in free societies. … And our duty is now clear. For the sake of our long-term security, all free nations must stand with the forces of democracy and justice that have begun to transform the Middle East.³
The rising insurgency in Iraq is apparently composed of multiple factions, with diverse and even incompatible objectives, but sharing an interest in undermining the U.S. occupation and the new Iraqi government. One faction includes members of the ousted Ba’athist government and presumably aims at a restoration of the regime that posed the original security threat to the United States. Another faction is headed by Jordanian-born Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi. It has forged an alliance with al-Qaeda and has a comprehensive goal of its own, which is to provoke inter-religious civil war within Iraq and in turn to trigger a Sunni uprising throughout the Middle East region. Zarqawi has sketched his goals and strategy in a letter drafted to al-Qaeda, appealing for support:

**The Shi’a:** In our opinion, these are the key to change. Targeting and striking their religious, political, and military symbols will make them show their rage against the Sunnis and bare their inner vengeance. If we succeed in dragging them into a sectarian war, this will awaken the sleepy Sunnis, who are fearful of destruction and death at the hands of these Sabeans, i.e., the Shi’a. … If we are able to deal [the Shi’a] blow after painful blow, so that they engage in a battle, we will be able to reshuffle the cards so there will remain no value or influence for the [Iraqi] ruling council, or even for the Americans who will enter into a second battle [alongside] the Shi’a. This is what we want. Then, the Sunni will have no choice but to support us in many of the Sunni regions. When the Mujahidin would have secured a land they can use as a base to hit the Shi’a inside their own lands, with a directed media and a strategic action, there will be a continuation between the Mujahidin inside and outside of Iraq.4

Adding to the general disorder and violence in Iraq are ordinary criminal gangs, some of whom appear to collaborate with the insurgents (e.g., in the kidnapping of foreigners), and all of whom add to the general appearance that neither the United States nor the Iraq government can control the country.5

Given the goals of the insurgents, if the U.S. counterinsurgency campaign does fail, several outcomes are imaginable, all of them harmful to U.S. interests. For one, even though the United States has achieved some important steps toward the political reconstruction of Iraq, in the best of circumstances, building a stable democratic system would be problematic in a society such as Iraq, where civil society was so thoroughly destroyed by the prior regime, where the economy collapsed and then stagnated after the Gulf War in 1991, and where cross-cutting links across religious and ethnic groups are scant. Unless the United States can shield the new government from the insurgents, civil and religious war in Iraq is almost inevitable. Zarqawi’s faction wants it. The ousted Ba’athists cannot regain government without it. Once civil war
starts, the Kurds will try to occupy the currently-Arab cities of Mosel and Kirkuk and attempt to secede. In such a free-for-all, the fledging Iraqi government in Baghdad would be widely perceived by Sunni and Kurdish populations as a Shi’a army of conquest. Success by either the Zarqawi or Ba’athist faction in such a civil war would be a disaster for U.S. policy, both tangibly and symbolically. But the alternative, where a protracted civil war settles into stalemate and effective partition of the country, would be equally disastrous, inviting intrusion by Iraq’s neighbors and providing potential safe-havens for terrorists of all stripes, in the manner of Afghanistan following the Soviet withdrawal. Moreover, unless the United States can solve the problem of building an effective counterinsurgency capacity of its own in Iraq, it can hardly advise the new Iraqi government about how to do this, nor can it have any confidence in the outcome of the other U.S. military occupation in Afghanistan.

Military occupations are a demanding foreign policy task. They tend not to end well, even when the occupying power starts out with fairly focused and immediate security goals. Successful outcomes — defined as a favorable balance between the goals secured and the costs incurred by the occupier — are even more rare when the occupying power aims at a comprehensive political and economic transformation of the occupied state. Since its first ventures at military occupation following the Spanish-American War, the United States has had more successes than most, although the record is nevertheless not encouraging. Of the 16 military occupations that the United States has participated in since 1898, the two cases of security occupations failed to achieve their goals, and among the 14 cases that aimed at comprehensive transformations of the occupied country, seven were successes, four were failures, and two are on-going and therefore of uncertain outcome (Afghanistan and Iraq). Of the seven U.S. successes, five involved states occupied after World War II. The only occupation in which the United States faced a major insurgency was its occupation of the Philippines from 1898-1945, and it ended unsuccessfully.6

The dynamic by which military occupations fail might be characterized as mutual exasperation. The occupation provokes nationalist reactions on the part of the occupied, who then prove recalcitrant in yielding to the demands of the occupier. As the costs of compelling compliance rise, the occupier wearies of the task. A major insurgency may accelerate this dynamic. The insurgents may fan nationalist sentiments directly, as a means of gaining support and protection from the populace; they may provoke the occupier into reactions that enflame
hostility among the populace; and they may undermine the legitimacy of the occupation and elevate its costs by generating disorder and inflicting casualties on the occupiers and those who cooperate with them.

This dynamic seems well underway in Iraq. The level of disorder in the country and the cost of the U.S. counterinsurgency campaign have been steadily rising. In the two years since the fall of Baghdad, there have been 1,184 deaths among U.S. soldiers in hostile incidents, roughly 2,800 deaths among Iraqi soldiers and police, and an estimated 13,900-16,800 Iraqi civilians deaths as a result of acts of war. Attacks on U.S. and Iraqi forces and Iraqi civilians, which were occurring at a rate of about 200 per month not long after the fall of Baghdad, reached a level of 2,000-2,500 per month at the beginning of 2005. Criminal activity also thrives in the disorder caused by the insurgency, so that within Baghdad alone, crime-related deaths have been running at a level of roughly 400 per month since mid-2004. The crime problem may be better or worst elsewhere in the country, but in the absence of an effective Iraqi police force that could investigate and assemble reports, there is no way to know.

Coalition and Iraqi officials understandably have tried to put the best face on all this, for instance, by asserting that 14 of Iraq’s 18 provinces are relatively peaceful. However, the remaining four provinces contain 45% of Iraq’s population and 40% of its territory, so they are not an inconsequential few. Moreover, the peacefulness of the other areas is indeed only relative. For instance, 29% of the Iraqi population lives in provincial districts where there were no insurgent attacks in the five months prior to the Iraqi elections in January 2005. At the other extreme, 28% live in violent districts where attacks averaged seven or more per day, and another 15% live in districts that averaged between one and six attacks per day during those five months. “Relative peace” for the remaining 28% of the population meant that the total insurgent attacks in their districts during the five-month period ranged from a low of five to a high of 150.

If strategy can be inferred from behavior, the strategy of the insurgent groups has several, mutually-supporting parts. Although deaths among Iraqi civilians and security forces have been higher than for U.S. forces, the bulk of insurgent attacks remain targeted on U.S. and Coalition soldiers. These attacks produce fewer casualties among U.S. forces because, carapaced within their bases, armored vehicles, and body armor, American soldiers are less vulnerable than the Iraqis. Yet the force-protection measures taken by U.S. soldiers have effects that nevertheless aid the insurgents. As U.S. soldiers take measures to protect themselves, they become estranged
from the local populace and cut off from their best source of intelligence about the insurgents. They adopt practices — high speed convoys through urban areas, random checkpoints, looser rules of engagement, and in one instance, the massive destruction of a city (Falluja) — that inconvenience, irritate, and endanger Iraqi civilians and convey an implicit message about whose lives matter most. Focused as they are on their own protection, U.S. forces have been unable to provide the security needed by economic reconstruction personnel and projects, so that unemployment remains high among the insurgency’s potential recruitment pool, while the United States and the Iraqi government appear inept at improving the lives of the populace.10

From time to time, American officials have highlighted this or that attack as proof that the insurgents are evil people who aim to destroy Iraq’s democratic future. In the circumstances, the message more likely to be heard by the Iraqi public is: “They will stop at nothing; we cannot stop them; you’d best make your own bargain with them.” It may well be that an insurgency can never become successful on the basis of intimidation alone, but intimidation certainly can be a solid starting point for extracting recruits, resources, information, and grudging cooperation from a populace. More problematic for the United States, opinion polling in Iraq suggests that U.S. counterinsurgency actions may have the effect of generating solid pluralities or even majorities among the Iraqi public who simply do not accept the U.S. interpretation of the insurgents as the evil party. In May, 2004, shortly after U.S. forces had made the first effort that year to pacify Falluja and had taken on the Mahdi Army of Moqtada al-Sadr, a poll among Iraqis found that: 47% believed the insurgent attacks were an effort to “liberate Iraq from the United States”; 79% believed the insurgent attacks had increased “because people have lost faith in the Coalition forces”; 53% thought the insurgents “believe national dignity requires the attacks”; 45% rejected the notion that the insurgents “do not want democracy in Iraq”; 61% rejected the idea that the insurgents “want to return to Saddam and the Ba’ath party”; and 46% believed the insurgents “are trying to help us create a better future.”11 And although the security situation ranks high among Iraqi citizens as an issue of concern, in a March 2005 poll, it was fifth among the issues that Iraqis said they most wanted their government to deal with, behind economic reconstruction, unemployment, health care, and crime. It is the failure of the United States to stem the insurgency, of course, which is preventing the Iraqi government from coping with these issues. To succeed, an insurgency may have to shift from intimidating the populace to winning its active support, through a political, religious, or nationalist appeal. There is little evidence yet that the
Iraqi insurgents have made this shift, but this poll data may show that the United States’ counterinsurgency campaign risks accomplishing the task for them.12

The Defense Department’s emphasis on force-protection responds to an understandable institutional and humane concern for soldiers’ lives. Yet it does have policy consequences, especially in counterinsurgency, where necessary tactics inevitably risk higher casualties. Critics within the military have argued that this aversion to casualties arises from a misguided belief among political and military elites that the public has a low tolerance for war casualties — or to put it in reverse, that only by keeping casualties low can political and military leaders avert the erosion of public support for military intervention. The result is distorted military operations.13

In fact, the public’s tolerance for casualties in military operations seems confirmed by close studies of historical cases, as well as public and elite opinion on hypothetical cases. A comparative study of two historical cases, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, found that public opposition in both cases rose by the logarithm of cumulative casualties, e.g., so that if 100 American combat deaths provoked 10% opposition to the policy among the public, it took 10 times that number of deaths to double the opposition to 20%.14 A more recent study built around hypothetical cases found that the public’s expressed tolerance for military deaths varied depending upon the hypothetical mission. For stabilizing democracy in Congo, the public showed its lowest tolerance for American casualties; for preventing Iraq from getting weapons of mass destruction, it showed the highest tolerance (the survey was done in 1999). Yet the levels of tolerable combat deaths volunteered by the public were consistently and significantly higher — as much as 24 times higher — than what military and political elites said would be tolerable, with military leaders being the most casualty averse.15 Opinion surveys of the public’s support in anticipation of hypothetic deaths prior to Gulf War in 1991 found that 60-70% of the public said they would support war if it resulted in American combat deaths of fewer than 100; 20-40% said they would still support war even if it resulted in more than 10,000 U.S. combat deaths.16 What the public is unwilling to tolerate are frustration and failure in policy as military deaths accumulate. Both a gradual creep and a sudden and sharp increase in military deaths may be taken by the public as evidence that the policy is failing, especially if accompanied by division and criticism of the policy among opinion leaders.17

There are signs in opinion polls that the American public’s tolerance for the current Iraq occupation is already wearing thin. For instance, the portion of the public believing that “the
United States made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq” reached 54% in June 2004, the 16th month of the war (a level not reached until the 39th month of the Vietnam War), and has continued to hover between 45-50%. The portion of the public judging that things are going “moderately badly” or “very badly” for the United States in Iraq has risen from 29% in June 2003 to a high of 64% in April 2004, and has hovered since between 45-60%. Those judging that “the war with Iraq was not worth fighting” has gone from 27% in April 2003 to 53% in March 2005. On the balance between goals and casualties in Iraq, those judging that the balance is “unacceptable” have risen from 34% in March 2003 to 70% in March 2005. All this despite the fact that solid majorities of the same respondents in March 2005 believed that most of the Iraqi people support what the United States is trying to do, that the Iraqi people will be better off as result of the U.S. invasion, and that recent Iraqi elections will produce a stable and effective government. The difficulty is that 57% of these respondents also judged that the United States “does not have a clear plan for handling the situation in Iraq,” and 64% judged that the
Bush administration does not have a clear plan for withdrawing U.S. soldiers. It is certainly possible for a president to continue waging a military campaign in the face of strong public opposition, but it is difficult in such cases for a president to secure ever-larger resources for the venture. President Nixon’s experience in Vietnam illustrates both points.

According to one recent tally, 48% of the American public now believe the counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq has ground to a stalemate (and another 7% think the insurgents are winning). There are hints that some military commanders have reached the same conclusion. A good deal of evidence points in this direction. Estimates of insurgent strength must be treated with caution, since the trajectory of estimates may say more about techniques of estimation than about actual insurgent numbers. Nevertheless, between November 2003 and March 2005, U.S. estimates of insurgent strength have risen from 5,000 to 20,000. And despite the claim by Gen. George W. Casey, commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, that 15,000 insurgents were killed or captured between January 2004 and January 2005, the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency estimated that the size of the insurgent forces in March 2005 remained unchanged.

That trajectory is consistent with tallies of the number of insurgent attacks, which have increased from 500 per month in July 2003 to about 1,800 in March 2005. The episodic surges in insurgent attacks (such as the one prior to the Iraqi elections in January, 2005) are also telling, because the surges are becoming increasingly frequent, and the number of attacks during the slack periods that follow never fall back to earlier levels — a pattern that suggests an insurgency that is growing organizationally larger and more capable over time. Since August 2004, the insurgents have repeatedly been able to stage up to 3,000 attacks per month during peak efforts, and to recover and surge again within one or two months. And although a portion of these attacks are suicide bombs aimed principally at civilians, with steadily-rising casualties, the overwhelming portion of attacks during the last 12 months have been aimed at U.S. and Coalition soldiers (73-86%) and Iraqi security forces (6-14%). This is, in short, a burgeoning insurgency aimed deliberately at political authority. And if it is literally true that Iraqi insurgents numbering 12,000-20,000 have been able to triple the level of their attacks while absorbing the loss of 15,000 of their soldiers in a single year, then this is an insurgency of extraordinary staying power.
According to DIA officials, June 2003 data are incomplete.

Insurgents have demonstrated their ability to increase attacks around key events, according to the DIA Director’s February 2005 statement before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. For example, attacks spiked in April and May 2004, the months before the transfer of power to the Iraqi interim government; in November 2004 due to a rise in violence in Sunni-dominated areas during Ramadan and MNF-I’s operation against insurgents in Fallujah; and in January 2005 before the Iraqi elections. The DIA Director testified that attacks on Iraq’s election day reached about 300, double the previous 1 day high of about 150 during last year’s Ramadan. About 80 percent of all attacks occurred in Sunni-dominated central Iraq, with the Kurdish north and Shia south remaining relatively calm.
The reason for what now appears to be a stalemate are straight-forward: the U.S. Army has had no institutional interest in, nor commitment to the counterinsurgency mission, so it never prepared for the task and now seeks to shed the responsibility as rapidly as possible. Scarred by its experience in Vietnam, the Army refused to address how it might win future conflicts like Vietnam and instead focused on how it might avoid ever being in such a conflict again. Two books widely read by military officers in the 1980’s and 1990’s, Col. Harry Summers’ *On Strategy* and Maj. H.R. McMaster’s *Dereliction of Duty*, share a common theme: the blame for the disaster in Vietnam lies with military leaders who should have stood up to the president and refused to accept the mission on terms set by civilian leaders. Summers adds the additional argument that the Viet Cong insurgency in South Vietnam was merely a sideshow that should have been left to the South Vietnamese to handle by themselves while the U.S. military conducted the “real war” against the army of the North.\(^{30}\)

The Reagan administration’s support during the 1980s for counterinsurgency in El Salvador and Nicaragua revived some direct interest in the challenges. Yet in June 1993, when the Army published a revised edition of its main field manual on *Operations* (FM 100-5), it was dominated by the lessons of Desert Storm and the Gulf War — a campaign of armored maneuvers and intensive air strikes against a conventional army. In a grasp at contemporary relevance in a post-Soviet world, FM 100-5 had a new chapter on “Operations other than War,” which devoted only three paragraphs to insurgencies and counterinsurgency and spoke of the role of U.S. military forces solely in terms of “[providing] support to a host nation’s counterinsurgency operations in the context of foreign internal defense (FID) through logistical and training support.”\(^{31}\) The current edition of *Operations*, FM 3-0, issued in 2001 as a replacement for FM 100-5, contains only a handful of references to insurgency and counterinsurgency, in a chapter on Stability Operations that clearly has in mind peacekeeping missions such as the Balkans.\(^{32}\) About the lessons of counterinsurgency in Vietnam, FM 3-0 offers a quick paragraph asserting that the fault lay in becoming too involved:

The majority of South Vietnamese people came to rely on U.S. forces for their protection, eroding their confidence in their own government to provide for their security. U.S. forces intended to support the South Vietnamese, but by significantly increasing their role in defending Vietnam, they undermined Vietnamese government authority and ARVN credibility.\(^{33}\)
In short, from the U.S. Army’s standpoint, the proper approach to counterinsurgency is to hand the task along to someone else as swiftly as possible. In Iraq, the someone else is an Iraqi security force that is being trained in counterinsurgency by an American military that neither accepts nor has mastered the task itself.

The disjuncture between conventional military planning and the requirements of counterinsurgency were evident right from the opening phases of the Iraq campaign. The swift war that unseated Saddam Hussein’s government will surely be studied by military officers for years to come, both for its achievements and for its risks. Rather than following the accustomed approach of assembling all of its combat forces and reserves in the theater before beginning offensive operations, the U.S. military attacked while its reinforcement and reserve forces were still in transit to the theater. As a consequence, when Baghdad fell in April, 2003, roughly 30% of the U.S. forces eventually committed to Iraq had not yet arrived. By the end of June, the troop numbers had peaked and begun to decline, even though the Iraqi army had been dissolved, the Iraqi police force had evaporated, insurgent attacks on U.S. soldiers were running at 500 a month, and U.S. casualties to the insurgency were rising from 65 in May to 253 in July, 2003. In one view, this pattern of behavior seems to defy the best wisdom that the U.S. Army was at that very moment encapsulating in its own field manual on Counterinsurgency Operations, published as FM 3-07.22 in October 2004. Yet woven even into the fabric of the Army’s own manual on counterinsurgency is the thread of institutional reluctance to take on the counterinsurgency mission upon which so much of American foreign policy now depends.

As a manual for what the United States should be doing in Iraq, the Army’s Counterinsurgency Operations gets it mostly right, and from the very first pages:

Ultimately, time is on the side of the insurgent. Fear, intimidation, and violence — coupled with the television and internet — may achieve the social upheaval the insurgent seeks and force foreign powers to abandon the [host nation] because of pressures from their own people at home. … The support of the people, then, is the center of gravity. It must be gained in whatever proportion is necessary to sustain the insurgent movement (or contrariwise, to defeat it). … Counterinsurgency must be initiated as early as possible. An escalating insurgency becomes increasingly difficult to defeat.

The manual understands that although the populace is the center of gravity, and the insurgents may adopt an approach of “mass mobilization” to win over the people, it is also possible the insurgents will take the approach of “armed action,” in which
the insurgents attempt to inflict such a level of casualties and destruction that the state is incapable or unwilling to continue counterinsurgency actions. ... Insurgents may also employ terrorist tactics if they lack a mass base, do not have the time needed to create such a base, or have objectives that do not require such a base. In this approach, the combatant forces rarely move beyond terrorist and guerrilla actions. Units are small and specialized, frequently no more than squad or platoon sized. Sympathizers provide recruits for the support base, but these sympathizers are actively involved only occasionally, though they are often central to the information warfare component of the insurgent campaign.\textsuperscript{36}

The manual also warns that an insurgency can succeed, even if it never becomes large enough to confront the opposing military forces head-on with its own main-force units.

If the insurgents adopt the armed action approach, ... inflicting an unsustainable level of pain on HN [host nation] or external military forces may eliminate the need to form main force units. Pressure from within the HN or country providing the forces may lead to capitulation or withdrawal. In attacking democratic societies, insurgents using this approach attempt to tap the purported aversion of democratic societies to protracted, costly conflicts that appear endless. They seek to break the will of the state to continue the struggle.\textsuperscript{37}

And in several places, the manual draws an analogy between the current insurgency in Iraq and the British campaign against the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland.

An illustration of the armed action approach is “The Troubles” of 1968-98 in Northern Ireland. An initial mass mobilization approach followed by the Provisional Irish Republican Army was penetrated by the state; hence, it was abandoned in favor of a cellular ‘active service unit’ methodology. Normally composed of no more than 300 people, the active service unit network engaged almost exclusively in terror actions and was sustained by a support base that numbered only in the thousands, out of a total 1.5 million population in an area the size of Connecticut. ... more recently, the insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan have used the armed action approach.\textsuperscript{38}

So what does the Army’s Counterinsurgency manual propose as a proper response? On this point, the manual has eminently sensible things to say about what must be accomplished and why the task will require resources that go beyond what would be necessary to defeat the insurgents if they were arrayed as a conventional army. At the same time, the manual also betrays the Army’s deep-seated institutional distaste for the counterinsurgency mission, its inadequacies in preparing for it, and its elaborate rationale for shedding the responsibility as swiftly as possible.

The manual understands that the key to successful counterinsurgency lies in providing security, first to the counterinsurgency forces themselves — to sustain their willingness and capacity to fight — and then to the people at large — to sustain their willingness and capacity to
assist. Insurgents operating as small units in an armed-action mode may have very low visibility, even in an urban setting. They may be able to obtain supplies in markets and shops, just like other consumers, and receive deliveries of ammunition, money, and instructions in ways indistinguishable from ordinary interactions among the populace. Where unemployment levels are high, they may be able to carry out reconnaissance and rehearse attacks without attracting attention among the throngs of other idle young men. The insurgents have a strategic advantage because they aim to create chaos that will cause exasperation among the American and Iraqi people, which is easier than creating order — easier to kill a policeman than to train one, easier to destroy a electrical power line than to build and guard one.

Although insurgents require at least some secure space in which to live and plan their operations, it does not need to be a large space, especially in an urban setting. So they have less need to hold territory and thus greater flexibility for fading away when confronted by superior force. The insurgents’ ability to raise recruits and resources rises as they spread chaos and fear among the populace, or create sentiments of hopelessness or anger directed at the United States as an occupying power and at the Iraqi government. As the insurgency disrupts the economy and economic development, it raises the prospect that government officials will engage in corruption and that general criminal activity will increase, both of which also undermine the legitimacy of the U.S. and Iraqi forces among the populace. The end result may be that the population withdraws its support from the government, not because the people prefer the insurgents, but because of exhaustion and exasperation. And of course, the insurgents seek deliberately to resemble the ordinary citizenry and to take refuge among them before and after attacks. The challenge for counterinsurgency forces is to sift out the insurgents from the general public, to avoid squandering resources on targets that are not insurgents, and to avoid alienating the population by inflicting death and destruction indiscriminately and pointlessly.

To find the insurgents among the people, the security forces must move among the people and develop the means for identifying enemy from innocent. Moving among people necessarily exposes the counterinsurgent forces to attack, so they must patrol in a manner that diminishes the opportunity for ambushes by raising the risks to the insurgents of being caught or killed while preparing, executing, or retreating from engagements. For well-trained insurgents, the retreat from an attack can be just as problematic and worthy of resources and rehearsal as the attack itself, and the insurgent organization has an incentive to preserve as best it can a soldier in
whom it has invested such training. In this respect, intensive patrolling by counterinsurgent forces and fast reaction when attacks occur can be effective in deterring attacks. Such techniques might seem at first to be less effective against suicide bombers, who are low-skill soldiers, with no expectation of withdrawing after their attack and with a willingness to die while maneuvering to their target. However, although the suicide bomber himself may be a low-skill soldier, those who rig the bombs are not. Hence, the bomb if not the bomber represents a substantial organizational investment by the insurgents. To assure that the investment gets well-spent, they will shadow the suicide attacker to the target and in turn seek to make their own escape after the attack. So again, intensive patrolling and fast reaction can have a deterrent effect on the insurgent organization, even if not on the suicide bomber.

How intensive the patrolling needs to be depends on how long it takes the insurgents to set the ambush. If laying a remotely-controlled bomb under a highway requires five hours of site preparation, then patrols must be more frequent than every five hours; if transporting a rocket-propelled grenade launcher to an ambush site without exposing the weapon requires a half-hour to the site, a half-hour waiting for a target of opportunity, and another half-hour of concealed retreat, then the risk of encountering a patrol must be comparably high.

The most intensive “patrolling,” of course, is done by the residents of each neighborhood, who inevitably spend more time in the area than counterinsurgency forces can and are better able to spot suspicious people or behavior. It is commonplace to note that a counterinsurgency program must include political and social incentives for the people, if it hopes to gain their cooperation against insurgents. But that alone is insufficient. Insurgents can and will punish citizens who cooperate with the government, so the citizens must be both wooed and protected. Counterinsurgency cannot succeed unless it is able to separate the people from the insurgents and then provide the people with security against retaliation. Both these tasks require significant manpower, and the U.S. Army ought to have been able to infer this from its own Counterinsurgency Operations manual and from historical experience.

Consider as illustration what Counterinsurgency Operations advises as the proper way to conduct a cordon and search operation, as a means of disrupting insurgent activities and collecting intelligence necessary as the foundation for general security.
To be effective, cordon and search operations must have sufficient forces to effectively cordon off and thoroughly search target areas, to include subsurface areas. … Cordon and search operations may be conducted as follows:

Disposition of troops should —
- Facilitate visual contact between posts within the cordon.
- Provide for adequate patrolling and immediate deployment of an effective reserve force.

Priority should be given to—
- Sealing the administrative center of the community.
- Occupying all critical facilities.
- Detaining personnel in place.
- Preserving and securing all records, files, and other archives. …

Search Techniques include—
- Search teams of squad size organized in assault, support, and security elements.
- One target is assigned per team.
- Room searches are conducted by two-person teams. …

On-site security.
- Guard entrances, exits (to include the roof), halls, corridors, and tunnels.
- Assign contingency tasks for reserve.

Room searches conducted by two- or three-person teams.
- Immobilize occupants with one team member.
- Search room with other team member.
- Search all occupants. When available, a third team member should be the recorder.

One can imagine an Iraqi city such as Falluja. Since the assault and sweep through Falluja by U.S. forces in November 2004, the resident population has been reduced from the original 250,000 to roughly 90,000, and widespread combat damage has reduced the structures within which insurgents might hide. Suppose there remains at least one room for every current resident (taking into account both residential and commercial structures). Reportedly, there are now two U.S. Marine and two Iraqi police battalions assigned to maintain a cordon around, and security within the five-square-mile area of the city — roughly 2,400 soldiers in all.

Even if these battalions were heavy on combat soldiers rather than support personnel and operated in three shifts a day of three-person teams, they likely would be capable of cordonning and searching at best only several hundred rooms each day. Put differently, at current security force levels in Falluja, even if cordon and search operations were a high-priority mission, large sections of the city would go unsearched by security forces for long stretches at a time. And indeed, even though Falluja is now touted as “the safest city in Iraq,” insurgents are again operating within the city, killing reconstruction workers and sniping at security forces. In order to apply limited manpower with maximum targeted effect, U.S. forces need information from the local population about where insurgents might be hiding. But to get that, they must provide local
security, which means clearing the insurgents and keeping them out. For good reason, *Counterinsurgency Operations* counsels patience — and lots of resources:

The attainment of clear and hold operations objectives requires a considerable expenditure of resources and time. Leaders and their [host nation] counterparts must be prepared for a long-term effort. Based upon experiences in insurgency-stricken areas in which clear and hold or similar type operations have been conducted, several years may be required to achieve complete and enduring success.43

And because operations of this sort bear little or no resemblance to military operations against a conventional army, standard military assumptions about force sizing also have little relevance. One often finds assertions, for instance, that successful counterinsurgency requires ten soldiers for every one insurgent or ten soldiers per 1,000 population, but there is no obvious logic to such rules of thumb. Within broad limits, force requirements for operations such as clear-and-hold or cordon-and-search, or even intensive patrolling, are dictated primarily by the area to be covered and the frequency of the operation, not by the number of insurgents or citizens.

When citing historical examples, *Counterinsurgency Operations* highlights the British experience against the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland during “The Troubles” from August 1969 to 1998. The comparison with the Iraqi insurgency seems apt in several respects. In both cases, the population was substantially urban, the lines of division were principally sectarian, the local constabulary forces were ineffective and unreliable, and the intervening military power quickly became itself the target of insurgent attacks from both sides. The pattern of insurgent activity in Northern Ireland also resembled Iraq, rising from 83 shootings, bombings, and incendiary attacks during 1969 to 3,200 in 1971 and 12,400 in 1972. The following year, 1973, total violent incidents dropped by half, however, and the year after that, by another third. It is surely not coincidence that in these same years, British army forces in Northern Ireland rose from 2,700 in 1969 to a peak of 16,900 in 1973 — the year that violent incidents began to decline precipitously. In the crucial years 1972-1973, the total combat deaths among the security forces (i.e., the British Army, the Ulster Defence Regiment, and the Royal Ulster Constabulary) were almost twice as high as deaths among the insurgents, yet the back of the insurgency was clearly broken. Intensive and adaptive British patrolling drove up the risks to the insurgents and led to the capture and indictments each year of more than a thousand insurgents and collaborators.
One can debate whether the relevant factor in British success was the ratio of British soldiers per square mile or per 1,000 population in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{44} Either way, the numbers are instructive for Iraq. By either measure, British counterinsurgency forces in Northern Ireland were two to three times the size of U.S. forces in Iraq (see Table 1 below). And even at that, it required 25 years of British occupation, and 440 British army combat deaths, before a political settlement ended the insurgency. The British army sustained 161 of those combat deaths in the crucial two years of their campaign, 1972-1973. Relative to the size of the forces committed, this would roughly scale to about 1,500 combat deaths among U.S. forces in Iraq. By mid-April, 2005, two years after the fall of Baghdad, U.S. combat deaths in Iraq stood at 1,184, but with no sign that the insurgency was abating. Counterinsurgency when done properly is costly in soldiers’ lives, but even more costly when done badly.\textsuperscript{45}

If the United States was not inclined to learn from the British experience in Northern Ireland, it could have learned from its own record. Among eight instances of U.S. military occupation undertaken since 1945, there have been four successes (Germany, Japan, Bosnia, and Kosovo), two failures (Haiti and Somalia), and two still in doubt (Iraq and Afghanistan). Of the four successes, none involved a ratio of occupying soldiers per area that was lower than the current U.S. levels in Iraq. If the United States aimed at a comfortable margin in force ratios comparable to the successful occupations of fractured societies such as Northern Ireland, Kosovo, or Bosnia, then U.S. forces levels in Iraq should be at least twice as large as they are currently (see Table 1).\textsuperscript{46}
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Occupation</th>
<th>Soldiers per square mile</th>
<th>Soldiers per 1,000 pop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Successes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany: US zone only</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland: all security forces</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland: British Army only</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uncertain</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq: US and all non-Iraq allies</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq: US only</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Failures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In sum, both historical experience and the Army’s own counterinsurgency guidelines point toward a single conclusion: At current force levels, the prospects of U.S. success in Iraq are not high.

One is bound to wonder how the United States got itself into this situation. Part of the answer is that even if the United States wanted to double or triple its occupation forces in Iraq, it would not be able to do so. As one military analyst notes,

President Bush may want to reconquer every Sunni city in Iraq, but the arithmetic of our forces requires him to plan for disengagement instead. Between the Army, Reserves, National Guard, and Marine Corps, American ground forces amount to about 800,000 troops. More than half a million are in training, procurement, and logistics. That leaves no more than 300,000 for higher commands as well as corps, divisions, and independent brigades. These combat formations in turn have their own headquarters, logistics, and support echelons; hence the so-called “rifle strength” most relevant for Iraq is less than 180,000. That is just about the number already in Iraq, training to go there, or just returned. And with troops also needed elsewhere, from a few Marines to guard embassies to many thousands in Korea and Afghanistan, the Pentagon is scrambling. There can be no widening of the fight in Iraq ...

Already, the Army Reserves and Army National Guard make up 40% of the U.S. forces in Iraq. The Army Reserve has roughly 205,000 soldiers in its ranks, largely for support roles. But the Reserves are being so heavily used for occupations globally that for all practical purposes, only
about 37,500 are prepared and available for missions in Iraq. In a memo to the Army Chief of Staff in December 2004, the commander of the Army Reserves, Lt. Gen. James Helmly warned that the Reserves were “rapidly degenerating into a ‘broken force’” from the operational strain of the Iraqi occupation.48

Another part of the answer is that U.S. diplomacy leading up to the Iraq war failed to draw a major international commitment of troops into the occupation. Even with help from the UN and major allies such as Germany and France, it would not have been possible to double or triple forces levels, but there is at least some evidence that “nation-building” missions of this sort fare better when undertaken under the aegis of international organizations.49

The principal reason the United States finds itself in a perilous condition in Iraq is that despite how often the U.S. Army has been handed the tasks of military occupation and counterinsurgency since 1945, it does not embrace and has not prepared for the role. The Army failed to take the mission seriously before the Iraq war began, and it failed to press home to civilian leaders the fact of its own lack of preparation. Quite possibly, even if the Army had been more insistent, civilian leaders would have plunged ahead with the Iraq war regardless. But they might at least have made some different choices in anticipation of the postwar occupation.50

So for instance, there might have been a very different judgment about what to do with the Iraqi army once the government of Saddam Hussein was overturned — more imaginative than just disbanding it and turning it loose onto the streets, armed and unemployed. The actual decision to disband the Iraqi army was made on May 23, 2003, by the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, L. Paul Bremer III. His justification was that the army had already evaporated and its bases had been stripped by looters. To their credit, some officers in the U.S. Army fought the decision, arguing that if the United States issued a general offer to continue the monthly pay of any Iraqi soldier who reported back to barracks, it might well have enticed a substantial number of young men off the streets and back into bases where they could be supervised and perhaps set to work augmenting U.S. security forces. Nonetheless, it is striking how late the Army threw itself into this issue, and how little fuss it seems to have made with the President over Bremer’s decision. The first high-level Pentagon meeting at which U.S. commander Gen. Tommy Franks deliberated what to do with the Iraqi army occurred on March 3, 2003 — only sixteen days before the war commenced. It appears that the issue was first raised in an NSC meeting with the President in attendance at about the same time, and Bush
reportedly agreed with the idea of keeping the Iraqi army intact and supervised. Yet when Bremer made the decision to dissolve it in May, he did so without consulting Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Tommy Franks, National Security Adviser Rice, nor (apparently) the President. At that stage, the Army was fighting a rear-guard action against a decision already made. And in any case, at that point, the Army seems already to have focused on getting an Iraqi army in place to take over the counterinsurgency burdens so the Army could go home, not to augment an insufficient U.S. force.\textsuperscript{51}

The Army’s lack of interest in, and preparation for counterinsurgency shows up in other, institutional ways. Under international law, an occupying army is responsible for maintaining law and order, and establishing effective civil authority. Even if an insurgency had not sprouted in Iraq, the United States ought to have anticipated heightened levels of general criminal activity — because every society has criminals, Saddam Hussein had emptied all the Iraqi prisons just five months earlier, and what better opportunity for criminals than a war aimed at collapsing the existing government. The inability of the Army to prevent massive looting of government facilities has compounded the problems of economic and political reconstruction in Iraq. Yet even if wholesale pillaging had not occurred, the Army was unprepared for the quotidian task of policing the streets. There is a Military Police branch of the Army, but its institutional orientation is policing within the U.S. military, not within an occupied population. And with total manpower of only 30,000, the Army’s MP force falls far short of the task. California, which is roughly comparable to Iraq in size and demographics, has 98,900 law-enforcement personnel. The current U.S. goal is to train 142,190 Iraqi police personnel, essentially no more than replacement of current U.S. forces. The number actually trained and equipped by April, 2005, was claimed to be 85,965, although reportedly a significant fraction of this force has no capacity to do the counterinsurgency mission necessary.\textsuperscript{52}

The Army’s Counterinsurgency Operations manual is replete with insistence that vital elements of the counterinsurgency campaign must be carried out by local police and paramilitary forces — not just because they are local, but because the tasks are ones for which conventional soldiers are ill-equipped, in both skills and attitudes. Such wisdom ought to have led the Army to an obvious question: Where local police forces have collapsed, who will take on those duties during occupation? One can be partially sympathetic to the Army’s institutional reluctance to take up the burden. During the occupations of Germany and Japan after WW II, the Army
transformed several of its regular units into the United States Constabulary to fill the gap until local police forces could be resurrected within the American zone. These Constabulary units served well in the occupation setting, but when called back into regular combat during the Korean War, they proved woefully unprepared. One analyst has suggested that counterinsurgency is so destructive of military “norms” that it should be contracted out to private security organizations.\textsuperscript{53} And perhaps that ought to be done, especially if the alternative is to cannibalize the ranks of an Army already stretched thin. But it has not yet been done, and in the absence of an effective police force, the security situation in Iraq has become so dangerous that the existing police units appear to be abandoning the practices that make them so effective in counterinsurgency: a willingness to live and work in close proximity to the populace, to travel lightly armed, to follow more restrictive rules of engagement, etc.\textsuperscript{54}

Of the U.S. Army’s Civil Affairs units, many of the same shortcomings apply. The institutional orientation of these units is to serve as liaison between the Army and local authorities, not to serve as interim authority until local government can be resurrected. The Army has 37 Civil Affairs units, with 36 of them drawn from the Army Reserves — an arrangement that allows the Army to maintain this capacity at low cost but also carries the connotation that being prepared to resurrect civil authority is not central to the Army’s core mission.\textsuperscript{55}

Given the handicaps under which the U.S. counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq is operating, are there changes in policy that might improve the prospect of success? Occasionally, insurgents make an egregious error that exposes them to catastrophe, and this might happen in Iraq — just as it happened in the Vietnam War, when the Viet Cong made a strategic misjudgment and were destroyed as an effective force in the 1968 Tet offensive. Certainly the United States ought to stay poised to exploit any bit of good fortune in Iraq. Yet “hang on until the other side makes a stupid mistake” is not a very commanding policy, and as Presidents Johnson and Nixon discovered after Tet, once the public’s skepticism toward military intervention reaches a certain level, it may no longer be possible even to exploit the opponent’s errors. Time is on the side of the insurgents, so whatever the United States is going to do, it must be done soon, and it must raise the public’s confidence in ultimate success.
If the analysis of the counterinsurgency problem in this paper is correct — that the United States is unlikely to succeed with the current ratio of security forces per square mile — then the United States has two choices: come up with more soldiers, or focus on a smaller area within which to gain control.

For reasons already noted, the United States itself cannot come up with significantly larger military forces, neither from its own ranks nor from its allies. The source of more counterinsurgency soldiers will have to be the accelerated training of Iraqis. But “accelerated” has limited meaning here. An effective soldier cannot be produced on an accelerated schedule simply by cutting his weeks of training in half, or by doubling the instruction hours in a day. (Indeed, because most American instructors have no command of Arabic, effective instruction time is already truncated by the tedious process of translation.) Skill in counterinsurgency comes from repetitious drill, extensive field experience, and ultimately, being bloodied in armed confrontation with the insurgents. Soldiers cannot master their trade nor be reliable in battle until they have been in battle. Yet pressed into combat too soon and they are likely to balk or be destroyed.

Because the time required to produce a reliable and skilled soldier cannot be easily compacted, generating a significantly larger force means pulling a very large cohort into training all at the same time. The logistics required are not trivial. Larger forces in training require larger bases, larger stocks of equipment, more instructors, more translators, etc. Because U.S. forces in Iraq are already stretched thin, the cost of enlarged training programs apparently is being met by diverting resources from day-to-day counterinsurgency. This would not be so necessary if the United States had been more successful in drawing its allies into the task of training Iraqi security forces — but it has not been. It is a promising sign that the United States has revised upward the total number of Iraqi security forces that it plans to train, and that it has shifted the balance between police and conventional army more toward police units, just as the British did in Northern Ireland after breaking the back of the insurgency there.56 On the other hand, the training of Iraqi police forces has fallen principally to the U.S. Army’s MP brigades, which are already stretched thin, and to the U.S. State Department’s contract instructors, who are American civilian police officers with (one suspects) scant experience with counterinsurgency.57 It is perhaps telling that by April 2005, the number of Iraqi national guard and army personnel reportedly trained was 69% of the target goal set by the United States, and the portion of border
guards trained was 51% of the goal — while the portion of police trained languished at 39% of the goal. If Iraqi security forces are to be significantly expanded in short order, the task will almost certainly fall to the U.S. Army, that is, to the military service which is already frustrated in its own efforts to cope with the insurgency.

So what of the alternative? If the United States is currently trying to establish control over too large an area with too few soldiers, then an alternative solution would be to scale back the area targeted for control. The aim would be to carry out the range of counterinsurgency tasks within a smaller area first — conducting clear-and-hold operations, performing a census and issuing identity documents, establishing effective police and civil authority, etc. — and then gradually to extend the boundaries of the controlled area. The usual objection to this approach — that the insurgents will simply re-infiltrate the area once security forces move on to new territory — is less persuasive than five other objections. First, unless the United States simultaneously adopts a scheme for harassing the insurgents in their base areas (a counter-insurgency of a different kind?), the insurgents can use the opportunity to consolidate their own organization and position, widen their mass appeal, and thus become even more intractable. Second, although this approach might reduce casualties among American soldiers, it may otherwise fail to yield the dramatic signs of success necessary in order to halt the slide in American public support for the military occupation. Third, this approach cannot work unless newly-established Iraqi security forces augment rather than replace American forces, at least for some time. If the United States persists in thinking, planning, and talking as if U.S. forces can be promptly withdrawn on a one-for-one basis as Iraqi units are trained, then nothing will succeed. Fourth, an approach of this sort (dubbed the ink-blot strategy when it was proposed in Vietnam) will not find favor among the U.S. military, because it is regarded as dangerously passive and defensive, surrendering the initiative to the opponent. Properly conceived, of course, it really would be an instance of tactical defense in the service of strategic offense, since the purpose would be to establish secure garrisons from which ever-wider circles of control could be extended. But such is not the style of the American military. Lastly, the United States appears already to be doing poorly on two of the three requirements for a successful military occupation — i.e., persuading the Iraqi people that they need the occupation, and that they are joined with the United States in facing a common threat. Hunkering down garrison-style might well
undercut the third requirement as well — i.e., presenting a credible promise that we will withdraw and turn over authority to the Iraqi’s themselves in a timely manner.\textsuperscript{58}

In sum, there does not appear to be any easy way around the core problem: the United States undertook the military occupation of Iraq with less than half the military forces needed for the task of occupation and counterinsurgency, and it now rests its prospects for success on the hope that an American military which is not faring well at the counterinsurgency mission will be able to swiftly train Iraq security forces to do vastly better. ‘Tis a rather slender reed on which to hang all the vital interests that the United States has invested in the Iraq venture.
Endnotes

I am grateful to Hiroshi Nakazato and Morgen Bergman for their careful reading and thoughtful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. They have attempted to save me from serious error, and if I have fallen into it nevertheless, the fault is entirely mine.

1 Data from U.S. Central Command, Department of Defense, *The New York Times*, October 19, 2004. Of the 150,000 U.S. soldiers currently in Iraq, roughly 120,000 are Army personnel, and the rest are Marines, Air Force, and Navy. Throughout this paper, the focus is on the policies and actions of the U.S. Army, because of its dominant role not only in total forces but also in planning and commanding the Iraqi counterinsurgency campaign.

2 Reportedly, the troop reductions will begin as soon as May, 2005, when U.S. forces are to be scaled back to 138,000, which was the level prior to the January elections in Iraq. This despite the fact that military officials estimate the number of insurgents remains at between 12,000-20,000. The U.S. intent ultimately is to put in place 142,190 Iraq police, 98,500 national guard and conventional army, and 29,400 border patrol officers, for a total of 270,090. The U.S. State Department’s figures in April 2005 for total Iraqi security personnel “partially or fully trained” stood at 55,900 police, 67,600 national guard and army, and 15,000 border patrol, or 152,600 in all. When asked how many of these are actually capable of independent counterinsurgency missions, the U.S. officer in charge of the training program, Lt. Gen. David H. Petraeus, gave an “off-the-cuff” estimate of 50,000, only a third of the total. Other analysts and military officers would place the number significantly lower.


3 President George W. Bush, speech at the National Defense University in Washington, DC, March 8, 2005, official White House transcript.

Drew Erdmann, a member of the U.S.-established Coalition Provisional Authority, reportedly had a more succinct statement of American goals hanging on his office wall in Baghdad: “End State: A durable peace for a united and stable, democratic Iraq that provides effective and representative government for and by the Iraqi people; is underpinned by new and protected freedoms and a growing market economy; and no longer poses a threat to its neighbors or international security and is able to defend itself.” Quoted in George Packer, “War after the War,” *The New Yorker*, November 24, 2003, p. 59.

4 Text of an undated letter by Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, as translated and published by the Coalition Provisional Authority, Baghdad, February 12, 2004 [bracketed comments added for

5 See “Rings That Kidnap Iraqis Thrive on Big Threats and Bigger Profits,” The New York Times, March 28, 2005: “As many as 5,000 Iraqis have been kidnapped in the last year and a half, according to Western and Iraqi security officials. … Ransom demands, security officials say, range from a few hundred to half a million dollars. … Seen in one way, kidnapping is just another facet of the security vacuum created by the American-led invasion of Iraq and never really filled, despite the hiring and training of tens of thousands of Iraqi police officers. But because of the harrowing effect the kidnapping industry has on Iraqi families, especially the prosperous and educated families whose children are special targets, investigators see kidnapping as a thing unto itself. Scattered anecdotal evidence suggests that the epidemic of kidnapping, especially of children, is a force like no other in driving from Iraq the educated professionals who are critically needed for the rebuilding of the country. … Investigators also suspect that at least some of the kidnappings are undertaken specifically to finance the insurgency.”

6 David M. Edelstein, “Occupational Hazards: Why Military Occupations Succeed or Fail,” International Security, Summer 2004, pp. 49-91. Edelstein notes that there may be multiple goals sought by an occupying power, so he defines success or failure as “the long-term balance of successes and failures within an occupation relative to the cost of occupation.” He concedes that his assessment of this balance in each case involves a degree of prudential judgment. Of the 24 cases Edelstein analyzed (including those involving the United States), Edelstein found only one success among the seven instances where the occupiers sought a focused security goal, and only six successes among the 14 cases where the occupiers aimed at a more comprehensive transformation. All six of these successes involved states occupied immediately after World War II.


8 See, for instance: “The projections, included in a military planning document nicknamed the Matrix that analyzes security in Iraq’s 18 provinces, suggest that Iraqi forces will not be capable of taking the lead in securing Baghdad until January 2006 at the earliest. On a more optimistic note, the analysis says that they have already achieved a large measure of what the military calls ‘local control’ in 14 provinces …” (“U.S. Plans to Ease Offensive and Transfer Some Troops to Train Iraqi Units,” The New York Times, February 2, 2005.)

“In an interview with The Financial Times published Wednesday, Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain said the British and United States governments planned to create a ‘time line’ for beginning the process of handing over swaths of Iraq to domestic Iraqi security forces after
Sunday’s election, a move that is meant to bolster the new government and begin a conversation about when foreign troops will leave the country. ‘There are areas where we would be able to hand over to those Iraqi forces.’ Mr. Blair said. ‘Remember, 14 out of 18 provinces in Iraq are relatively peaceful and stable.’” (“31 Americans Die as Marine Copter Goes Down in Iraq,” The New York Times, January 27, 2005.)

“[Interim Iraqi prime minister Ayad] Allawi, who had declared 15 of Iraq’s 18 provinces to be ‘stable and peaceful’ during his last visit to Washington in September [2004], appears to have abandoned his illusions, now referring to the security situation in Iraq as ‘our catastrophe.’ Last Thursday, he extended the state of emergency in Iraq until early February.” (“A Victory for Terror,” Der Spiegel, January 10, 2005.)

“On Thursday the commander of American ground forces here, Lt. Gen. Thomas Metz, acknowledged that significant areas in 4 of Iraq’s 18 provinces were still not secure enough to allow citizens to vote in the elections.” (“Iraq Guardsmen Face Big Test as Vote Nears and Attacks Increase, The New York Times, January 8, 2005.)

“With three weeks to go before nationwide elections, significant areas of 4 of Iraq’s 18 provinces are still not secure enough for citizens to vote, the commander of American ground forces here said today. (“Weeks Before Vote, General Says Parts of Iraq Are Not Ready,” The New York Times, January 6, 2005.)

“As for the comments by the ground commander in Iraq, Lt. Gen. Thomas Metz, that 4 of the 18 provinces are still not secure enough for voters to be safe, the president [George W. Bush] countered by noting that ‘14 of the 18 provinces appear to be relatively calm.’” (“Bush Dismisses Growing Concerns over Elections in Iraq,” The New York Times, January 7, 2005.)

See “The Security Situation, Attacks by District, Attacks by Type,” The New York Times, at: http://www.nytimes.com/packages/khtml/2005/01/19/international/20050119_iraq_ELECTIONS_GRAPHIC.html. The 29% figure includes 22% of the population in districts that were free from attacks, plus the 7% of the population living in remote Kurdish areas for which there was insufficient district data but which in general have been free of insurgent activity.

Perhaps it helps put these data in perspective to note that Iraq has roughly the same land area, population, and urban/rural demographics as California. In 2003, California had 18 of its 98,900 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty, and 2,402 civilian homicides. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Crime in the United States 2003, Tables on law enforcement personnel by state.

On the economic stagnation in Iraq, see data in Michael E. O’Hanlon and Adrianna Lins de Albuquerque, Iraq Index. Two years into the occupation, unemployment remains at 28-40%, roughly were it has been since January 2004. Crude oil production still has not reached the pre-war level (the United States has abandoned that even as a goal) and is currently no higher than it was in November 2003. The average daily megawatt hours of electrical production is also still below pre-war levels and is currently no higher than the level reached in March 2004.
Surges in both oil and electrical production that were achieved briefly in 2004 have been reversed.

Of the $18.4 billion voted by Congress back in 2003 for Iraq’s reconstruction, by March 2005 only $4.2 billion had actually been disbursed for work completed. Another $4.8 billion originally intended for reconstruction has been diverted to training of Iraqi security forces. Contractors undertaking building projects have had to devote as much as 25% of their funding to security measures for their own protection.

On the consequences of manpower shortages and force-protection measures in separating U.S. soldiers from the populace, consider the experience of Company E of the Second Battalion, Fourth Marine Regiment, stationed in Ramadi for six months. The Marines have long had a reputation for being more willing to move lightly-armed in hostile settings, so the bulk of the Company’s counterinsurgency work was done on foot. But the Marines moved to and from their patrolling areas in Humvees along a highway that the insurgents would mine with explosive devices. “A British officer had taught them to sweep the roads for bombs by boxing off sections and fanning out troops into adjoining neighborhoods in hopes of scaring away insurgents poised to set off the bombs. ‘We didn’t have the time to do that,’ said Sgt. Charles R. Sheldon of Solana Beach, Calif. ‘We had to clear this long section of highway, and it usually took us all day.’” So instead, the Marines tried to become adept at spotting explosive devices while speeding along the highway at 60 mph. Nevertheless, 13 of the Company’s 21 combat deaths occurred while riding the Humvees. In all, one-third of the Company’s 185 soldiers were killed or wounded in Iraq. “Marines From Iraq Sound Off About Want of Armor and Men,” The New York Times, April 25, 2005.


12 Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz may have under-estimated this effect when he asserted in Congressional testimony immediately after the Iraqi elections in January, 2005, that the insurgency “is not a nationalist insurgency. It is an unholy alliance of old terrorists and new terrorists,” remnants of deposed President Saddam Hussein’s regime and “new terrorists drawn from across the region.” See “Testimony as Delivered to the Senate Armed Services Committee: Hearing on Military Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Washington, DC, Thursday, February 3, 2005,” U.S. Defense Department, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs).

From his analysis of historical cases of military occupation, David M. Edelstein concludes that the conditions necessary for success are three: 1) “recognition by the occupied population of the need for the occupation”; 2) “perception by the occupying power and the occupied population of a common threat to the occupied territory”; and 3) “a credible guarantee [by the occupying power] that it will withdraw and return control to an indigenous government in a timely manner.” The results of these opinion polls among Iraqis suggest that the United States is failing to meet the first two of the three necessary conditions. See Edelstein, “Occupational

13 Lt. Col. Richard Lacquement, “The Casualty-Aversion Myth,” *Naval War College Review*, Winter 2004, pp. 39-59. Lacquement offers a review of the public’s supposed aversion to casualties, but the bulk of his article is about the bad effect that a belief in that aversion has had on military leaders and military operations. Lacquement has a PhD from Princeton’s Woodrow Wilson School.

14 John Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973). Scott Gartner and Gary Segura argue that by using the logarithm of cumulative casualties, Mueller obscures spikes that occur in marginal (day-to-day) casualty levels, and thus may obscure more fine-grained sensitivity of the public to casualties. Yet in the end, although Gartner and Segura make the sensible point that sharp spikes in marginal casualty levels might trigger public reactions, their analysis does not seem to challenge the basic point that public tolerance for casualties is quite high. See Gartner & Segura, “War, Casualties, and Public Opinion,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, June 1998, pp. 278-301.

15 Peter Feaver and Christopher Gelpi, “Casualty Aversion: How Many Deaths are Acceptable? A Surprising Answer,” *The Washington Post*, November 7, 1999. Note that the survey question put to political and military elites was what they would judge as acceptable casualties, not what they thought the public would judge as acceptable.


17 See Eric Larson: “The simplest explanation consistent with the data is that support for U.S. military operations and the willingness to tolerate casualties are based upon a sensible weighing of benefits and costs that is influenced heavily by consensus (or its absence) among political leaders.” (p. xv) Larson’s study is based on polling data from the Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and the Somalia intervention.

18 CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll covering March 24, 2003 to March 20, 2005. See the chart included here for a comparison of public responses to the same question during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The peak in June 2004 may have been influenced by events in May, 2004, when the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib entered the news and U.S. forces clashed with the Mahdi Army of Shi’ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.


In the past, it appears that the American public has been willing to persist with unpopular military ventures, at least until any American prisoners have been returned and a modus vivendi has been reached with opponents for the safe withdrawal of U.S. soldiers. See Larson, *Casualties and Consensus*, p. 73. Thus far in Iraq, captured American soldiers are not an issue, and at least some if not all of the insurgent groups would no doubt be pleased to announce a grant of safe-passage to withdrawing American forces.


See O’Hanlon and Albuquerque, *Iraq Index*, April 23, 2005. The ability of American officials to put a favorable cast on these facts is striking: “Senior American officers are wary of declaring success too soon against an insurgency they say still has perhaps 12,000 to 20,000 hard-core fighters, plentiful financing, and the ability to change tactics quickly to carry out deadly attacks. But there is a consensus emerging among these top officers and other senior defense officials about several positive developing trends, although each carries a cautionary note.” “U.S. Commanders See Possible Cut in Troops in Iraq,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 2005. Among the “positive trends” cited is the fact that as U.S. forces have become more adept at protecting themselves, the insurgents have raised their attacks on Iraqi security forces instead — which ought to be equally alarming to U.S. policy-makers.

See the U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Violent Incidents Against the Coalition and Its Partners, by Month, June 2003 through February 2005” *Rebuilding Iraq*, March 24, 2005, p. 10. There was a surge in insurgent attacks leading up to the Iraqi elections on January 30, 2005, and an ebb in attacks has followed. It seems very unlikely that the insurgents have given up their cause simply because the elections occurred, and there has been no recent success in U.S. counterinsurgency efforts that might have crippled the insurgency. It is therefore likely the insurgents have reduced their activity in order to prepare for yet another surge.

A raid by U.S. and Iraqi forces on a lakeside training camp in the Sunni Triangle during March, 2005, reportedly killed some 85 insurgents. The ability of the insurgency simultaneously to sustain high levels of attacks on U.S. and Iraqi forces and also set up large training camps suggests that the insurgents have a substantial “surplus” of manpower, resources, and leadership-in-depth. See “Mine Kills Marine Near Baghdad in Day of Deadly Insurgent Attacks,” *The New York Times*, March 31, 2005.

The apparent abundance of manpower is confirmed in an oblique way by the vignette of a Lebanese school teacher who went to Iraq in late 2003, with the intention of becoming a guerrilla, attracted by the message of al-Zarqawi. Once he arrived, he found the insurgents insisted he pay for his own food and lodging, and that he buy his own military kit from them for $200. Because he lacked any combat experience, he volunteered to be a suicide bomber.


29 The insurgents have at hand a pool of recruits among unemployed (and often angry) young men who are willing to assist in attacks on U.S. forces in exchange for payments as small as $150-$200. In turn, of course, the insurgency itself has stalled the economic reconstruction of Iraq, by endangering the lives of those attempting reconstruction and by inducing the United States to deflect funds from reconstruction into security. See *The New York Times* interview with Brig. Gen. Carter F. Ham, the top American commander in Mosul: “It used to cost just $50 to hire an Iraqi youth to fire a rocket-propelled grenade at American troops; it now costs $100 to $200, the general said. But the increase is small compared with amount of money that insurgents have at their disposal — mostly cash that is driven by car or truck into the country from Syria, General Ham said, where scores of senior Ba’ath Party officials and Saddam apparatchiks fled after the American invasion last year. ‘They’re not hurting for cash.’ he said. ‘That’s a problem.’ With so much money flowing in, past incompetent or easily bribed or intimidated border guards, the insurgents have been able to keep refilling their ranks of low-level or part-time mercenaries while their leaders hide in the dusty warrens of the Old Mosul district or the Yarmouk neighborhood.” “In Northern Iraq, the Insurgency Has Two Faces, Secular and Jihad, but a Common Goal,” *The New York Times*, December 19, 2004.

In fact, the bounty offers cited by Gen. Ham for attacks on U.S. forces do not appear to be any higher than they were a year earlier. “The U.S. 4th Division’s Taskforce Ironhorse reported in November 2003 that between 70 and 80 percent of those apprehended for making attacks in their area [near Tikrit in the “Sunni Triangle”] were paid to do so, the going rate being anything between $150 and $500.” Ian F. W. Beckett, “Insurgency in Iraq: An Historical Perspective,” Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, January 2005, p. 4.

In 2004, the United States diverted $3.46 billion from economic reconstruction into programs for training Iraqi security forces. Subsequently, another $1.3 billion was also diverted, for a total of $4.8 billion of the original $18.4 billion allocated by Congress for reconstruction. It is not clear whether the diversion of funds displays the President’s reluctance to ask Congress for additional security funding, or is instead a concession that general disorder makes reconstruction projects impossible. Either way, it does not auger well. See “Security vs. Rebuilding: Kurdish Town Loses Out,” *The New York Times*, April 16, 2005, and “Rethinking Reconstruction: Grand U.S. Plan Fractures Again,” *The New York Times*, April 17, 2005.


The U.S. Army also has a manual on *Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict*, FM 7-98, published several months before FM 100-5 and not yet replaced by a newer version. Crane argues that the whole orientation of FM 7-98 was to adapt a 1980s combined-forces, AirLand Battle strategy to low intensity warfare, and he notes the odd feature that Vietnam is not explicitly mentioned anywhere in the manual. See Crane, p. 13.


Bruce Hoffman and Jennifer Taw, in a RAND research report prepared for the U.S. Army, show that the Army was not alone in discounting the prospect that it would find itself once again engaged directly in counterinsurgency. On the other hand, Hoffman and Taw also highlighted the Army’s lack of preparation as well. “It is unlikely that U.S. combat troops will be directly involved [in urban counterinsurgency], although such involvement is not precluded by doctrine. Thus, although the U.S. military may well require specialized urban combat skills for future regional contingencies, it is unlikely that it will employ those skills in the context of urban counterinsurgency. Moreover, it is not clear that U.S. military doctrine, training, equipment, or other capacities can effectively contribute to host nations’ counterinsurgency efforts.” Hoffman and Taw, *The Urbanization of Insurgency: The Potential Challenge to U.S. Army Operations* (Santa Monica: RAND Corp., 1994), pp. 23-24.

34 U.S. ground forces levels in Iraq on April 8, 2003, when Baghdad fell were 92,000. They reached 142,500 in May and continued rising to 148,750 by July, when the number started to decline. At the end of 2003, U.S. forces had dropped to 122,500, while U.S. casualties continued to rise from 195 in August, 2003, to 446 in October and 408 in November. See GlobalSecurity.org, “U.S. Ground Forces End Strength,” www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_orbat_es.htm

35 Field Manual 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, October 2004), pp. 1-2 to 1-3 and 3-1. Prior to this publication, the definitive guide was the Marine Corps’ *Small Wars Manual*, first published in 1940 and reissued in 1987. None of the military services had produced a manual expressly on tactics,


37 FM 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, p. 1-9. Indeed, so long as an insurgency stays focused in urban areas, it may not be capable of organizing main-force units because urban areas do not provide large, secure spaces where main-force units can assemble and train in battalion-sized maneuvers. See Hoffman and Taw, *The Urbanization of Insurgency*, p. 18.


39 “Although urban insurgencies have traditionally been the easiest kind to defeat, that may no longer be the case.” “In countries as diverse as Peru and Turkey, insurgents are setting up ‘liberated zones’ in urban shantytowns. Such zones, which are nearly impenetrable, afford the insurgents many of the same advantages they enjoyed in the jungles of the rural areas.” “Because of their warrenlike alleys and unpaved roads, the [urban] slums have become as impregnable to the security forces as a rural insurgent’s jungle or forest base. The police are unable to enter these areas, much less control them. The insurgents thus seek to sever the government’s authority over its urban centers, thereby weakening both its resolve to govern and its support from the people.” Hoffman and Taw, *The Urbanization of Insurgency*, pp. ix and 12.


41 FM 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, pp. 3-5 to 3-6.


43 FM 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, pp. 3-14. A Marine intelligence assessment at the time of the sweep through Falluja also warned that unless significantly larger U.S. forces were left stationed in the city after the assault, the insurgents would return. See “Marine Officers See Risk in Cuts in Falluja Force,” *The New York Times*, November 18, 2004.

44 James T. Quinlivan, “Force Requirements in Stability Operations,” *Parameters*, Winter 1995, pp. 59-69. Quinlivan links his analysis of troop requirements entirely to ratios of soldiers per 1,000 population, with the assertion that “a ‘hearts and minds’ counterinsurgency campaign places the focus on the people, the military consequences of which are requirements for population control measures and local security of population. Population control measures and local security both demand security force numbers proportional to the population.”
The difficulty with Quinlivan’s argument is that it does not seem grounded on any specific notion of the tactics effective in a counterinsurgency, and it seems more appropriate to a mass-mobilization insurgency, rather than the armed-action insurgency currently faced in Iraq. If “population control” means coping with hostile crowds, searching dwellings, and checking identity documents, then to some degree the ratio of soldiers to population does matter. But in other respects, and particularly in urban areas, the ability of a platoon to carry out intensive patrolling may be relatively indifferent to whether a city block contains 100 people or 1,000. Moreover, as Quinlivan concedes, his illustrative cases serve only to show what intervening states have done historically; the cases are not exhaustive, nor are they sorted into successes and failures. So the merit of ratios based on population alone is not settled by Quinlivan’s data or analysis. None of this diminishes Quinlivan’s core conclusion that counterinsurgency missions are so manpower-intensive that the U.S. military likely cannot sustain them for long in anything but the smallest of states.

45 In Northern Ireland, here were an additional 489 combat deaths among the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). In Iraq, there have been an additional 177 combat deaths among the other non-Iraqi members of the Coalition. See Peter Neumann, Britain’s Long War: British Strategy in the Northern Ireland Conflict (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Appendix; Col. Michael Dewar, The British Army in Northern Ireland (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1996), Appendix; and O’Hanlon & Albuquerque, Iraq Index.

See also Beckett: “there are also lessons to be learned from the British experience in tackling an organization which displays characteristics of both an insurgent and a terrorist group. It has operated principally in an urban environment but also in a rural environment, has enjoyed refuge across an international frontier, and has manipulated the situation within a deeply divided community. … It can be noted that the British army indeed has achieved an acceptable level of violence, but with a substantially larger ratio of security forces to population than is currently in Iraq. In Northern Ireland, it has been 20 per 1,000 inhabitants, whereas in Iraq, it is currently 6.1 per 1,000. There was also a useful continuity and familiarity with operational areas established through a system of some [British] battalions serving long tours and others shorter tours of 2.5 years and 6 months, respectively.” Ian F. W. Beckett, “Insurgency in Iraq: An Historical Perspective,” Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, January 2005, p. 7.

46 Data in Table 1 for population and international stability forces are drawn from James T. Quinlivan, “Burden of Victory: The Painful Arithmetic of Stability Operations,” RAND Review, Summer 2003, and Dobbins, et al., America’s Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq (Santa Monica: RAND, 2003).

The calculations in the chart assume conservatively that half of Iraq is uninhabited desert which does not require a significant presence of security forces. This assumption enhances the soldiers-per-sq-mile ratio shown for Iraq. In fact, the insurgents do exploit some of this desert area and might use it more extensively as an operational base if hard-pressed by a counterinsurgency campaign. In that case, U.S. forces would be even more inadequate.
The case of Germany is anomalous. Although the United States Constabulary force numbered 38,000 among a population in the American occupation zone of 17.1 million Germans (2.2 soldiers per 1,000) over a land area of 42,295 square miles (0.9 soldiers per sq mile), there were 230,000 other soldiers that remained in the zone as Cold War tensions began to rise. If these are included, on the argument that their presence had a stabilizing influence over the German population, then the ratios change to 6.3 soldiers per sq mile and 15.7 per 1,000 population.

The judgments about success or failure of these occupations are drawn from Edelstein, “Occupational Hazards,” pp. 84-91.


49 See James Dobbins, “The UN’s Role in Nation-Building: From the Belgian Congo to Iraq,” Survival, Winter 2004-2005, pp. 81-102. The number of Coalition allies and their troop contributions in Iraq continue to shrink. Poland with 1,700 soldiers in Iraq, Ukraine with 1,650, and Italy with 3,000 have all announced their intention to withdraw their forces by the end of 2005.

50 I will concede that despite what I see as the U.S. Army’s lack of preparation for the missions that have come to dominate American foreign policy, a portion of the responsibility for the Iraq problem also lies with civilian authority, which seems to have placed military leaders in the position of either doing the best they could with insufficient forces or handing in their resignations to the President and his civilian advisers (precisely the choice confronted in Vietnam, according to the interpretations touted by Col. Harry Summers and Maj. H.R. McMaster). So for instance, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki, who had served as commander of the U.S. peacekeeping force in Bosnia, responded to a question put to him by the Senate Armed Services Committee in February 2003 about the forces needed for occupation of Iraq by warning, “Something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers are probably a figure that would be required. We’re talking about a post-hostilities control over a piece of geography that’s fairly significant, with the kinds of ethnic tensions that could lead to other problems.” Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz subsequently testified that Shinseki’s estimate was “wildly off the mark.” “The notion that it would take several hundred thousand American troops just seems outlandish,” he said, because there was no history of ethnic strife in Iraq, the Iraqi civilians would welcome an American-led liberation force that "stayed as long as necessary but left as soon as possible," and other countries would step in with resources to help rebuild Iraq. Wolfowitz added that he found it difficult to understand how someone could predict that the occupation would require more troops than the invasion itself. Of course, the Army’s field manual Counterinsurgency Operations explains in detail why a campaign against insurgents will require more soldiers than a conventional war against a conventional opponent.
Wolfowitz later told Congress that in criticizing Shinseki’s prediction, he was relying on the judgment of Gen. Tommy Franks, head of U.S. Central Command. Shinseki found some support in the Secretary of the Army, retired Brig. Gen. Thomas White, who later remarked that senior officials were “unwilling to come to grips” with the occupation forces required: “It’s almost a question of people not wanting to ‘fess up to the notion that we will be there a long time and they might have to set up a rotation and sustain it for the long term.” Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld demanded Secretary White’s resignation in April 2003.

A British analyst, Alastair Finlan, carries the argument further and suggests that even the tactics used by U.S. soldiers in Iraq’s cities are shaped by the neoconservative civilian leaders in the Pentagon, whose asserted pro-Israel bias has somehow led the U.S. Army to adopt the same, counter-productive techniques in Iraq that are used by Israel against the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. See Finlan, “Trapped in the Dead Ground: U.S. Counterinsurgency Strategy in Iraq,” Small Wars and Insurgencies, March 2005, pp. 1-21. A more reasonable interpretation, and one more consistent with the evidence Finlan actually cites, would be that the heavy-handed tactics stem from the U.S. Army’s lack of preparation for urban counterinsurgency and thus its reliance on advice and examples from others, including the Israelis.

None of this interaction seems to alter the basic point: the U.S. Army failed to plan for the occupation and possible insurgency, although the government of Saddam Hussein advertised in advance that it planned to mount just such an insurgency, and even as the insurgency began to grow, the Army started gathering up its soldiers and packing them home.


52 The bulk of the U.S. Army’s Military Police battalions are drawn from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve and are not a full-time component of the regular Army. See The Annual Report of the Reserve Forces Policy Board, May 2001, Chapter 1, “Roles, Missions, and Operations,” Table 1-1. The U.S. force-level goal for Iraqi police personnel was revised upward only in June 2004, from 89,369 to 142,190. See U.S. Department of State, Iraq Weekly Status Report, April 20, 2005. Some of the shortage in Military Police forces in Iraq was not the U.S. Army’s fault. On the eve of the war, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld trimmed two MP brigades (about 3,000 soldiers) from the force structure that was recommended by professional military officers.

The U.S. State Dept has an Office of Civilian Police (CIVPOL), but the budget is small and the headquarters staff is four people. For the task of assisting peacekeeping missions abroad, the
State Department has hired a private firm, DynCorp International, which characteristically has given police officers only about ten days of training before handing them along to the UN for missions. DynCorp International has a contract with the State Department to provide “up to 1,000 civilian police advisors … to help the Iraqi citizens organize effective civilian law enforcement agencies,” for which it requires at least 5 years of civilian law enforcement experience but no foreign-language skills, and offers compensation of up to $120,600 per year plus all lodging and meals. The Justice Department has its International Criminal Investigative Training and Assistance Program (ICITAP) for training foreign police officers, but again, this unit is small and not coordinated with other agencies. See Rachel Bronson, “When Soldiers Become Cops,” Foreign Affairs, Nov/Dec 2002, pp. 122-132, and DynCorp’s recruitment materials.

On the inadequacies of the training and equipment for the current Iraqi police force, even within the neighborhoods of Baghdad, and the demoralizing effect this has on both the police and civilians who want to cooperate with them against the insurgents, see “A Haircut in Iraq Can Be the Death of the Barber,” The New York Times, March 18, 2005. The Iraqi police officers in Baghdad are reportedly paid $140 a month, in contrast to the $150-$500 the insurgents will reportedly pay volunteers for a single attack on U.S. soldiers.

53 See Rod Paschall, “Low-intensity Conflict Doctrine: Who Needs It?” Parameters, No. 15, 1985, pp. 33-45. A survey of attitudes toward peacekeeping missions among Reserve and regular U.S. Army units found that although “soldiers in the Reserve unit generally had more constabulary attitudes than those in the active duty unit,” neither group thought peacekeeping was an appropriate mission for their unit, and substantial majorities in both units agreed that “a soldier who is well trained in basic military skills requires additional training for peacekeeping.” See David R. Segal, et. al., “Constabulary Attitudes of National Guard and Regular Soldiers in the U.S. Army,” Armed Forces & Society, Summer 1998, pp. 535-549.

When regular combat soldiers require additional training for counterinsurgency, it comes at a price, because the time spent in special training and counterinsurgency deployment is not being used to hone regular combat skills. The way to cope with this is to rotate such soldiers out of their counterinsurgency assignments and send them home to practice their combat roles. As a larger and larger fraction of the total forces are deployed in the counterinsurgency role, however, this time for re-training and practice back home can be purchased only by extending the period of deployment abroad in the counterinsurgency role — which in turn means that the deployed soldier’s regular combat skills will become dulled even further. This problem would be diminished considerably if designated units were specifically trained and reserved for the counterinsurgency role and not expected to prepare and train for other non-counterinsurgency roles. But this is exactly what the U.S. Army has resisted. On the interaction between deployment and re-training periods, see James T. Quinlivan, “Force Requirements in Stability Operations,” Parameters, Winter 1995, pp. 59-69.

54 For an argument about the importance of military police in the Army’s occupation missions, and a critique of the Army’s neglect of the MP forces, see Brig. Gen. Raymond E. Bell Jr. (ret.), “Green Tabs for Combat MPs,” Army Magazine, January 2004. It is significant that in
order to get the Army to pay attention to the MPs, Gen. Bell feels compelled to argue that the differences between the MPs and regular infantry have become increasingly blurred in Iraq: “It is now time … to recognize that the military police of the U.S. Army are also combat soldiers. … Today’s military police are no longer engaged solely in the rear areas. They are as much in the midst of battle as any combatant. They are equipped to fight as infantry. In fact, they are even more heavily armed, since their basic weapons are a rifle and a pistol. They are also more mobile than foot soldiers with their up-armored Humvees and armored security vehicles. These vehicles deploy with machine guns and Mark 19 automatic grenade launchers. The firepower of a military police combat support company lacks only mortars to approach that of a light infantry battalion.”

55 Relying upon the Reserves for support services that might not be needed in every war — such as constabulary police or civil affairs officers — has a certain logic within a finite Defense Department budget. Yet because these are also services relevant to the types of conflicts that the post-Vietnam U.S. Army has wished to avoid, one might wonder if they have been relegated to the Reserves in anticipation that civilian policy-makers will therefore be more reluctant to call upon the Army for such conflicts, because pulling the Reserves out of their civilian careers and communities is likely to involve more political costs than committing an all-volunteer professional Army. I am indebted to Hiroshi Nakazato for this insight.

56 Prior to June 2004, the stated U.S. goals were to train 89,400 police and 105,400 conventional army, national guard, and border guards, so that the police would have constituted 46% of the total security force. The goals have since been revised upward to 142,190 police and 127,900 conventional army, national guard, and border guards, so that the Iraqi police will become 53% of the total security forces.

By comparison, in Northern Ireland, Britain built up the Royal Ulster Constabulary as it reduced British Army forces, so that the RUC shifted from being 15% of the counterinsurgency force in 1973 to 33% in 1994 when a political agreement was struck, effectively ending the insurgency. The British also used the RUC as a highly visible channel for integrating Catholics into civil institutions in the North, which produced a more effective constabulary while responding to one of the grievances that fueled Catholic support for the insurgency.

The Iraqi national guard, which was originally a lightly-armed regional force, was merged into the Iraqi army in February 2005 in an effort to bring the guard up to the army’s higher standard of equipment, training, and performance and to allow guard units to be re-deployed outside of their home regions. This may not have been wise. From the standpoint of counterinsurgency, it might have been better to leave the national guard units more lightly-armed as a paramilitary force, and more connected to their home communities. Raising the armor and armament levels of counterinsurgency units invites them to adopt tactics that increase collateral damage to civilians and alienate them from the public.

As an example, consider this criticism by a senior British Army officer of the use of heavy armament in U.S. tactics: “The officer explained that, under British military rules of war, British troops would never be given clearance to carry out attacks similar to those being
conducted by the U.S. military, in which helicopter gunships have been used to fire on targets in urban areas. British rules of engagement only allow troops to open fire when attacked, using the minimum force necessary and only at identified targets. The American approach was markedly different: ‘When US troops are attacked with mortars in Baghdad, they use mortar-locating radar to find the firing point and then attack the general area with artillery, even though the area they are attacking may be in the middle of a densely populated residential area. They may well kill the terrorists in the barrage, but they will also kill and maim innocent civilians. That has been their response on a number of occasions. It is trite, but American troops do shoot first and ask questions later. They are very concerned about taking casualties…’” “US Tactics Condemned by British Officers,” The Daily Telegraph, April 11, 2004.

57 Prof. Robert Scigliano of Boston College, who once participated in a U.S. program to train civil servants in South Vietnam during the late-1950s, was fond of telling a story about being in South Vietnam and encountering a State Police officer from Massachusetts who was there on contract from the U.S. government. Asked about what he had as a specialty that he could bring to bear in the turbulent circumstances of South Vietnam, the police officer replied, “Bank fraud.”

58 See Edelstein, op. cit.