The Goldwater Nichols Act of 1986 and American Counterinsurgency:

Comparing Afghanistan and Vietnam

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by

ANDREW T. GOODHART

has been approved for
the Department of Political Science
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

Patricia A. Weitsman
Professor of Political Science

Benjamin M. Ogles
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Abstract

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The Goldwater-Nichols Act was passed in 1986 to make the American military more capable of fighting conventional wars. However, in the post-Cold War world, the United States increasingly faces unconventional threats. This study examines the effect that Goldwater-Nichols has had on U.S. Counterinsurgency capabilities, comparing the cases of Vietnam and Afghanistan. It draws on bureaucratic theory to understand how changes in institutional structure affect warfighting.

I conclude that the expanded power of the unified combatant commands and an increased focus on jointness has made the U.S. more capable of fighting insurgencies. Counterinsurgency in Vietnam suffered from a fractured chain of command and an overemphasis on offensive strategies. Afghanistan has seen a rationalization of decision-making and a greater focus on ‘hearts and minds’ strategies. Insufficient commitment from Washington civilian leadership, however, has deprived U.S. troops in Afghanistan of the resources they need to prevail.

Approved: ________________________________

Patricia A. Weitsman

Professor of Political Science
To the American men and women who, with grit, compassion, ingenuity and perseverance, have fought insurgents in the face of difficult conditions and insufficient support.
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>ANA</td>
<td>Afghan National Army</td>
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<td>ANP</td>
<td>Afghan National Police</td>
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<td>ARVN</td>
<td>Army of Vietnam</td>
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<td>CA</td>
<td>Civil Affairs</td>
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<td>CAOC</td>
<td>Combined Air Operations Center</td>
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<td>CAPS</td>
<td>Combined Action Platoons</td>
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<td>CAS</td>
<td>Close Air Support</td>
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<td>CENTCOM</td>
<td>United States Central Command</td>
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<td>CFACC</td>
<td>Coalition Forces Air Component Command</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFC-A</td>
<td>Combined Forces Command Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFLCC</td>
<td>Coalition Forces Land Component Command</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHLC</td>
<td>Coalition Humanitarian Liaison Cell</td>
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<tr>
<td>CINC</td>
<td>Commander in Chief</td>
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<tr>
<td>CINCPAC</td>
<td>Commander in Chief, Pacific</td>
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<tr>
<td>CJCMOTF</td>
<td>Coalition Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force</td>
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<td>CJTF</td>
<td>Combined Joint Task Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMO</td>
<td>Civil Military Operations</td>
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<td>CMOC</td>
<td>Civil Military Operations Center</td>
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<td>COIN</td>
<td>Counterinsurgency</td>
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<td>CORDS</td>
<td>Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support</td>
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<td>CSTC-A</td>
<td>Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan</td>
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<td>DOD</td>
<td>Department of Defense</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMS</td>
<td>Interagency Management System</td>
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<td>ISAF</td>
<td>International Security and Assistance Force</td>
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<td>JCS</td>
<td>Joint Chiefs of Staff</td>
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<td>JSOC</td>
<td>Joint Special Operations Command</td>
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<td>MAAG</td>
<td>Military Assistance and Advisory Group</td>
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<td>MACV</td>
<td>Military Assistance Command Vietnam</td>
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<td>NCA</td>
<td>National Command Authority</td>
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<td>NLF</td>
<td>National Liberation Front</td>
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<td>PLO</td>
<td>Palestinian Liberation Organization</td>
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<td>QIP</td>
<td>Quick Impact Project</td>
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<td>PRT</td>
<td>Provincial Reconstruction Team</td>
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<td>RF/PF</td>
<td>Regional and Popular Forces</td>
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<td>SOCOM</td>
<td>United States Special Operations Command</td>
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<td>SOF</td>
<td>Special Operations Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAC</td>
<td>Strategic Air Command</td>
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<td>TAOR</td>
<td>Tactical Area of Responsibility</td>
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<td>PROVN</td>
<td>Pacification and Long-Term Development of Vietnam</td>
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<td>UAV</td>
<td>Unmanned Aerial Vehicle</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis assesses the impact of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 on United States counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts. It does so by employing a comparative case study, examining the wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan. The Goldwater-Nichols Act fundamentally changed the way the United States structures war fighting, leading Secretary of Defense Les Aspin to call it “the greatest sea change in the history of the American military since the Continental Congress created the Continental Army in 1775.”

Passed in 1986, the law was conceived in the bipolar context of the Cold War, when the primary threat to American security was that of conventional war with the Soviet Union or its proxies. The intent of Goldwater-Nichols was to make the U.S. military more capable of defeating its adversaries on the conventional battlefield. Most literature on the law reflects the Cold War bias toward conventional war and little attention has been given to its effect on unconventional war. This study fills part of that gap by explaining how Goldwater-Nichols has enabled the United States to better fight insurgencies.

Although the United States faced insurgencies in the Cold War, they have become more central to American planning since the end of bipolarity. Preponderant U.S. power makes it more likely that adversaries will turn to unconventional tactics in order to avoid the U.S.’s overwhelming conventional strength. Conventional military efforts are

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usually directed at compelling another government to change its behavior. Insurgencies are different because they seek to take over the apparatus of government and institute a new order. Defeating an insurgency therefore requires an approach that is more closely linked to political goals. An institutional context that emphasizes unity of command and cooperation makes it easier to coordinate military actions and tie them to political goals. Analysis of the effect bureaucratic reform has on counterinsurgency is therefore especially important.

This thesis follows military convention by distinguishing between the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. Strategic refers to the level at which national decision makers “establish national and multinational military objectives; sequence initiatives; define limits and assess risks for the use of military and other instruments of national power.”3 The operational level is “the level of war at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to achieve strategic objectives within theaters or other operational areas.”4 The tactical level is defined as “the level of war at which battles and engagements are planned and executed to achieve military objectives assigned to tactical units or task forces.”5

The Goldwater-Nichols Act was passed in order to increase the overall effectiveness and efficiency of American military operations. It accomplishes this by amending title 10 of the United States Code, which prescribes the appropriate structure

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and functions of the military. At the strategic level, the law included changes to the structure of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to enhance the power of civilian decision makers and improve the quality of advice they receive from the military. At the operational level, it strengthened the unified combatant commands whose power had been circumscribed by the military service branches. The law also directed greater focus on contingency planning. At the tactical level, Goldwater-Nichols enhanced the ability of the service branches to work together. Cooperation is achieved through increases in joint training, doctrine, and equipment interoperability. Congress intended that the cumulative effect of these reforms would be a military that is more capable and avoids competition and duplication of effort among the service branches.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act empowered the United States to more effectively fight insurgencies at the operational and tactical levels. Decision making at both levels was rationalized by unifying the chain of command. At the operational level, one commander is in charge of all assets in a military theater, which allows him to formulate strategy without regard for the interests of individual service branches. At the tactical level, increases in joint training and inter-service interoperability have enabled the military branches to work together more effectively. The combined effect of these changes is a military bureaucracy that is more capable of executing national COIN strategy.

I exclude the strategic level from this study because such an analysis would focus on the outcome of a military campaign to assess the quality of national doctrine. A

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6 There are ten unified combatant commands post-Goldwater-Nichols. Six are responsible for geographic regions while the remaining four perform functional tasks.
thorough examination of all the variables affecting success or failure is outside the scope of this study. In the case of Afghanistan, such a focus would also be premature. Instead, I focus on whether the United States is now more equipped to implement national strategy at the operational and tactical levels.

This study draws on bureaucratic theory, which argues that institutional structure affects how militaries approach war-fighting. The wrong bureaucratic structure will result in a sub-optimal response to threats, and may lead to defeat. Such an understanding conflicts with realism, which assumes that states will employ their resources in a manner that is optimal for success. The United States experience in Vietnam illustrates how the parochial interests of the military service branches fueled sub-optimal strategies. At both the operational and tactical levels, military efforts focused too heavily on conventional, offensive strategies, which were ill-suited to counterinsurgency war. The American COIN campaign in Afghanistan has seen far more inter-service cooperation, as well as an emphasis on the use of limited force.

I demonstrate that the Goldwater-Nichols Act enhanced American COIN capabilities, by investigating how efforts at the operational and tactical levels changed between the American wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan. My analysis takes the form of a comparative case study, focusing on several key variables across the two cases. This approach facilitates theory-building because it allows for the application of consistent metrics across multiple case studies.
Significance of Topic and Project Overview

The United States’ failure in Vietnam cost the United States 47,434 American lives and 549 billion dollars, to say nothing of the domestic civil strife and loss of international prestige that were by-products of that war.7 The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have cost 538 and 4106 American lives respectively8 and a combined $666 billion since 2001.9 The cost of counterinsurgency is high, and it behooves national leaders to understand how institutional change may affect the chance of success. Given the military restructuring ushered in by Goldwater-Nichols, it is appropriate to ask what its effect has been on counterinsurgency.

Chapter 1 introduces the theoretical underpinnings of my analysis. I also explain the methodology, metrics, and limitations of this study. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature on insurgency and counterinsurgency, while Chapter 3 explains the relevant aspects of Goldwater-Nichols. In chapters 4 and 5, I present my Vietnam and Afghanistan case studies respectively. Chapter 6 provides an analysis of the effect that Goldwater-Nichols had on counterinsurgency. In Chapter 7, I discuss possibilities for institutional improvement. Chapter 8 presents brief conclusions.

Theory

International relations theory overwhelmingly focuses on military strength as a predictor of war outcomes. This is due to the dominance of realist theory and its focus on

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polarity. Realism assumes that a nation will translate its strength into the necessary policies and strategies to assert its will over those of its adversaries. By refusing to open the ‘black box’ of states, the theory fails to account for the role that decision-making and command structures play in determining the outcome of international political contests. To be fair, realism, as articulated by Morgenthau, does acknowledge that the quality of national leadership may impact war outcomes. It does so, however, by way of caveat, and the result is a common reading of Morgenthau that assumes rationality and focuses on material strength to predict outcomes.

My argument is consistent with the one articulated by Van Creveld, who writes that “a superior command system may serve as a force multiplier” and that the increasing complexity of modern warfare makes effective systems of command and control more important than in the past. In other words, it is not enough for a state to surpass its enemies in material strength. To prevail in armed conflict, a state must have a bureaucratic structure that allows it to respond to the unique nature of each engagement. By examining the effects of institutional structure on counterinsurgency, this study contributes to a theoretical understanding of international relations that realism alone cannot provide.

Bureaucratic theory predicts institutions will be focused both on their mission as well as on guarding their place in the larger organizational structure. Institutional differentiation is necessary because of the complexity of tasks that large organizations have to accomplish. Focusing on a specific ‘critical task’ creates a sense of mission that

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allows an institution to be effective and cohesive.11 The critical tasks of many such
institutions, when combined together, allow the larger organization to accomplish
complex objectives. However, these institutions may resist the coordination of their
efforts. Wilson writes that “members of a military service, or any organization, will try
to defend and advance the interests of their parent organizations whenever they are
placed in an interorganizational setting.”12 An organization acts defensively because it is
“like a fish in a coral reef: To survive, it needs to find a supportive ecological niche.”
Having such a niche ensures institutional relevance. In contrast, cooperation raises the
risk that an organization will lose autonomy. Cooperation also increases the likelihood
that others will cause a project to fail and that blame will be unfairly attributed.13

These observations of bureaucracy are, perhaps, intuitive. The counter-
productivity of such intra-bureaucratic competition, however, stands in contrast to the
unity of effort assumed by realism. It therefore warrants explicit statement. Within non-
governmental bureaucracies, competition is likely to mean duplication and waste. In a
war-fighting bureaucracy, however, the stakes are much higher and the ability to prevail
in war may rest on the ability of leaders at the top of the organizational hierarchy to
effectively coordinate the efforts of the institutions below them.

The military services, to the extent that they exert influence on the operational and
tactical planning for war, will choose strategies that maintain their respective niches.
Their planning is influenced by concerns for their position vis-à-vis other branches as

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11 James Q. Wilson, Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It (New York: Basic
12 Ibid, 58.
well as by the type of fighting in which they specialize. These institutional incentives are likely to drive the service branches to pursue aggressive strategies. Snyder argues that offensive strategies promise the greatest resources and independence from civilian decision makers.¹⁴ Posen echoes Snyder and adds that the importance of gaining an advantage over one’s adversaries will tend to push military planners toward an offensive strategy.¹⁵

In counterinsurgency operations, however, an overtly offensive strategy is likely to alienate members of the non-combatant population and drive them into the ranks of insurgents. This is because effective counterinsurgency relies on convincing the local population not to support the insurgent movement. A strategy that focuses on simply killing insurgents will only succeed under the narrowest of circumstances.

Insurgencies are an attempt to replace the existing government with a new order. Counterinsurgencies try to maintain the existing order through a balance of coercion and persuasion. The requirements of a successful counterinsurgency are expected to be at odds with the institutional proclivities of the military, particularly its constitutive branches. Success will, therefore, be possible when national leaders are empowered to direct the military in pursuit of national interests, rather than narrow, institutional ones.

Methodology

This thesis follows Alexander George’s method of structured, focused comparison to understand the effect of Goldwater-Nichols on American counterinsurgency. George’s

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method is used because it overcomes the disadvantages inherent in many case studies. Examining a single case in great depth to understand its uniqueness or applying an existing theory to a case are two methods that constitute the bulk of political science case study research. These approaches are useful for gaining knowledge about particular circumstances, but they do not lend themselves to comparative analysis and theory-building. Structured, focused comparison, however, involves the application of a narrow set of criteria to multiple cases to understand how those cases are similar or different in regard to a particular issue of interest. The application of discrete criteria enables researchers to expand the comparison to additional case studies. The results form the basis for generating theory.

In this study, I explain the effect of bureaucratic changes on American COIN capacity at the operational and tactical levels. To do so, I first identify the relevant independent, dependent, and intervening variables. These are taken from the bodies of literature on counterinsurgency requirements and the expected effects of bureaucratic structure on military performance. From these variables, I derive a set of 8 questions to be applied to both case studies. The answers to these questions allow me to compare and contrast the two cases and identify the causal mechanisms for changes that occurred.

I test whether the increase in the ability of the military services to operate jointly and the increased power of the commanders in chief (CINCs) of the unified combatant commands have made the U.S. more capable of waging counterinsurgencies.  

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16 Eckstein calls these ‘configurative-idiographic’ and ‘disciplined-configurative’ case studies respectively.
17 When the acronym CINC is used in this paper, it refers to the commander in chief of one of the unified combatant commands. When the complete title, Commander in Chief, is used, it normally refers to the
Bureaucratic theory suggests that leaders without a service interest in the form that operations take will be more likely to employ military power in a rationalized manner. Goldwater-Nichols has this effect by enhancing the power of the unified commands vis-à-vis the service branches. Empowering the CINC s gives them the authority to draw on assets from across the military services. Improvements in joint training and doctrine enable such inter-service assets to work together effectively.

Three dependent variables are evaluated to judge the capability of the U.S. military to coordinate COIN efforts during the Vietnam and Afghanistan conflicts. These are 1) whether unity of command existed; 2) whether a hearts and minds strategy was pursued in planning and directing U.S. assets; and 3) the ability of the military services to cooperate at the tactical level. The first variable is judged according to the extent to which there existed a single chain of command with the unified theater commander in possession of overall control of operational planning. Assessment of the second variable reflects whether the theater commander pursued a strategy that focused on convincing the indigenous population not to support the insurgency, rather than simply trying to kill insurgents. Finally, cooperation among the service branches is evaluated by the extent to which effective joint assets were available to the unified commander.

The independent variables under question are three changes to U.S. Code, title 10, which govern 1) the authority of the CINC s of the unified combatant commands; 2) the requirements for joint training among the military services; and 3) the creation of a new President, but usage here follows common practice in the literature on the unified combatant commands. CINC CENTCOM, for example, indicates the Commander in Chief of Central Command.
A unified combatant command known as U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), which is responsible for Special Operations Forces (SOFs).

The intervening variables are 1) intervention in military operations by the President or Secretary of Defense and 2) the influence of advances in military technology. Actions by the President or Secretary of Defense are considered because these two individuals compose the National Command Authority (NCA) and are above the theater commanders in the chain of command. The thrust of this analysis is on the extent to which the theater commanders’ authority has empowered them to coordinate joint assets in a rationalized manner. Intervention by the President or the Secretary of Defense, however, may have changed the authority of the commander in question and is treated as an intervening variable. A second intervening variable is the change in the level of technology from one counterinsurgency campaign to another. Such technology may have led to increased coordination and control that is not attributable to Goldwater-Nichols. Technological improvements may also have made inter-service cooperation easier. The chart below illustrates the relevant variables and causal flow.
The cases examined in this study were chosen because they are examples of American efforts against prolonged, indigenous insurgencies. Of course, testing the effects of Goldwater-Nichols requires that one conflict occurred before, and the other after, the Goldwater-Nichols Act took effect. The closer these two counterinsurgency efforts are in time, the less impact technological changes should have had. Vietnam is an ideal first case because it is the most recent prolonged, indigenous insurgency the U.S. fought prior to passage of Goldwater-Nichols. In the period after Goldwater-Nichols, either the war in Afghanistan or the war in Iraq would be an appropriate example of U.S. COIN.
Afghanistan is used here for three reasons. First, it is the first major U.S. counterinsurgency campaign since Goldwater-Nichols became law. It is also being waged long enough after passage of Goldwater-Nichols that the effects of the law should be observable. Second, examining the war in Iraq would require me to separate the effects of Goldwater-Nichols from those of institutional learning from the war in Afghanistan. This would complicate analysis by adding an additional intervening variable. Lastly, the war in Afghanistan provides an opportunity to see how the defense establishment responds when confronted suddenly with a threat. Potential deficiencies in military structure are more likely to be apparent when the defense establishment is forced to react quickly, as it was after 9/11 in the decision to invade Afghanistan. The Iraq war would be a less suitable example, given the longer period of time that the administration had to plan that invasion.

**Metrics**

In order to ensure that evaluation of both case studies is consistent, I ask a number of questions of each case study. This is in line with George’s structured, focused comparison, and allows for more effective application of case studies to theory-building. These questions are:

1) Did a single commander possess both responsibility and authority for troops of all service branches in theater?

2) Was technology responsible for the (dis)unity of command?

3) Was intervention by the NCA responsible for the (dis)unity of command?

4) Did operational planning reflect parochial service interests?

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18 Locher notes that five to ten years were expected to be necessary for the changes to take effect. See: “The Goldwater Nichols-Act Ten Years Later: Taking Stock of Goldwater-Nichols,” 10.
5) Did operational planning focus on a hearts and minds approach to COIN?

6) Was NCA intervention responsible for the presence or lack of a hearts and minds approach?

7) Were the services able to cooperate effectively at the tactical level?

8) Was technology responsible for the presence or lack of cooperation among the service branches?

Limitations

As previously outlined, strategic doctrine and the eventual outcome of U.S. counterinsurgency efforts are not examined. The aspects of Goldwater-Nichols under question in this study relate to the military’s ability to fight insurgencies at the operational and tactical levels. An analysis of strategic doctrine would require examining decision making at the level of the NCA, and is beyond the scope of this study.

Success or failure of American COIN is not addressed for two reasons. First, it is too soon to evaluate the success or failure of American efforts in Afghanistan. COIN operations are generally protracted affairs characterized by frequent setbacks. Premature doctrinal evaluation would add little but a play-by-play commentary. Second, a number of factors unrelated to bureaucratic structure impact the ultimate outcome of a counterinsurgent campaign, and many of these are unique to each case study. A comprehensive examination of the Vietnamese and Afghan insurgencies is beyond the scope of this paper, and would likely fail to show the effect of Goldwater-Nichols specifically. A partial analysis that used success or failure as its metric would likely obscure more than it illuminates by omitting important variables. In short, using overall
success as a metric would require the explanation and inclusion of so many variables that it would prevent a meaningful discussion of the effects of bureaucratic structure.

Manwaring writes that, “in a time of strategic fluidity and asymmetry like the current one, the political actor that develops new concepts and concomitant leader judgment – and unifying organizational structure – better and more quickly than an opponent will have a decided advantage.” 19 This study focuses on the second part of Manwaring’s equation – that of unifying organizational structure. In particular, I ask whether battlefield commanders have the resources to formulate a joint operational strategy that is not steered by the interests of the military service branches and if troops have the tactical to operate jointly.

Examining whether Goldwater-Nichols increased unity of command and decreased the negative effects of service rivalry will not predict whether the United States will choose its wars wisely – or whether it will win them. What it does explain, however, is the extent to which the institutional framework of the United States military since Goldwater-Nichols is characterized by an increased capacity for fighting insurgents and a rationalization of the operational and tactical spaces. Civilian decision-makers are responsible for formulating a national security strategy that brings that capacity to bear in the right theaters and at the right times.

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Chapter 2: Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

There is near universal consensus among theorists that the battle between insurgents and counterinsurgents is fundamentally a political one. Support of the population is its object. This is the reason for the well-worn catchphrase, ‘battle for hearts and minds.’ Unlike most wars, in which national militaries fight over which state will control disputed territory or resources, insurgencies represent a non-governmental attempt to wrest control of the apparatus of government.20

Clausewitz made clear that all wars are political in nature. However, insurgencies are different than conventional wars in that their aim is not to destroy an enemy’s capacity to fight but rather, to gain the support of the population in order to take over the government. To do so, they mobilize the population around opposition to unpopular government policies. Rice notes that insurgencies only gain strength when there is some underlying political grievance that a large segment of the population holds against the government. Insurgents gain influence to the extent that they convince the population that its needs will be better cared for under a new order than under the existing one.21

Fall writes that “when a country is being subverted it is not being outfought; it is being outadministered.”22 The population is expected to make a cost-benefit calculation of which side in an insurgency-counterinsurgency struggle can best provide physical protection and political deliverables. As a result, competing for the hearts and minds of

20 Insurgents are also distinct from terrorists, whose objective is to influence a government but not overthrow it. Terrorism may, however, be used as an insurgent tactic. See: Angel Rabasa, Money in the Bank: Lessons Learned from Past Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007), 2.
22 Bernard Fall, Last Reflections on a War (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 220.
the populace will inevitably involve some amount of political accommodation on the part of counterinsurgents. 23

The form that a particular counterinsurgency takes will vary according to political context, but some aspects are common. Successful counterinsurgents are those who establish a local presence, provide security from insurgents and improve the quality of life for the population. If government forces do not provide security to the population, even those who approve of the government may be coerced into aiding the insurgency. In some respects, the counterinsurgent is in a significantly more difficult position than the insurgent. The government provides much more visible (and therefore, more vulnerable) force concentrations, and is, by nature, reactive to the political grievances that are being expressed by insurgents. It must provide security and an improvement in quality of life for the population. The apparatus for both presents targets to the insurgent.

Furthermore, the government is faced with nearly incompatible demands in terms of security. Civilians are likely to resent the inconveniences of a large military presence, but will blame the government if it fails to protect them against insurgent attacks. The governmental response to insurgent attacks must be effective, but also avoid heavy-handed tactics that alienate the population. This requires a much closer linkage between political objectives and the use of force than is required in conventional wars. The required focus on local security and good governance means that counterinsurgency efforts will often more closely resemble police or humanitarian work than conventional military operations. The role of counterinsurgents is exacerbated when they are

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foreigners because they are likely to be viewed as occupiers or colonizers.\textsuperscript{24} A lack of understanding of the local culture and language may make a difficult job even more so.

Understanding whether the government is making progress is more difficult in COIN than in conventional wars. Because insurgents are drawn from the population, military metrics such as body counts and territory gained are inadequate for measuring the effects of COIN. The government may kill scores of insurgents but, in order to stop an insurgent movement, it must annihilate the population entirely or convince it that life under the existing government is better than fighting for a new order.\textsuperscript{25} These are the only options for preventing peaceful citizens from supporting an insurgency. Since the first option is neither politically feasible nor morally desirable, counterinsurgents are forced to change the cost-benefit analysis for non-combatants. This includes carrots and sticks and requires the mobilization of both the civilian and military assets of government.

Byman writes that “defeating an insurgent movement is as much, if not more, a political effort than a military one. A national approach that incorporates all dimensions of power is essential.”\textsuperscript{26} Galula similarly states that “what is at stake is the country’s political regime, and to defend it is a political affair. Even if this requires military action, the action is constantly directed toward a political goal. Essential though it is, the

\textsuperscript{24} This was certainly true in Vietnam where the U.S. presence was identified with French one it replaced. Fear of this image has also informed the U.S. approach to counterinsurgency in Afghanistan.

\textsuperscript{25} Edward Luttwak notes some examples of annihilation or terrorism being used as COIN tactics. He regrets American light-handedness. See: “Dead End: Counterinsurgency Warfare as Military Malpractice,” \textit{Harper’s Magazine} (February, 2007).

\textsuperscript{26} Daniel Byman, “Going to War with the Allies You Have,” (monograph, U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2005): 12.
military action is secondary to the political one...”27 Thompson echoes the point that “‘winning’ the population can tritely be summed up as good government in all its aspects.”28 It is clear, then, that insurgencies arise because of grievances that the state has failed to resolve. When dissatisfaction is great enough to provoke popular, armed action against the government, the counterinsurgent’s first responsibility will be winning over the population. Doing so will require the mobilization and integration of all the assets of government toward a common aim.

The insurgencies of interest in this study are indigenous in the sense that they rely primarily on local support for their survival. This excludes the kind of insurgency against which the United States fought and won (with conventional means) in Greece. Because the insurgents in that conflict relied almost exclusively on outside support, they did not have to win over the population in order to survive. Their lack of popular support made COIN easier for the Americans, who needed only to cut off the insurgency’s supplies and defeat it militarily.29 This example is raised because it serves as an anomalous situation in which U.S. conventional strategy was suited to fighting an insurgency.

The interpretation of insurgency outlined here is not quite universal, however. Smith states that “all war, be it ‘low intensity’ or otherwise, is inherently the same and can therefore be understood, in its entirety, within the Clausewitzian strategic paradigm.”30 He argues that war is always asymmetrical to some degree and the ‘fad’ of

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28 Robert Thompson, Defeating Communist insurgency; the Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam (New York: Praeger, 1966), 112.
viewing insurgency as a theoretically distinct category is problematic. U.S. military commanders have similarly disputed the necessity of an explicit counterinsurgency strategy with the argument that “any good soldier can handle guerillas.”

While most of the literature stresses the centrality of protecting the population and providing political deliverables, Trinquier provides an exception in the extent to which he relies on martial solutions. He acknowledges that insurgents live among the population and calls support of the population “the sine qua non of victory,” but Trinquier assumes that most of the population will be inclined to favor the government. As a result, he focuses on the bureaucratic means of surveilling the population and interrogating them for information about insurgents. When the population is convinced that the government can protect it and that collusion with insurgents will be punished, it will throw its support behind the government. Trinquier writes that “above all, we must loose the guerilla’s hold on the population by systematically destroying his combat organization.” Little mention is made, however, of the circumstances that gave rise to insurgents in the first place or of political deliverables such as economic development or land reform. It is notable that the recent counterinsurgency field manual of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps rejects this view.

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31 Insurgency can be understood within Clausewitzian terms, but its objectives, tactics and sources of strength are distinct from those in conventional war and therefore necessitate separate analysis.
34 Ibid, 33.
35 Ibid, 64.
36 The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual.
A government fighting an insurgency faces significant challenges. It must not only fight militarily against an enemy whose limited profile provides little target, but must also maintain the ‘moral high ground’ in the eyes of the population. Insurgents live among the population and it is easy for the government to alienate the populace through collateral damage and the general disruption of civilian life. Avoiding such alienation requires a tightly-controlled bureaucratic apparatus that coordinates all efforts toward a single goal—winning hearts and minds. Galula writes that “a single boss must direct the operations from the beginning to end” and “the counterinsurgent leader…has to take into account the problems of the various civilian and military components of his forces…”37

What is required is an administrative bureaucracy that allows for the coordination and rationalization of the instruments of national power. The Goldwater-Nichols act was passed in order to unify efforts against conventional forces. I argue that it has enabled greater coordination in unconventional conflicts as well.

37 Galula, 87, 90.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act was passed in 1986 after contentious political wrangling. It is widely viewed as the most significant change in the structure of the U.S. military since the National Security Act of 1947.\textsuperscript{38} It came in response to a number of high-profile failures of American military performance that convinced policy makers in Washington that the military had the right people and weapons, but lacked the right structure. The result of such deficiencies was that the United States was unable to effectively bring its power to bear against even much weaker foes. This framework for understanding the military is at odds with realism, which assumes that great powers will use their resources in a manner that is optimal for success.

American disappointment with the military’s ability to translate material power into victory developed in the context of the general estrangement between the military and civilian society in the wake of the Vietnam War. Clean victories might have improved the military’s image, but instead, three post-Vietnam conflicts stand out as indicators that the U.S. military was not performing up to par. These are the actions taken in Tehran, Beirut and Grenada.

Historical Background

In 1980, American forces from the Marine Corps, Army, and Air Force attempted to fly a joint mission called Eagle Claw to free the U.S. citizens taken hostage in Tehran.\textsuperscript{39} The operation came to a failed end when a helicopter crash killed eight servicemen. None of the American hostages were freed. In searching for causes of the


failure, critics noted that planners deliberately chose servicemen from different military branches in order to distribute credit. Servicemen involved in Eagle Claw neither lived nor trained together and lacked the requisite equipment interoperability to communicate with each other. The result was not only the failure of the mission, but national embarrassment and loss of prestige. David Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, later suggested that the mission would have succeeded if he had been able to tailor the constellation of forces differently.

Three years later, in October, 1983, similar organizational failures occurred when 241 servicemen died in an attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut. Sent as peacekeepers following the withdrawal of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) from Lebanon, they were vulnerable to attacks by Hezbollah, which blew up their barracks. More significant than the number of casualties, though unfortunate, are the results of a Defense Department commission conducted afterward. It concluded that that there was no military commander responsible for the safety of those servicemen. Both extremely restrictive rules of engagement and a strategic placement that put them at considerable risk should have been considered in military planning. Instead, a “long and tortured” chain of command meant that no one was tasked with planning for contingencies and ensuring that U.S. soldiers were able to accomplish their mission and protect themselves in the process.

40 Lederman, 30.
42 Kitfield, 4.
43 Lederman, 66.
In fact, commanders in the field relied on orders from the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington because they lacked the authority to observe the local situation and direct their forces accordingly.\(^4^4\) Sufficient efforts were not taken for force protection and once servicemen were wounded, they faced obstacles to receiving medical care. Lederman writes that inter-service rivalry prevented Marines from receiving treatment at the nearest military medical facility because it was run by the Navy and the men were being flown by the Air Force.\(^4^5\)

U.S. servicemen were pulled out, lowering U.S. credibility in the world and reinforcing the view that the United States cannot stomach casualties. The clear lesson for adversaries of the U.S. was that they need not rival American military power to thwart its aims; inflicting a few hundred casualties will suffice. For Americans, the operation exposed an Achilles heel of its mighty armed forces.

A few days after the Beirut bombing, the U.S. military was engaged in fighting in Grenada in an operation known as Urgent Fury. Planning for this mission took place prior to the Beirut bombing, but military operations began shortly thereafter. In Grenada, the military succeeded against a far weaker adversary, but not without considerable difficulty. A “muddled chain of command” was again identified as an impediment to achieving American aims.\(^4^6\) As in Tehran, operational planning focused not on the constellation of forces that would be most likely to ensure victory, but on the distribution


\(^{4^5}\) Lederman, 66.

\(^{4^6}\) Kitfield, 1.
of glory. Lederman quotes Admiral Joseph Metcalf III, who called such distribution of responsibilities among the service branches “one of the key operational objectives.”

The operation included Army Special Forces, Navy Seals, Marines, and Navy ships. A lack of communications interoperability meant that Army Rangers could not call in air support from the Navy when they came under enemy fire. When soldiers procured equipment that would allow them to radio their comrades at the Navy, a lack of prior coordination deprived them of the codes needed to request help. Kitfield even notes that Army and Marine forces nearly “came to blows” because the Marines would not provide the air transport needed by the Army.

Given the disparity in power between the United States and Grenada, one would expect an easy U.S. victory. Yet, such success was narrowly won. Lederman writes that, “had serious resistance been met along the seam between the Army and the Marines, this division of authority…could have undermined effective operations.” Operation Urgent Fury lacked coordinated military planning and a command capable of joint action. Efforts to distribute glory seem to have contributed to the difficulties. Roman and Tarr note that the service chiefs put pressure on the Joint Chiefs of Staff to include members of their respective services, thereby increasing the number of fault lines that had to be bridged for a successful mission.

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47 Lederman, 67.
48 Ibid.
49 Kitfield, 5.
50 Lederman, 67.
Counterinsurgency and the Changes of Goldwater-Nichols

Opponents of unification might argue that these missions present an excessively negative view of military planning by focusing on situations in which the military was forced to react quickly. Under such circumstances, forces are less likely to be coordinated than when they have anticipated an armed confrontation and taken the necessary steps to prepare. Military shortcomings, however, were less a product of quickly-conceived missions than of an existing command structure that failed to give authority to local commanders and allowed too much parochial input from service chiefs. The result was a sub-optimal constellation of military assets. The desire to share glory meant a crowding of the battle space and a breakdown in coordination between forces. Furthermore, such quick reaction has become increasingly important for military forces. The United States enjoys a strategic context in which it has no conventional military peer, so states or groups that wish to attack the United States are more likely do so with unconventional means. The suddenness with which these attacks can occur requires that the military be able to react quickly and with precision.

The focus of this thesis is on counterinsurgency operations, which require the careful application of both positive and negative sanctions to achieve a favorable cost-benefit analysis on the part of the target population. Overt military force must be tightly controlled and applied in a way that avoids alienating non-combatants. Thus, coordination between the services is expected to be especially important, as is a central command that directs them toward a common goal. Furthermore, a nation’s military forces will rarely know where and when to expect insurgent attacks. This means that
responsiveness and smooth cooperation will be especially important in counterinsurgency operations. Advancements in mass media technology mean that military abuses or mistakes in one part of an area of operations will be publicized and become known quickly in other areas. The military can thus afford to waste little time in working through a learning curve before it adapts to the situation.

Though quick and precise reaction to an insurgency is essential, preparing to respond to an insurgency is difficult. Galula notes, for example, the impracticality of devising war games for counterinsurgency. A team of soldiers can hardly be asked to win the hearts and minds of another group of soldiers in a mock insurgency setting.51 This means that developing the appropriate structure to fight an insurgency will be more effective than trying to prepare for a particular insurgency. Goldwater-Nichols has made substantial changes to the American military structure and is likely to affect American COIN efforts.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act is a complex piece of legislation. Lederman identifies eight different objectives that it was designed to achieve.52 This study focuses on four aspects of these reforms that are likely to have an impact on the military’s capacity to fight insurgencies. Three of these are explicit changes ushered in by Goldwater-Nichols and include a revised chain of command that increased the power of the regional CINCs, an increase in jointness among the military branches, and additional attention given to special operations forces. The Cohen-Nunn Amendment to the 1987

51 Galula, 84-85.
52 Lederman, 76.
National Defense Authorization Act is responsible for the latter. It will be treated as an extension of the reforms started by Goldwater-Nichols.

This study also assesses the impact of Goldwater-Nichols on civil-military cooperation in fighting insurgencies. The act did not explicitly aim to improve such cooperation but it is plausible that a unified chain of command would make the military more capable of interfacing with civilian agencies. Weitsman writes that the “preoccupation with jointness,” entrenched in the military’s thinking as a result of Goldwater-Nichols, “spilled over into the arena of multinational operations.”53 If the changes brought about by Goldwater-Nichols encouraged a norm of cooperation beyond that mandated by law, it is likely that it would also spill over into civil-military cooperation. If spillover takes place, it should provide an additional boost to American COIN.

The most significant aspect of Goldwater-Nichols in terms of counterinsurgency was the increased authority given to the regional CINCs. Some background information may be necessary to understand the previous command structure. Prior to Goldwater-Nichols, the Unified Command Plan established eight unified combatant commands, four of which were tasked with regional responsibilities. The other four focused on key operational capacities.54 The objective was to organize the armed forces in a manner that achieved cooperation among the services in critical regions of the world as well as in accomplishing certain key military tasks. Responsibility for directing the use of military forces in the respective regions was given to the respective CINCs but they lacked

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sufficient authority to determine the constellation of forces used or the command structure below the level of the CINC. Component commanders from the services were delegated responsibility for leading their own troops into battle. Dividing battlefield command according to service branch rather than element (land, sea, and air) resulted in a fractured chain of command below the CINC.

The delegation of battlefield authority is necessary because one regional CINC can not be expected to directly control all of the forces under his command. Both an inability to commit attention to all theaters of a campaign, as well as the low likelihood that one commander would possess the necessary expertise in all media of the military art, make delegation a reasonable choice. Under this arrangement, however, the component commanders received orders from both their respective services and the regional CINCs, which fractured the chain of command. Furthermore, funding and advancement structures favored the services, which gave component commanders an incentive to guard their services’ assets during unspectacular missions and to advocate for their use in more exciting ones.

The result was an ongoing struggle over the distribution of glory that impeded rational planning in Tehran and Grenada. Lacking budgetary clout, the CINCs of the unified combatant commands were unable to incentivize joint training or the procurement of interoperable equipment. The regional CINCs had been delegated responsibility for overseeing missions with assets drawn from across the services but did not possess sufficient authority to direct those forces or to ensure that they were prepared for joint actions.

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55 Lederman, 44-45.
With passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, however, the authority of the CINCs increased considerably in relation to that of the services. Priest writes that the law “gave the power to direct and unify weapons use, training and tactics from each service to the ‘unified combatant commands.’”

The regional CINCs are also no longer forced to rely on the services to carry out separate military campaigns in a theater of war. Instead, they gained the power to draw from the services’ specialized knowledge and capacities and pull them together into a coherent battle plan. The problem of delegation is solved through the regional CINC’s abilities in “giving authoritative direction to subordinate commands and forces necessary to carry out missions assigned to the command…prescribing the chain of command to the commands and forces within the command…[and] organizing commands and forces within that command as he considers necessary to carry out missions assigned to the command.”

In addition, Goldwater-Nichols gave the CINCs considerably more funding than they had previously.

The chain of command above the regional CINCs, which led to problems in Beirut and Grenada, was also streamlined by Goldwater-Nichols. The law cut the Joint Chiefs of Staff out of the chain of command, thus removing a traditional bastion of power for the service branches.

Command now runs directly from the President, to the Secretary of Defense, to the CINCs of the regional unified combatant commands.

This structure reflects a desire to simplify the command chain, but it also raises issues for the balance between civilian and military power. It would seem to increase

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56 Priest, 3.
58 It also weakened the service chiefs by elevating the Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to be the primary military advisor to the President and Secretary of Defense. While not directly relevant to the issues examined here, it has been the object of considerable controversy.
civilian power by removing a military mediator between the civilians of the National Command Authority and the CINCs of the unified combatant commands. Some have argued, though, that the restructuring brought about by Goldwater-Nichols and the increased stature of the CINC would decrease civilian control, preventing a repetition of the micro-management that took place during previous conflicts. This would seem to have been the intent of Senator Goldwater, who asked whether the country could “any longer afford a 207-year-old concept that in military matters the civilian is supreme…can we any longer afford to allow the expertise of [professional military] men and women…to be set aside.”59 The text of the law, though, expresses its intention to strengthen civilian control. In reality, whether the CINC of the unified combatant commands or the civilians of the NCA dominate is likely to depend on the personalities of the individuals in those positions.

Goldwater-Nichols sought to reduce the tension between service branches by mandating joint training. This was expected to make military officers more comfortable with their counterparts in other branches and increase a sense of a joint mission. The military branches already had assignments to joint positions, but they were not usually filled with the best officers. Less-qualified officers were chosen because these positions were viewed as detrimental to a military career. Goldwater-Nichols required that these rotations be weighted equally, in terms of advancement, to positions within one’s own service branch. In fact, the law actually forced officers to gain such experience in order

to achieve flag rank, which meant that each CINC would have previous experience with another service branch.\textsuperscript{60}

On a more practical level, joint training was intended to help coordinate the different operational procedures of the services.\textsuperscript{61} The effects led Barone to comment that “commanders and troops have become steeped in a culture of jointness, in which success in battle and promotions have depended not on advancing the favored weapons or practices of one service but on working effectively with other services.”\textsuperscript{62} In another important aspect of jointness, SOCOM has enabled SOFs to work more effectively together, coordinating their training and equipment.

The regional CINCs were thus invested with authority commensurate with their responsibility for success. Because CINCs are ultimately responsible for war outcomes, this study expects them to chose force structures with more attention to the success of the mission than to the emphasis they place on one service or another. In short, empowering the regional CINCs should lift planning above the parochial fray to focus on overall victory, rather than the distribution of glory among the service branches.

\textit{Opposition}

Passage of Goldwater-Nichols required overcoming the objections of the Department of Defense and some members of Congress. Then Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger opposed the legislation, as did representatives from across the

\textsuperscript{60} Roman and Tarr, 101-102.
\textsuperscript{61} This includes the obvious issue of equipment interoperability that has been discussed in relation to the failures in Tehran and Grenada but the services also view the use of concrete assets differently. Air power is a particularly good example. For a discussion, see Thom Shanker, “At Odds with Air Force, Army Adds its Own Aviation Unit,” \textit{The New York Times} (June 22, 2008).
Perhaps more important was congressional opposition. Lederman argues that members of Congress had political incentives not to seek a more centralized Department of Defense. Service loyalties of veterans serving in Congress may have provided some incentive to oppose reforms, but having strong, independent service branches also meant that there were multiple actors in the DOD (Department of Defense) to whom legislators could go for information. They occasionally used testimony from the services to oppose the administration when Congress was dissatisfied with national policies. Some legislators feared that changes to the JCS structure would limit service chiefs’ ability to testify before Congress. Lastly, electoral concerns led members to oppose reforms that might make them seem weak on defense issues or limit the amount of ‘pork’ that flowed into their districts.

There were also reasons for opposition that were relevant to military performance. Some feared that changes to the Joint Chiefs of Staff would reduce the quality of military advice to the President and Secretary of Defense, while others thought that these changes would shift power from civilians to the military. Both remain open questions. Despite opposition, reformers prevailed and the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 was signed into law on October 1, 1986.

Shortly after Goldwater-Nichols was passed, Congress followed up with the Cohen-Nunn Amendment. An extension of Goldwater-Nichols, it amended the law by creating a functional unified combatant command for Special Operations known

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63 Roman and Tarr, 99.
64 Lederman, 47-48.
as SOCOM. SOCOM pulled together the special operations forces from all of the
service branches, and is responsible for joint training, equipment and doctrine. However, most of these forces are commanded by the regional CINC, who integrate them into a unified plan that includes conventional forces. SOCOM was also opposed by the Defense Department, which had de-emphasized its special operations activities in the post-Vietnam era. Defense Department opposition may explain why the law was passed at all. Goldwater-Nichols required the Defense Department to consider the creation of such a unified combatant command and come to a conclusion within a year. Shortly after creating this mandate, however, Congress chose to force DOD’s hand and establish SOCOM.

Based on the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis, one would expect the Goldwater-Nichols Act to increase the military’s capacity for counterinsurgency operations by facilitating cooperation between service branches, thereby allowing military commanders to draw on a range of capabilities. Increases in the authority of the regional CINC are expected to reduce the influence of the service branches on operational planning. Greater unity in the military should facilitate coordination with civilians.

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The U.S. experience in Vietnam provides an example of American counterinsurgency efforts before the changes ushered in by Goldwater-Nichols. While the United States has been involved in a host of counterinsurgency efforts dating to its early days, the effort in Vietnam is a particularly apt example because it occurred at the height of American power and was a prolonged, indigenous insurgency. Changes in the command structure under the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program give the researcher concrete examples of how the U.S. responded to insurgency in Vietnam that can be compared to the arrangements devised in Afghanistan.

I conclude, as do many historians, that service rivalry created an overwhelming emphasis on conventional solutions as the services sought to prove their ‘success’ against insurgents and preserve their respective niches. Each service did what it had trained to do against the Soviets with little attention paid to the fact that the Viet Cong represented a very different enemy. The lack of a unified command prevented a more limited use of American firepower, and disunity of effort meant that resources expended by the U.S. in Vietnam were not directed toward a common goal. When unity of command for counterinsurgency was finally established through the CORDS program, the U.S. saw far greater success. Importantly, the absence of a unified commander with the ability to control assets from across the service branches meant that such adaptations did not occur until the
war effort was well underway. When it did occur, it was as a result of the intervention of the NCA.

*Initial American Involvement*

U.S. involvement in Vietnam began after the Second World War in support of the French, who were fighting a rearguard effort to maintain their colonial power.69 Aid to France was initially given in order to gain its support for NATO, but the fear of falling dominoes ensured American involvement after French troops withdrew.70 The French had set up a puppet regime in South Vietnam, which the U.S. supported because of its opposition to the communist north. Concerned that the French were losing the war, however, the United States sent military advisors to Vietnam in the summer of 1950. These advisors were known collectively as the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG).

The Geneva Accords of 1954 ended French involvement in Vietnam and divided the country in half. During negotiations, the United States lobbied hard to avoid losing Vietnam to the Viet Minh and ultimately refused to sign the agreement because it left territory north of the 17th parallel in communist hands.71 The North Vietnamese government sought to unify the country under its rule and developed a structure of insurgent forces in the south to undermine the government of South Vietnam. After the French withdrawal, American advisors assisted the South Vietnamese government directly, training and equipping the Army of Vietnam (ARVN). As the South

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69 The U.S. was, of course, involved in Vietnam during WWII in efforts against the Japanese but that period of American involvement has been excluded here for brevity.
70 Rabasa, 27.
Vietnamese government continued to lose ground and desertion to the Viet Cong increased, the U.S. responded by ratcheting up its involvement. Krepinevich argues that the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) was created out of frustration with South Vietnam’s inability to defeat the Viet Cong. In 1965, President Johnson authorized Operation ROLLING THUNDER, an American and South Vietnamese air campaign against the North, which signaled the large scale entry of U.S. forces into the war. With the introduction of the MACV, the U.S. became the largest military player in Vietnam.

*The American War*

*Command and Control*

A remarkable lack of unity characterized the American war effort in Vietnam. The MACV had overall responsibility for the military effort in Vietnam, but did not exercise operational control over all military assets in theater. Furthermore, as a country-specific command arrangement, the MACV lacked the authority to act outside of Vietnam when the enemy operated abroad.

The chain of command in which the MACV operated stretched from the National Command Authority (President and Secretary of Defense) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), and finally to the MACV. President Johnson and Defense Secretary McNamara exercised a high level of control over day to day operations, a fact attributable to the personalities of these two men and their interest

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72 Ibid, 160.
in the war. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were also heavily involved in planning, and the MACV was forced to submit plans to the NCA and JCS for approval.

CINCPAC was the MACV’s nominal superior but exercised relatively limited control. In fact, it was incapable of directing theater forces and required the creation of the MACV as a subordinate command. This was accomplished by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a body where the services wield considerable clout. The result was that the military services were able to steer the JCS to create a command structure in the MACV that preserved their service autonomy. MACV had overall responsibility for military assets in theater but each service exercised direct command over its forces, under the MACV’s guidance. Cushman explains that the regional CINCs remained weak because the services had an institutional interest in limiting the control that the CINC could exercise over their forces. The same was true of the MACV, leading Cushman to write (in 1984) that “the Services and departments are the permanent and real institutions of the military establishment.”

Although CINCPAC had overall statutory responsibility for the employment of U.S. forces in the region, it lacked the authority to execute that responsibility and remained on the sidelines.

The commander of MACV, General Westmoreland, was unable to exercise unity of command for two reasons. The first is the influence of the JCS and NCA, which deprived the MACV of full responsibility over operational planning in Vietnam. Second,

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the Services retained an impressive amount of power over the use of their forces. The use of air power in Vietnam is a telling example of this fractured chain of command.

Control of air assets was spread out between CINCPAC in Hawaii; the Navy, operating out of the Gulf of Tonkin; the 7th and 13th Air Forces in Vietnam and Thailand, respectively; Strategic Air Command (SAC) in Omaha; the U.S. Marine Corps in Vietnam; and, finally, the MACV in Saigon. B-52s, used extensively in Vietnam, were controlled by SAC and operated independently of other U.S. assets. The Navy and the Air Force failed to agree on how to unify their air efforts and relied instead on the Route Package System. This arrangement preserved the autonomy of each branch, thus resolving the conflict over turf but failing to achieve unity of effort among the services. The Marine Corps was similarly parochial and refused to give up tactical control of its assets, even when so instructed. General Westmoreland tried to create a single command arrangement for all tactical air operations, but the Marines responded by taking the matter up with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and then with the Secretary of Defense. Although told to comply with Westmoreland, the Marines continued to agitate until a compromise was worked out for daily and weekly tasking of their aircraft. The Marines were thus allowed to maintain greater control over their air assets.

Such a fragmented command and control system was mirrored in naval and land operations. The MACV had direct control of naval forces operating within Vietnam, the

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75 Westmoreland was dual-hatted as overall commander of U.S. forces as well as the commander of the Army’s component of the war effort, a fact that likely biased him toward the Army’s war effort.
76 B-52s were considered a strategic, rather than a tactical asset.
77 Cushman, 98-99.
so-called ‘brown water Navy,’ but not naval forces at sea. This put riverine forces at MACV disposal. The problems caused by a divided naval command were less severe than those relating to ground and airpower, given the limited role of deep sea forces in American counterinsurgency. Nevertheless, it serves to underscore the disjointed nature of U.S. command. Command of ground forces was similarly disjointed and the Marines again opposed an effort by Westmoreland to create a unified command. Unity of effort would have allowed for a more coordinated use of force but it would have also reduced the clout of the Marines, who lobbied CINCPAC to prevent the change. What emerged instead were tactical areas of responsibility (TAORs), which divided Vietnam among the services. Unfortunately, this meant a further compartmentalization of the war effort with minimal coordination.

**Parochialism and Conventional Tactics**

Komer argues that the services in Vietnam did what they were most capable of doing, which he calls “play[ing] out their institutional repertoires.” Avant provides a persuasive explanation of why those repertoires focused so heavily on the massive conventional operations that the U.S. undertook in Vietnam despite past American experience with counterinsurgency operations. In line with the bureaucratic arguments articulated by Snyder and Posen, she explains that national security strategy was linked to short-term trends, driven by each military service’s need to compete for budget resources.

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78 Ibid, 61.
79 One can easily understand the Marine Corp’s perspective, given the small size of its force and the prospect that successful Marine Corps programs (such as CAPS) would be discontinued under Army tutelage. Even so, the example highlights the lack of a unified command structure.
81 Ibid, 57.
In the post World War II era, nuclear weapons were seen as the key to American security from the Soviet Union and the Air Force had a virtual monopoly on the means of their delivery. To compete, the other service branches had to justify their military programs in terms of their centrality to fighting a hypothetical WWIII against the Soviet Union.\footnote{Avant, 33.} This impacted the Army perhaps most of all, which tailored its focus to large, mechanized troop formations required to defeat the Soviet Army in Europe. Army preparations also included the development of the now-infamous Army Airborne helicopter forces. Intended to provide mobility as a sort of ‘air cavalry,’ they were used in Vietnam as a means of bringing the war to the enemy while limiting close combat.

Because of its focus on conventional war, the Army advancement structure was designed to reward officers who had experience in leading troops in conventional battles. This led to a lack of talent devoted to pacification and troop rotations that were too short to build the local experience necessary to defeat a dynamic enemy.\footnote{Ibid, 49-50; and Krepinevich (1986), 206.} Army strategy in Vietnam responded to the wars the Army had already fought and the wars it expected to fight in the future. Lacking a central commander who demanded the adaptation needed to counter the Viet Cong insurgency, the Army did what it knew best.

General Westmoreland did acknowledge the presence of an insurgency aimed against the government of South Vietnam but he was more concerned with National Liberation Front (NLF) main forces.\footnote{Dale Andrade and Col. James H. Willbanks, “CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future,’’ \textit{Military Review} (March-April, 2006): 9-10.} As the Army commander in Vietnam, he sought to bring the full weight of American combat troops to bear against the North Vietnamese.
The strategy that he employed focused on large search and destroy operations – rather than on the development of local security. These operations utilized the conventional tactic of trying to isolate the enemy and annihilate him. They represented a strategy of attrition and one that seemed to focus more on strengths of the Army than on the needs of the situation. Instead of seeking to win support of the population, the goal was to reach the so-called ‘crossover point’ at which U.S. forces were able to kill Viet Cong faster than they could be replaced.\textsuperscript{86}

In addition to the military emphasis on conventional maneuvers, civilian pressure from Secretary of Defense McNamara drove an obsession with numbers that required the military to ‘demonstrate’ its results with statistics.\textsuperscript{87} The need to quantify their success, along with institutional repertoires that were strongly biased toward conventional operations, led the military services to focus on body counts and other conventional measurements. Not only did the services compete with each other, officers within each service were under pressure to demonstrate their success in order to gain promotion.\textsuperscript{88} Commanders were pressured to increase their kill numbers, providing incentive to manipulate statistics or use indiscriminate firepower and then claim the dead Vietnamese as Viet Cong fighters. Counting bodies was difficult for the Air Force, so measurement focused on the number of sorties flown and the amount of munitions dropped. Defoliants

\textsuperscript{86} Krepinevich (1986), 198.
\textsuperscript{87} Avant, 99.
\textsuperscript{88} For an account of inter-service competition, see Komer, 55.
were seen as a way of fighting insurgents from a distance, but their widespread use
alienated civilians for the damage they caused to crops and people.\footnote{Krepinevich (1986), 201-211. Krepinevich notes that birth defects were inevitably blamed on American defoliants. Their use drove a wedge between the Americans and the population, encouraging the latter’s defection to the side of the Viet Cong.}

Air power was also used to ‘soften up’ targets before infantry units arrived to destroy them. The effect was to warn an already elusive enemy that American ground forces were on their way. It is not surprising that the enemy learned to disperse and take cover when it heard approaching airships. The intention of this preparatory fire was to make the job of fighting the VC safer for American troops by using ordinance in the place of soldiers. It was in keeping with the strategy the military expected to use against the Soviet Union, but it deprived American troops of the element of surprise and made ground maneuvers less effective. In fact, the massive firepower employed was counterproductive, as it alienated the population, pushing the crossover point further from reach. Sir Robert Thompson noted the futility of using weapons instead of men to fight an insurgency. “The argument that anything which saves the life of one American boy is permissible will in the long run waste the lives of many more...that these fewer casualties may have been entirely wasted does not occur to many.”\footnote{Quoted in Krepinevich (1986), 197}

Thompson, drawing on his experiences in Malaya, argued for an approach that used ground forces to protect and control the population. While it is true that more lives would be lost in each engagement if the fighting was to be up close and with more basic arms, Thompson knew that the key to defeating an insurgency was denying it access to the population, an objective known as pacification. It was a strategy that required men on
the ground, not just in the sky. Instead of trying to drive a wedge between the VC and
the population, the U.S. tried to annihilate the insurgents. In an indigenous insurgency,
of course, this is impossible.

Having trained to win wars with an overwhelmingly conventional strategy, it was
difficult for the military to conceive of fighting differently. When officers acknowledged
a role for non-kinetic resources in pacification, they saw it as of secondary importance.
Addressing the coordination of military and pacification efforts, Lt. General Ewell said
“military operations would be given first priority in every case.”91 For the U.S. military
service branches, the unconventional war in Vietnam represented ‘the other war’ and one
that was better left to their Vietnamese counterparts. Unconventional war did not
promise the glory of a decisive battle and the concomitant ‘bragging rights’ over the other
military services that such victory would bring. In truth, the ability of one service branch
to claim ‘vital’ significance to the war would have meant more than a locker room trump
card. Because of the role that service rivalry played in the budgetary process, proving the
relevance of one’s service ensured the stability of its funding. COIN success in Vietnam
would have required the careful coordination and judicious use of U.S. assets in
protecting the Vietnamese population and preventing Viet Cong subversion. Instead,
with no single commander above the institutional fray, a lack of inter-service
cooperation, and a strong service-bound proclivity toward conventional operations, U.S
efforts failed to defeat the insurgency and frittered away both Vietnamese and American
support for the war.

91 Quoted in Krepinevich (1986), 222.
This raises an apparent contradiction in the requirements for counterinsurgency and one that poses a challenge to effective institutional arrangements. Defeating an insurgency requires a degree of unity of effort that can usually be achieved only through unified command. However, the nature of insurgent war makes it unclear where insurgents will strike. As a result, senior commanders may not be available to make an immediate decision. Local commanders must, therefore, possess considerable latitude in decision making if they are to react effectively to sudden changes in the local situation. Nagl notes that British willingness to empower local commanders of low rank was key to their success in Malaya.\(^{92}\) Coordination of the British effort was achieved because of the preparation provided by colonial policing as well as the lack of separation between military and civil efforts. The Americans are, by contrast, more reluctant to give authority to low-level ground officers or engage in policing operations. A rigid, centralized, decision making structure, and the separation of military and civilian efforts created substantial bureaucratic impediments to American COIN.

*Pacification*

Pacification efforts can be grouped into two periods, one before the introduction of the CORDS program and the other after. CORDS changed the emphasis that the U.S. military placed on pacification, making it a priority for the first time. Equally important, it changed the institutional arrangements for coordinating pacification efforts, finally establishing unity of command. Attention will be turned first to the pre-CORDS

environment and then to the changes ushered in by CORDS. A discussion of why it took so long to implement the needed changes will follow.

Before large-scale U.S. involvement, the Diem government in South Vietnam attempted a program of *agrovilles*, which were villages into which peasants were concentrated. Such concentration was supposed to enable the government to better provide public services to the population while building trust through increased contact with the Saigon government.\(^{93}\) The program fell flat because it uprooted villagers, removing them from their homes and ancestral burial grounds without improving their quality of life. Not only were peasants forced to build these villages themselves, they were not compensated for the materials that went into construction or for the time that it took them away from their farms. Having villagers concentrated together under government aegis also made them attractive targets of VC attack. Insufficient forces dedicated to their protection made VC attacks relatively easy and lethal. In response to increasing attacks, the South Vietnamese government shifted to a system of strategic hamlets, modeled after the successful British strategy in Malaya.\(^{94}\)

The strategic hamlet program focused on a defensive posture in the hamlets and included the training of Regional and Popular Forces (RF/PF) in order to create the local capacity to defend against Viet Cong attacks. The U.S. opposed this policy for its apparently ‘excessive’ civic focus on improving the lives of hamlet residents and for its lack of conventional force employment to pursue the enemy. This illustrates a strategic

\(^{93}\) This lack of trust is related to urban-rural tensions and a sense that Saigon governmental elites were more interested in self-enrichment than the provision of public goods.

difference between the South Vietnamese government and the U.S. military. Vietnamese efforts were informed by the ‘oil spot’ concept in which individual villages were to be secured from the VC. As the number of secure villages across the country rose, they were to gradually extend their control outward until they covered the whole of the country. It is easy to see how this approach was at cross purposes with the American strategy. By using a strategy of attrition that focused on munitions expended and Vietnamese killed, while providing little support to civic programs or village defense, the U.S. drove the population into the outstretched arms of the Viet Cong, who provided both development and security.

The South Vietnamese government was also racked by corruption and incompetence. Hunt writes that “a critical failing…was the continued inability of paramilitary and police forces to provide local security…RF/PF strength failed to reach authorized levels.”95 The Americans were not willing to focus on a strategy that did not conform to their repertoire and the Vietnamese lacked the competence and capacity to do it without them. Built as a mirror image of the U.S. forces, the ARVN was designed to operate in large unit formations like the Americans. This structure was inappropriate to counterinsurgency and it was also unsustainable without American support. Perhaps even more debilitating to South Vietnamese COIN efforts were tensions between the rural population of South Vietnam and the country’s urban elites. Pervasive distrust and a sense that the government served its own interests rather than those of the Vietnamese

95 Ibid, 27.
people made winning hearts and minds especially difficult.96 Some U.S. forces pursued an ‘oil spot’ strategy and met with considerable success, but these efforts were never integrated into a larger U.S. strategy.

The United States Marine Corps developed a program of Combined Action Platoons (CAPs) that used small numbers of Marines who lived in villages among the population to implement civic projects and train local security forces. The Marines achieved some remarkable successes through CAPs, from which military leadership failed to learn.97 “The commanders were unable or unwilling to accept the conclusion implicit in the successes of the CAPs, which was that their vast resources, equipment, and technology were essentially irrelevant to the kind of war they faced.” Rather than expanding the program, military leadership forced the Marines to shift focus from the CAPs program to conventional fighting.98 Westmoreland derisively described the Marines as “infatuated with securing real estate and in civic action…I have written two letters to him [General Walt] emphasizing the importance of having adequate reserves to take the fight to the enemy.”99

Special Operations Forces had similar successes, particularly in their efforts with the Montagnard tribes of central Vietnam. With little instruction about how to deal with the tribes, SOFs improvised. Like the Marines, they used limited force and focused on training local militias to defend their villages against advances by the Viet Cong. The

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97 In addition to enabling village to defend themselves, CAPs also had impressive kill statistics. See Rabasa, 35.
99 Quoted in Nagl, 157.
trust of the villagers was gained through humanitarian projects, most notably the provision of medical care. Special Operations Forces were different from their conventional counterparts in that their repertoire did not emphasize large scale, mechanized warfare. This removed the parochial incentive to simply use whatever weapons were at their disposal because, by nature, SOFs are irregular forces that place a premium on ‘cognitive dominance’ and operate with minimal force. Nagl called them “the army’s best hope for a successful, minimum-force counterinsurgency organization.”

It is instructive that the military groups which achieved success through unconventional operations and securing the local populations were those without institutional interests in waging a large conventional war. Army officers claimed the situation was improving (based on body counts, number of weapons seized, etc.) but there was ample evidence that conventional operations were not succeeding. One example was the Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of Vietnam (PROVN). It was led by General Harold K. Johnson, whose observations in Vietnam convinced him that the strategy being pursued by Westmoreland was unable to produce an American victory. His findings were released in 1966 and focused on the deleterious effects of large sweeps, the myopia of using body counts to measure success,

101 Ibid, 139.
102 Lewis Sorley, “To Change a War: General Harold K. Johnson and the PROVN Study,” *Parameters* (Spring, 1998), 94.
and the crucial role that local actions had to play in promoting security and winning the population’s support.\textsuperscript{103}

Instead of adapting to the reality that its conventional strategy was not working, the military continued to follow the services’ institutional repertoires, certain that success would eventually follow. This is consistent with the expectation that the service branches will tend to see their own capabilities/strategies as the lynchpin for victory. The result was that they pursued them even more vigorously when they are not meeting with success, even though the strategy itself, not the vigor of its application, was to blame. In contrast to the service commanders, a unified commander is able to evaluate what is happening in the various theaters of a campaign and adjust the force structure accordingly.

\textit{CORDS Shakes Things Up}

Results on the ground suffered until they reached a level that provoked a reaction from Washington. By 1966, it was becoming clear to President Johnson that Vietnam was not going well and that greater military emphasis needed to be placed on defending the population, as well as coordinating military efforts with the efforts of American civilians in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{104} \textit{The Pentagon Papers} would later report on the civilian side of pacification that “each agency had its own ideas on what had to be done, its own communication channels with Washington, its own personnel and administrative structure…it began to become clear to people in Washington and Saigon alike that

\textsuperscript{103} Nagl, 97-98.
\textsuperscript{104} See Komer, 89-92, on problems of civil-military coordination.
Americans in the provinces were not always working on the same team.”\textsuperscript{105} The American program required redirection and would require the unification of U.S. efforts in Vietnam if it was to be successful. To accomplish this, President Johnson sent Robert Komer to lead a new hybrid civil-military organization known as Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support.\textsuperscript{106}

Washington decision makers had frequently emphasized the importance of counterinsurgency. Indeed, President Kennedy was well-known for his interest and advocacy of such a ‘small war’ approach. The military was certain, however, that the civilians in Washington misunderstood the nature of the conflict, so they resisted change. They did what their institutional training had prepared them to do, maintaining an essentially conventional strategy, while providing window dressing that would assuage Washington civilians interested in counterinsurgency.\textsuperscript{107} The operational autonomy of the military service branches allowed them to pursue such an approach. Progress in American COIN came when President Johnson forced a shift in American efforts. Changes in the command structure and an increased focus on COIN made the United States more capable of fighting the insurgency in Vietnam.

The CORDS program represented a radical departure from business as usual in that it pooled together nearly all aspects of American civilian support to Vietnam under the leadership of Robert Komer. Although a civilian, Komer served within the military

\textsuperscript{106} There was a pre-CORDS organization known as the Office of Civil Operations (OCO) which was administered by the U.S. embassy. In existence for only a few months, it seems to have been intended as an interim arrangement before CORDS.
\textsuperscript{107} Avant, 57.
chain of command in the role of deputy to General Westmoreland. The idea here was twofold. Being under military tutelage but with significant autonomy would allow Komer to merge the now-integrated civilian efforts into those of the military. It would also allow the CORDS program to draw on the significant resources that the military possessed. Komer explained that “if you are going to get a program going, you are only going to be able to do it by stealing from the military. They have all the trucks, they have all the planes, they have all the people, they have all the money.”

Unifying pacification efforts under Komer represented an opportunity to synchronize the work of the military branches as well as those of the civilian agencies operating in Vietnam. As a civilian, Komer was free of service bias as well as the general military bias toward offensive strategies.

It is interesting to note that, while CORDS represented a pooling of counterinsurgency efforts, it also served to decentralize daily decision making. This was accomplished by delegating authority to advisors who oversaw pacification efforts in their respective provinces and districts. These advisors were strengthened by being put in control of military assets in their provinces. While civilians did not command soldiers in battle, they did exercise control over what pacification efforts would be taken by military forces. This arrangement effectively created a two-track war. The bulk of the

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108 Placing civilian agencies under military control provoked a predictable backlash at the State Department and elsewhere. For an account of how President Johnson brought reluctant civilians on board, see Hunt, 82-85.


110 The focus of U.S. efforts varied with the needs of each province. Some focused primarily on the development of local defense capability while others emphasized building infrastructure. (Hunt, 92-94) This decentralization also came closer to the British pacification style of delegating responsibility and holding commanders responsible for success (Avant, 39.)
U.S. military continued to prosecute a conventional war against the Viet Cong, while CORDS ramped up efforts to empower local security forces.\textsuperscript{111}

This might appear to be a continuation of the previous approach taken in which most American forces pursued conventional fighting while a few (such as the Marine CAPs) pursued local security programs. This is not the case for two reasons. The first is that CORDS made pacification a major priority, which it never was previously.\textsuperscript{112} Second, the Tet Offensive of 1968 represented a shift of much of the Viet Cong’s effort to conventional operations. At this point, it became imperative that the United States wage conventional and unconventional wars in tandem. CORDS allowed it do that. By June of 1970, 91 percent of the strategic hamlets were “secure” or “relatively secure.”\textsuperscript{113} The number of internally displaced persons declined, as did the incidence of VC-attacks.\textsuperscript{114} “The evidence is impressive that a completely changed situation prevailed in the rural areas and that the insurgency in the countryside – the people’s war – was effectively contained.”\textsuperscript{115}

Failure in Vietnam came with the U.S. decision to withdraw and the 1975 collapse of the Saigon government. South Vietnam was unable to defend itself against conventional attacks from the North and the U.S. was no longer willing to commit the resources to defending it. The window for American (and South Vietnamese) victory had closed. The question is why the U.S. took so long to shift to a strategy that was capable

\textsuperscript{111} Hunt, 90-92.
\textsuperscript{112} The increased priority of pacification is evident in the number of advisors devoted to CORDS, particularly for the training of RF/PF forces. See Komer, 124-125.
\textsuperscript{113} Blaufarb, 169.
\textsuperscript{114} These numbers come from the Hamlet Evaluation Survey, which judged progress toward pacification. The initial system was criticized for inconsistency but was improved by removing much of the subjectivity involved in evaluating hamlet security (Ibid, 249).
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 270.
of defeating the Viet Cong. If it were not for the success of the CORDS program at pacification, one might conclude that the war was simply un-winnable. Given the rapid changes described above, however, it is clear that the problem was not an inherent intractability of the conflict. Furthermore, key military leaders knew that their conventional strategy was insufficient. The services’ inability to overcome their engrained institutional repertoire led to the application of a cookie-cutter approach to all armed conflict. It was not until the efforts of the services branches and those of the civilian agencies involved were brought together that the U.S. began to see some success. MACV proved unable to provide this unity of effort until President Johnson intervened to change its command structure.

1) Did a single commander possess both responsibility and authority for troops of all service branches in theater?  
   No.

2) Was technology responsible for the (dis)unity of command?  
   No.

3) Was intervention by the NCA responsible for the (dis)unity of command?  
   No.

4) Did operational planning reflect parochial service interests?  
   Yes.

5) Did operational planning focus on a hearts and minds approach to COIN?  
   Yes, with the establishment of CORDS.

6) Was NCA intervention responsible for the presence or lack of a hearts and minds approach?  
   Yes.

7) Were the services able to cooperate effectively at the tactical level?  
   No.

8) Did technology have a significant impact on the presence or lack of cooperation among the service branches?  
   No.

Figure 2: Evaluating U.S. Efforts in Vietnam
Chapter 5: Afghanistan

The U.S. response to 9/11 provides a unique opportunity to test the enhanced power of the unified combatant commands, as well as the ability of the service branches to operate jointly. If Goldwater-Nichols had the predicted effect on COIN efforts, it should be evident in the metrics laid out here. Indeed, this is the result. In planning and directing the campaign, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) was able to draw assets from across the service branches to implement the strategic wishes of the NCA. This meant fielding forces in a manner that minimized the number of foreign troops on Afghan soil. CENTCOM also implemented a hearts and minds approach early in the war. Efforts at civil-military integration were less successful.

Afghanistan’s history of insurgency against foreign powers set the stage for a U.S. military presence that quickly developed into a prolonged battle against Taliban, Al-Qa’ida, and tribal insurgents. Attention will be divided between the initial U.S. invasion with its limited force structure, the subsequent shift to larger, more conventional operations and, finally, the response to a growing Afghan insurgency.

Invasion

The presence of outside powers in Afghan affairs is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Afghanistan’s history and it is important to understand the historical context in which the U.S. invaded. The 19th and 20th centuries found Afghanistan sandwiched between the Russian and British spheres of influence. The British would...
fight three wars with Afghanistan leading up to the 1921 Treaty of Rawalpindi which guaranteed Afghan independence. After World War II, the United States replaced Great Britain and continued Western-Russian rivalry in Central Asia. A strategic alliance with Pakistan prevented the United States from becoming heavily involved in Afghanistan and the Soviets took it into their orbit.117

Dissatisfaction with their satellite led the Soviets to invade Afghanistan in 1979. The United States supported the Mujahideen in an effort to “bleed the Soviet Union white” by proxy. The Soviets withdrew in 1987 and Afghanistan fell to in-fighting that split the country along ethnic and tribal lines.118 Pakistan and the United States supported the arrival of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, though American attention to Afghanistan declined sharply since it was no longer on the front line of U.S.-Soviet rivalry.119 The Al-Qa’ida attacks of 9/11 made Afghanistan a national priority again, but the baggage of centuries of foreign intervention was to constrain American options.120

If the United States was to avoid the image of a foreign occupier, it would have to be seen as operating with international legitimacy and in support of the Afghan people. The country’s history of insurgency against outside powers made the situation particularly sensitive. With this in mind, the United States amassed a broad coalition of supporters for war against the Taliban and Al-Qa’ida in Afghanistan and chose to adopt a ‘light footprint’ strategy in which the Northern Alliance would provide most of the

118 Mahmood Mamdani, Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and the Roots of Terror (New York: Pantheon, 2004), 124.
ground forces needed while American SOFs fought alongside, providing expertise and firepower.\textsuperscript{121} This most often took the form of close air support, though other munitions were used as well.

When it became clear that Afghanistan would be the target for retaliation for the attacks of 9/11, CENTCOM was tasked with drafting plans for an invasion. CENTCOM presented the President and Secretary of Defense with three options. The first consisted of a barrage of cruise missiles with no ground component. The second added air sorties to the cruise missile strikes. The third included cruise missiles, air strikes, and small numbers of ground forces.\textsuperscript{122} The latter option was chosen and, in what would come to be known as the ‘Afghan Model,’ SOFs were sent to Afghanistan to liaise with Northern Alliance troops whom they would lead against Taliban and Al-Qa’ida forces. The first SOFs arrived at the end of October when they joined CIA assets in simultaneous assaults on two targets in the south of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{123} The CIA possessed special authorities that U.S. military forces lacked but it coordinated its efforts through CENTCOM.\textsuperscript{124} By November 9\textsuperscript{th}, Mazar-i-Sharif had been taken. By December 7\textsuperscript{th}, Kunduz and Kandahar, among others, were in coalition hands.\textsuperscript{125}

These initial battles are noteworthy for their limited involvement of American troops. That strategy has been widely criticized since then for providing insufficient manpower and such critiques are probably well-placed. Critiques notwithstanding, the

\textsuperscript{121} Support from the international community was so overwhelming in the initial post-9/11 period that it seems to have actually been more of a burden on the U.S. military than an aid. See DeLong and Lukeman.


\textsuperscript{123} John T. Carney and Benjamin F. Schemmer, No Room for Error: The Covert Operations of America’s Special Tactics Units from Iran to Afghanistan (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 10.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid, 6. and Woodward, 165.

\textsuperscript{125} Ewans, 166.
implementation of such a strategy at the operational level represents a bureaucratic triumph for CENTCOM. What is remarkable is that such a limited employment of U.S. troops would be chosen at a time when Americans felt vulnerable, enraged, and eager for retribution.\textsuperscript{126} The easier route, in terms of the military services’ institutional interest in using their training/weapons and in keeping with the services’ preference for offensive action, would have been to send a large invasion force. The same is true of the public’s desire for revenge, to which the military seems to have responded with a quick succession of initial air strikes that had more cathartic than military effect.\textsuperscript{127}

The United States limited the involvement of its troops amid concerns that it would find itself bogged down fighting an insurgency if it sent a large invasion force. This strategy was against the wishes of the military services branches.\textsuperscript{128} The logic here was that using proxies would provoke less of a response than large-scale intervention because it deprives insurgent recruiters of a highly-visible occupying force to point to in issuing an anti-colonialist rallying cry.\textsuperscript{129} It must be reiterated that the appropriateness of the chosen operational strategy is not at issue here. What is at issue is the ability of military planners to plan and execute an invasion that draws from the services’ respective capabilities in a coordinated way, while preventing them from employing the full weight of their arsenals. This is a significant departure from operational strategy in Vietnam in

\textsuperscript{127} “The Global War on Terrorism,” 465.
\textsuperscript{128} For an account of Gen. Franks’ overriding the force preferences of the Army, see Sean Naylor,\textit{ Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda} (New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 2005), 53.
which the services competed with one another and brought maximum firepower to bear. It also stands in distinction to smaller operations prior to Goldwater-Nichols in which the involvement of the military service branches determined operational planning, rather than vice versa.

CINC CENTCOM, General Tommy Franks, exercised remarkable unity of command over U.S. forces, drawing on special operations assets made available to him by SOCOM. These forces played such an important role in Afghanistan that the war there has been called “America’s first special operations war.” The close cooperation between SOFs from across the service branches represents a triumph of Goldwater-Nichols (particularly the Cohen-Nunn Amendment) through the development of joint training and doctrine. SOCOM has provided theater commanders with a Special Operations Forces asset that is integrated across the services as well as into the conventional force structure that supplies it with close air support (CAS) and other assistance. SOFs were able to interface very effectively with Air Force and Navy planes, which provided CAS while bringing unique capabilities of their own to bear.

The linguistic and clandestine capabilities of SOFs were crucial to operating within the American ‘light footprint’ strategy. The ability to gain access to contested areas of the country and communicate with tribal leaders meant that SOFs could leverage local manpower with American technology, avoiding a larger U.S. troop presence. Close air support was especially useful in gaining the support of Northern Alliance forces who,

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130 Carney and Schemmer, 1.
skeptical of the presence of foreigners and unsure of their resolve, were quickly won over when they observed how American firepower could enable them to defeat numerically greater Taliban and Al-Qa’ida forces.\textsuperscript{133}

SOFs acted as teams and Air Force assets were often a central part of both Army SF and Navy SEAL units. Lambeth notes that Army Special Forces units usually included both CIA paramilitary forces and an Air Force air controller. Seventy-five percent of air strikes in the campaign against the Taliban were delivered by Marine Corps and Navy planes because a lack of bases made drawing on air assets from Navy carriers easier than using ground-based aircraft.\textsuperscript{134} The close SOF-conventional force cooperation found in Operation Enduring Freedom is in contrast to the Vietnam War. In that conflict, SOFs were either not integrated in the overall war effort or were made to pursue a conventional strategy that failed to make use of their particular skills.

Ground forces also had access to CAS from planes that were loitering above Afghanistan, waiting for such orders. This is one of the innovations used in Afghanistan and represents an improvement over CAS in Vietnam, when forces would frequently have to wait extended periods for air assets to arrive. Because they were not waiting in the sky, the aircraft had to be tasked and prepared once a request for air support came in.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{133} Afghans were skeptical of the commitment of American forces but valued American firepower. One account tells of an Afghan who threw his body down in front of an American SOF during battle to protect him because he thought if an American was hurt, that the U.S. would withdraw its forces and CAS. Carney and Schemmer, 3.

\textsuperscript{134} Lambeth, 60, 248, 259-260.

\textsuperscript{135} Captain Dan Akbar, personal communication, July 15, 2008. For more detail on the organization of air assets, see Rebecca Grant, “The War Nobody Expected,” \textit{Air Force} 85:4 (April, 2002).
In Afghanistan, the extensive employment of SOFs and the limited number of conventional forces have been cited as reasons for post-war instability, including insurgent attacks. This force structure represents the cornerstone of Donald Rumsfeld’s ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’, which emphasized technology and limited personnel in war-fighting.\footnote{For Rumsfeld’s own explanation of this transformation, see Donald H. Rumsfeld, “Transforming the Military,” \textit{Foreign Affairs} 81:3 (May/June, 2002): 20-32.} Rumsfeld stressed the need for “fully integrated joint forces capable of reaching distant theaters quickly and working with our air and sea forces to strike adversaries swiftly and with devastating effect.”\footnote{Rumsfeld, 27.} The merits of Rumsfeld’s emphasis on limited troop strength are debatable, but it is clear that the Goldwater-Nichols Act gave commanders the authority (and the military services the capability) to make such a strategy possible. That CENTCOM was bureaucratically capable of pursuing such a strategy is noteworthy because Rumsfeld’s revolution is threatening to the services, particularly the Army. This represents a sharp departure from the Vietnam War in which the MACV was cobbled together in a manner that reflected service interests rather than a unified plan for victory.

\textit{Operation Anaconda}

After the initial Taliban and Al-Qa’ida defeats in Operation Enduring Freedom, and the failure to intercept Bin Laden at Tora Bora, focus shifted to a more conventional approach. Naylor writes that “U.S. commanders were…rethinking their ‘all UW, all the time’ approach.”\footnote{Naylor, 23.} CENTCOM’s control over military assets in Afghanistan allowed it to include conventional forces in the force structure with little logistical difficulty. The

\footnote{Rumsfeld, 27.}
command was also able to avoid significant input from the service branches over which forces would be used or the ‘distribution of glory.’

Operation Anaconda was named for its design as a series of rings of forces that would choke Taliban and Al-Qa’ida forces from their hideouts in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. It demonstrated the ability of CENTCOM to react to the situation on the ground in Afghanistan and adapt the force structure accordingly. Indeed, the decision to increase the use of conventional forces reflected disappointment on the part of U.S. decision makers at the failure of Afghan forces at Tora Bora to pursue Al-Qa’ida. It appears that tribal forces were less committed to Bin Laden’s capture than the Americans were and failed to pursue him aggressively. Conventional U.S. forces, it was hoped, would prevent a repeat of Tora Bora.

Command and Control

CENTCOM’s exercise of centralized control over U.S. assets has already been demonstrated by its ability to cut the service branches out of the planning process and by the ability of units or individuals from different services to work jointly. Both are attributable to changes brought about by Goldwater-Nichols and stand in contrast to the disjointed effort taken in Vietnam. Another key change introduced by Goldwater-Nichols is the ability of the regional CINC to revise command arrangements as he sees fit. In the case of Afghanistan, Franks did not personally direct troops on the ground in Afghanistan. He was involved in directing U.S. actions from CENTCOM headquarters, but worked through three functional lines of command for U.S. forces. These were the

140 My personal communication with veterans confirms the success of inter-service cooperation.
Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), Coalition Forces Air Component Command (CFACC), and the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC).

CFLCC commanded all conventional land forces in Afghanistan as well as some SOFs. These are known as ‘white’ SOFs because they are not secret. CFLCC was organized in Afghanistan as a Combined Joint Task Force, initially as CJTF-180. CFC-A (Combined Forces Command Afghanistan) later took over the role of component commander, and CJTF-180 became a subordinate command. Reports about U.S. forces in Afghanistan refer to a number of combined joint task forces, including CJTF-180, CJTF-76, and CJTF-82. In personal communication with an official at CENTCOM, I was informed that these designators do not represent different command chains, but rather the same organizational arrangement whose designation has changed over the course of Operation Enduring Freedom. The number assigned to the CJTF reflects the unit leading it. This unit varies with scheduled troop rotations.

CFACC coordinated all CENTCOM air assets, including those from the Air Force, Navy/Marines, and the Army. A subordinate command, the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) was in charge of Afghanistan-specific forces. An officer at CAOC is quoted as saying, "you had a coherent and cooperative group of planners from all the services, working together with a common goal and perspective.” Grant attributes this to the use of a joint command arrangement. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. John P. Jumper added that "we've come a long way from 10 years ago, when we had to fly ATO

141 Official from CENTCOM, personal communication, July 16, 2008
142 Grant.
In addition to the air power innovations already mentioned here, the Afghan campaign saw the extensive use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), controlled primarily by the CIA and Air Force. These assets provided an intelligence-gathering capability and were often armed.

However, in an aspect of the campaign reminiscent of Vietnam, CENTCOM required authorization before it could engage medium and high-value targets. There was also some coordination with the JCS on targeting lists. Such JCS involvement in choosing targets was more limited than during Vietnam but it is unclear why. It is possible that the JCS decided to leave these decisions up to the theater commanders but operational details may have also played a role. Lambeth notes that in military operations leading up to the fall of the Taliban government, only 20 percent of air attacks were on pre-assigned targets. This raises the possibility that theater assets may have had authority over local targeting because of a lack of permanent targets, rather than because of a power shift caused by Goldwater-Nichols.

JSOC had control over all ‘black’ SOFs, which are so named because of their secret nature. These forces were organized into task forces to take on particular missions. Special Operations Forces have played an unprecedented role in military operations in Afghanistan, notably in the early days of fighting. Some difficulty was experienced, however, when greater emphasis shifted to conventional forces and the two were not fully integrated. Naylor writes about the concerns land force commanders at Fort Bagram had.

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143 Ibid (Brackets in the original).
145 Lambeth, 259.
because they did not exercise control over SOFs operating in their battle space. An ad
hoc arrangement was worked out, but Naylor writes that “this was a clear violation of the
military principle of unity of command – the idea that a single commander should control
all forces involved in an operation.”¹⁴⁶

CENTCOM also set up a Coalition Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force
(CJCMOTF) in 2001 during the planning of Operation Enduring Freedom.¹⁴⁷ The
CJCMOTF was tasked with leadership of Civil Military Operations (CMO) in
Afghanistan. Field notes, however, that the chain of command was not able to integrate
Civil-Military Operations at each level of the chain and that commanders tended to pass
off responsibility to Civil Affairs (CA) forces.¹⁴⁸

Unity of command is complicated by the involvement of non-U.S. forces in
Afghanistan. Efforts are divided between Operation Enduring Freedom (which is on-
going) and the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF). Previously a separate
command, OEF is now subordinate to ISAF, which is led by NATO.¹⁴⁹ Afghanistan is
divided into five areas of operation, with the United States in control of the volatile
eastern region.¹⁵⁰ Frewen notes that the unreliability of NATO troop levels is partially
responsible for a disunity of COIN efforts between OEF and ISAF forces. Differences in
NATO and American approaches to counterinsurgency exacerbate the matter. Among

¹⁴⁶ Naylor, 92.
¹⁵⁰ U.S. forces under American command in the East fall under the Combined Joint Task Force 101 (CJTF-
other differences, NATO troops are more reluctant than the Americans to engage Taliban forces.\textsuperscript{151} Some coalition partners have also shown a greater interest in co-opting local militia forces, a practice the United States has not embraced.

\textit{Provincial Reconstruction Teams}

American military operations in the war in Afghanistan have thus far been examined to demonstrate the ability of CENTCOM to plan and direct U.S. forces in a manner that prevented the interference of parochial service interests. They did not represent counterinsurgency operations per se, but a ‘light footprint’ strategy that was employed in order to prevent such an insurgency from developing. It is clear, of course, that this effort failed to prevent the Taliban, Al-Qa’ida, and tribal forces from re-emerging in the form of an insurgent movement after the defeat of their regular forces.

The U.S. effort in response to this insurgency is embodied in the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and, again, the adaptability and interoperability provided by Goldwater-Nichols has played a key role. The flexibility of these organizations has led one author to call them “A model for post-conflict reconstruction and development.”\textsuperscript{152} While PRTs offer significant capabilities for COIN operations, I argue that an insufficient number of them, a lack of civilian coordination, and inadequate commitment by the NCA have prevented the development of an appropriate COIN structure in Afghanistan.

Initial planning at CENTCOM for the Afghan campaign did include some attention to non-kinetic operations alongside the military’s conventional plans. This

\textsuperscript{152} See: Borders.
represents an improvement over the planning for previous conflicts, though U.S. preparations for nation building were still not adequate. The U.S. emphasis on a light footprint and the concomitant limitation of forces has already been explained here. In addition, Franks directed operational planning on civil-military efforts that were intended to enhance the legitimacy of the U.S. effort and gain the support of Afghanistan’s many tribal groups.

Non-governmental relief organizations were included in this planning process, but many would come to resent the military’s role in providing humanitarian relief. Such groups viewed the military as interfering in the ‘humanitarian space’ in which NGOs operate.153 Some felt that the presence of American troops providing aid led the population to equate aid agencies with the military. The result, such critics claim, was that aid workers were more likely to become targets. Sedra writes of a danger “that militaries will often succumb to the temptation to instrumentalize humanitarian assistance in order to secure the compliance of warring parties or to gather intelligence.”154 One can understand these reservations from the perspective of the humanitarian assistance community but leveraging aid to gain support is a key tool in counterinsurgency. The U.S. has used it as such.

Origins

The military initially took charge of humanitarian aid through its CA officers. Early in the Afghan campaign, CA forces operated under the aegis of Coalition Humanitarian Liaison Cells (CHLCs), which worked with SOFs to provide battlefield

153 See: Field, as well as Borders.
commanders with unified civil-military resources. Briscoe gives examples of two chiclets in Afghanistan (as the cells were dubbed) and how they were able to transition back and forth between security and development responsibilities. One of these chiclets worked with local leaders to assess the humanitarian needs of the area and then develop programs to meet those requirements. Plans were formulated within the priorities set by the Afghan and U.S. governments in order to ensure coordination. An example of such plans is the project to dig deep wells that the U.S. undertook in drought-stricken areas. This represents a gain both for the local people and for the U.S. hearts and minds strategy. This chiclet also focused on security at the Kandahar airport, interfacing with Afghans to gain access to local resources. The second chiclet focused more explicitly on security, defending a coalition compound and rooting out local militants. When the security situation allowed, it also provided humanitarian aid.

CHLCs were first implemented in early 2002 and became Joint Regional Teams later the same year to create a more institutionalized form of civil-military cooperation. At the Afghan government’s request, the U.S. changed the name to PRTs. Such teams were to become especially important after the fall of the Taliban government, as the insurgency gained traction. PRTs serve as a means of consolidating and projecting government power into the far-flung regions of the country. They also allow the government of Afghanistan and coalition military forces to coordinate their efforts. That

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the U.S. pursued a civic-oriented approach to counterinsurgency during the early days of the war in Afghanistan represents a departure from Vietnam.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Three Models

There are currently 25 PRTs operating in Afghanistan, and 12 are U.S. led. This has led to a significant amount of differentiation between PRTs as each lead country has developed its own strategies and priorities. Three PRT models are often identified – those of the U.K., Germany, and U.S.\(^{157}\) This differentiation has occurred partly due to demands imposed by home governments, but there was very little coalition-wide guidance to PRTs on how they should be structured, what their priorities should be, or how success might be measured. “The lack of a central coordinating authority, a governing concept of PRT operations or a strategic plan left each sponsoring country free to interpret the guidelines and to conduct operations based on its national priorities and local conditions.”\(^ {158}\)

PRTs have developed responses that make sense in terms of their immediate surroundings and the capacities of the governments that lead them. These capacities follow largely from the types of military expertise possessed by each nation. At one end of the spectrum are the British, whose PRT model draws on extensive colonial experience. British PRTs are marked by close coordination between military and civilian efforts, in line with the British style of colonial policing. The Germans occupy the other end of the spectrum and pursue an approach that is focused more on long-term


humanitarian development and a strict civil-military separation. The United States falls in the middle in terms of the level of civil-military coordination and is notable for the extent to which the military dominates such interaction. This dominance is especially visible in the distribution of manpower and funding between the military and civilian components of American PRTs.

United States Provincial Reconstruction Teams

The structure of the U.S. PRTs varies somewhat, but they have approximately 100 personnel. They are led (in equal numbers) by either an Air Force lieutenant colonel or Navy commander. The majority of the PRT staff is made up of military personnel, including Army CA troops, security forces (about the size of a platoon), and a Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC). Cohen writes that CA units, because they are civilian professionals first and soldiers second, bring diverse civilian capabilities to counterinsurgency efforts. Smaller contingents (usually only 3-4 people) are drawn from the State Department, USAID, as well as from the Department of Agriculture and the Afghan Interior Ministry.

Like their international counterparts, American PRTs received only vague guidance about what their goals were and how they were to be achieved. This changed somewhat in 2003, as they became more clearly linked to the prerogatives of U.S. combat

159 Gauster, 20.
160 Feickert, 1.
commanders. The PRTs became “the eyes and ears of the senior commander” and took on three primary functions: security, extending the reach of the Afghan government, and reconstruction. In other words, the PRTs became a force-multiplier in a campaign notable for its low number of personnel. PRTs are placed as outposts around Afghanistan, particularly in areas that are not yet safe enough for non-governmental or intergovernmental organizations to operate. This enables U.S. commanders to use the PRTs to gather information on local conditions while conducting development projects to win hearts and minds. They are coupled with security patrols to give the government and the U.S.-led coalition a presence throughout the country and to drive a wedge between non-combatant Afghans and insurgents. Their relatively small size and their ability to quickly draw on more robust U.S. forces have allowed the military to maintain its light footprint strategy.

Well-accepted COIN doctrine argues for the importance of providing local security to prevent the population from being intimidated into supporting insurgents. American experiences in Vietnam underscore this point. In Afghanistan, PRTs represent the cornerstone of American efforts to establish regional security. They lack sufficient military capacity to undertake large conventional operations, but they possess a small security contingent to protect their personnel. PRTs are also usually located near a forward operating base, which allows them to draw on additional firepower relatively quickly. They perform patrols of their area in order to establish a presence and other military assets are called in the event of a larger skirmish. This often takes the form of

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164 Drolet, 6.
requesting CAS (the so-called ‘B-52 Effect’) but may include support from nearby ground troops as well.

Central to efforts to create regional security is the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP). Training police and military personnel is a task that is shared with ISAF and represents a vital step toward establishing Afghan control over security throughout the country. The thrust of the American effort to train Afghan security forces takes place through the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A).

PRTs also serve as an extension of the central Afghan government’s authority. Tribal leaders in Afghanistan are extremely powerful and the country has, historically, not had an effective central government for long periods of time. When a central government has ruled the country (such as during the Soviet occupation or during the Taliban’s rule), the dissolution of that government has been followed by fierce competition between tribal warlords. Ethnic differences increase the difficulty of gaining support for a common government. When PRTs can put a government label on development and security efforts, the central government is strengthened.

Reconstruction has also figured prominently in the work of the PRTs, partly because it is key to winning hearts and minds, but partly because local projects to improve the quality of life are easily undertaken without much guidance from higher

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authorities. This was the case in the early days of PRTs before leaders knew what role they occupied in the overall U.S. strategy. Reconstruction efforts have often taken the form of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) and have primarily relied on military discretionary funding. As efforts at the local level have become more integrated into a nation-wide strategy, PRTs have attempted to coordinate with local authorities and the Afghan government in planning construction projects. This has meant submitting development projects to the Interior Ministry for approval and the inclusion of Afghan government personnel in the PRTs. The effect has been to allow military commanders to better understand local needs while tying reconstruction projects into the broader strategy laid out by Afghan officials.

On an operational level, PRTs work for U.S. military commanders down to the brigade level. PRTs receive guidance from a PRT Working Group and a PRT Steering Committee in Kabul but the essentially local nature of PRTs and the dominance of military funding and personnel ensures the military great influence over their direction. Goldwater-Nichols has been instrumental in allowing this sort of strategy. Cooperation between the service branches has meant that officers of any service in American PRTs can receive military support from the nearest U.S. assets. Both coordination and improvements in precision weaponry have allowed for the judicious application of force.

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169 Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds have much of the funds for reconstruction projects because of the flexibility with which they can be spent. For more information, see: Abbaszadeh, et al., 49.


Evaluating United States Provincial Reconstruction Teams

This study, along with most of the literature, has argued that counterinsurgency is essentially a contest between the government and insurgents over whose vision of the country will prevail. This requires a buy-in from average Afghans into a new government in Kabul that may seem distant and unusual. Improving the security and material well-being of Afghans and putting the Afghan government’s stamp on such changes is essential if the coalition is to convince Afghans to endorse a new and unknown form of government. This is the process of winning hearts and minds and it is the cornerstone of what PRTs are designed to do.

PRTs represent an attempt at counterinsurgency that is notable for two reasons. The first, as already stated, is that they were begun so quickly after the start of an insurgency in Afghanistan. This is a clear departure from Vietnam in which the services devised offensive conventional counterinsurgency solutions. Secondly, PRTs draw assets from across the service branches and integrate civic and offensive efforts. Unfortunately, civilian personnel do not report to the PRT commander. Representing a break from the unity achieved by the CORDS program, PRTs bring civilians together with military personnel but do not place them into the military chain of command. Civilians receive their funding and guidance on policy priorities from civilian agencies in Washington while military personnel report to a local commander. Furthermore, coordination of civilian agency efforts only occurs in country. When close cooperation has occurred, it
has been largely because of an auspicious conjunction of personalities in the PRTs rather than an appropriate structure.172

Training provides a good example of the differences between military and civilian approaches to the PRTs. There is no single body that provides training to civilian agencies in the PRTs and ensures that they operate in a coordinated manner toward a common goal.173 When civilians have been able to train at all before their deployment to a PRT, it has often been in the form of ad hoc arrangements, with little connection to the preparations being undertaken by other civilians or their military counterparts. Military members, in contrast, train together prior to deploying to a PRT. This allows them to prepare for the requirements of working in a capacity that requires a range of skills far broader than those required in conventional combat situations.

The PRTs’ impact on counterinsurgency efforts is difficult to judge for a couple of reasons. There are few undisputed metrics for measuring success. For example, a high value for a metric such as ‘contact with the enemy’ could be interpreted to mean that government forces were taking the fight to the enemy. It could also indicate that pacification was failing because of an increase in violence. As in American counterinsurgency in Vietnam, it is easy to focus on certain data simply because they are available. Measuring inputs, such as the mileage of roads repaired gives some sense for what progress is being made in an area, but needs to be alloyed with other observations. Relevant indicators may also be impressionistic and include the kind of response that

soldiers receive from Afghan civilians or the willingness of locals to provide accurate intelligence on insurgent activity.

The problems that Americans experience in attempting to measure counterinsurgency success in Afghanistan mirror those in Vietnam. Counterinsurgents in Vietnam, however, produced the Hamlet Evaluation Survey, which allows the researcher to at least compare changes over time in the security of the hamlets. Perhaps because of the American experience with body counts and other quantitative indices in Vietnam, no systematic mechanism – quantitative or qualitative – has been employed to measure the success of the PRTs at achieving U.S. priorities.

The most disappointing aspect of the PRTs is their limited number and the fact that not all are under U.S. control. Because of Afghanistan’s size, there are many more areas in need of reconstruction and protection from insurgents than 25 PRTs can provide. Furthermore, having three distinct models of PRTs limits the extent to which their efforts can be aggregated and coordinated toward common goals.

1) Did a single commander possess both responsibility and authority for troops of all service branches in theater? Yes.

2) Was technology responsible for the (dis)unity of command? No.

3) Was intervention by the NCA responsible for the (dis)unity of command? No.

4) Did operational planning reflect parochial service interests? No.

5) Did operational planning focus on a hearts and minds approach to COIN? Yes.

6) Was NCA intervention responsible for the presence or lack of a hearts and minds approach? No.

7) Were the services able to cooperate effectively at the tactical level? Yes.

8) Did technology have a significant impact on the presence or lack of cooperation among the service branches? No.

Figure 3: Evaluating U.S. Efforts in Afghanistan
Chapter 6: Assessing the Impact of Goldwater-Nichols on U.S. Counterinsurgency

As discussed previously, counterinsurgency in Vietnam was hampered by a lack of jointness in several areas. Because the Joint Chiefs of Staff had responsibility for changes to the command structure in theater, and because the services dominated the JCS, decisions of how to structure the MACV reflected parochial interests. This led to a divided war effort in which each service branch operated essentially independently. In the absence of a commander to limit the amount of force used, the services followed their doctrinal repertoires, inflicting large-scale destruction that was uncoordinated toward a common goal. The services that decided on their own to focus on protecting the population were those with less institutional interest in large scale tactics. Unfortunately, they were forced to conform to the concepts of conventional war and become more offensive. The service branches had insufficient institutional incentive to pursue a low-intensity war in which they coordinated with the other services and civilians. Pacification was ‘the other war.’ Once pacification was forced on the military by putting civilians in its chain of command, U.S. efforts improved dramatically.

Goldwater-Nichols was expected to have unified the chain of command in theater, while enabling the service branches to work with one another more effectively. A key aspect of this unity is the presence of a single commander above the institutional fray who is tasked with overall success. This commander’s responsibility for mission success should give him a powerful incentive to pull together a constellation of forces according to their capabilities rather than service branches. These improvements are expected to increase tactical cooperation across service branches while rationalizing the use of force.
The latter is because removing the service branches’ parochial interests from the operational planning process should allow a unified commander to tailor the selection of assets to the needs of the campaign, rather than to the wishes of the services. In non-COIN operations, this should mean the integration of forces and limitation of the firepower used. In COIN operations, it is expected to result in the closely-coordinated application of limited firepower, integrated with a focus on the non-kinetic aspects of counterinsurgency.

The impact of Goldwater-Nichols in Afghanistan has been mixed. As demonstrated previously, increases in the authority of the unified combatant command CINCs have unified the chain of command and allowed CENTCOM to override the influence of the service branches. This is apparent in Franks’ decision to rely heavily on SOFs and to limit the number of troops the Army could send from its conventional units. CINC CENTCOM’s increased power has also allowed him to adapt the chain of command as needed. This is evident in the formation of Combined Joint Task Forces, which pooled various service assets responsible to CENTCOM.

Likewise, the formation of a CJCMOTF and the early civic affairs focus (which developed into Provincial Reconstruction Teams) provide evidence that empowering a central commander makes it less likely that operational strategy will simply mirror ‘what the services do best.’ Taking the services out of operational planning made possible a strategy in which pacification was pursued from very early in the campaign. In other words, Snyder and Posen’s expectation that services would steer military strategies in an offensive direction was mitigated by the presence of a unified command with
responsibility for overall success. Such a balanced posture stands in contrast to the offensive strategies chosen by the service branches in Vietnam in order to guard their ‘ecological niches’ in the military bureaucracy.

Further, the increased cooperation between service branches (notably SOFs) provided commanders with truly joint assets. This points not only to the importance of joint training among the services but especially to the importance of having SOCOM as a separate unified combatant command. Training jointly under the unified command of SOCOM has meant fighting jointly in theater. While inter-service disagreements over the use of key assets remain, the services are operating at a level of jointness that is unprecedented in American history. Centralized command which empowers subordinates to perform specific tasks helps square the circle between centralization and decentralization in the spirit of Auftragstaktik.175

Joint military efforts in Afghanistan have not been without tensions and disagreements, however. A good example of inter-service difficulties is disagreement between the Army and Air Force over the use of air assets.176 Reflecting their respective military specializations, the Air Force is extremely concerned with the preservation of its planes, which sometimes leaves the Army disappointed at the quality of CAS. This has led to some animosity between these branches and to the Army’s efforts to expand its

176 This tension is not new and Wilson writes of insufficient Air Force CAS to Army units in the Korean War. See: Wilson (1989), 186-187.
own airborne capacity. The Army’s effort includes not only CAS but also the capacity for strategic/tactical airlift and UAVs.

Whether the development of redundant capabilities is a positive or a negative development in light of Goldwater-Nichols depends on the metric used. One of the priorities of Goldwater-Nichols was to eliminate redundancy in military acquisitions and planning among the service branches. Judged according to this objective, such overlap represents a failure of jointness. Limited parochialism however, may cause positive competition between service branches to spur innovation the same way it does in the private sector. That is the position taken here. While redundancy is more expensive, it also puts greater resources at the disposal of local commanders. The unity of command exercised by the regional CINCs and their subordinates prevents redundancy on the part of the services from making the services insular from one another. Familiarity with the strengths and weaknesses of the assets deployed by each service will allow a competent commander to draw on more tailored resources. This increases the likelihood of operational success and the minimalization of collateral damage. Jointness should, therefore, not suffer.

Interoperability, long a problem in joint warfare, has not been entirely absent in Afghanistan. For example, the General Accounting Office has reported that “a lack of uniformity in laser range finders and communications equipment” has reduced ability of

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177 See Shanker.
178 Bolkcom and Katzman, 26-28, 32.
179 Luttwak notes that the Army turned down Air Force airlift because it was easier to use its own air assets than cooperate with the Air Force.
ground and air forces to work together.\textsuperscript{180} Likewise, Air Force refueling tankers have been unable to service Navy planes.\textsuperscript{181} Overall, however, the situation has improved greatly since Goldwater-Nichols. The level of inter-service cooperation is particularly impressive when one contrasts it with the division of Vietnam among the services.

Goldwater-Nichols has had less of an impact on the civilian side of operations. The problems experienced by civilian agencies mirror those in Vietnam before the CORDS program. Responsible to separate agencies with unique requirements and funding, civilian agencies represent a weak link in the PRT structure that has caused a dominance of the PRTs by military personnel. Goldwater-Nichols was designed to remedy shortcomings in the military after it became clear that a lack of jointness was handicapping American efforts to effectively employ its military. It was suggested here that the norm of jointness may have spilled over into civil-military cooperation the way it has into international cooperation. The results have been disappointing. Although military and civilian personnel are not separated by the gulf that separated the service branches, the institutional weight of the military has eclipsed that of its civilian partners, preventing a truly joint effort. Given the importance of a ‘whole of government’ approach to counterinsurgency, the loose nature of civil-military coordination is problematic.

In the final analysis, it is clear that the Goldwater-Nichols Act unified the command structure and empowered the regional CINCs to pursue a non-parochial and joint strategy at the operational and tactical levels. Improvements in jointness, both in

\textsuperscript{180} Bolkom and Katzman, 22.  
\textsuperscript{181} Carney and Schemmer, 278.
terms of training and equipment have allowed members of the military service branches to work together to an unprecedented degree. Technology and the intervention of the President or Secretary of Defense have been identified as potential intervening variables and will be addressed here.

Technology seems to have had a modest effect, but that effect is easily overstated. Improvements in precision guided munitions, particularly the ability of ground forces to direct air attacks against targets in real time has multiplied the lethality and precision of relatively few soldiers, Marines, and airmen. Some of the most important changes, however, have not related to technology. For example, the practice of putting CAS planes in the sky in loitering patterns and enabling them to accept requests for support from across the service branches could have been accomplished with the level of technology used in Vietnam. Such a hypothetical CAS would likely have been less precise because of the weaponry involved, but the process of coordinating airspace by a unified air command was made possible by changes in the command structure – not technology. Furthermore, many of the most effective CAS planes in the U.S. arsenal are older and slow-moving, not more modern, high-speed jets.\(^{182}\)

The failure in Tehran and the near failure in Grenada underscore the point that what troubled the military before Goldwater-Nichols was essentially the lack of structure to enable and compel the services to work together. Furthermore, technology is arguably more relevant to winning battles than defeating insurgencies. COIN requires face to face contact with Afghans and the development of national and local capacity. This cannot be

\(^{182}\) Such aircraft are especially useful because they can remain over a battlespace longer. Some are even resistant to fire from the ground.
accomplished from a distance and there is a danger that the U.S. will rely on advanced weapons rather than human assets. The United States would be wise to take note that, just as the helicopter did not ensure a U.S. victory in Vietnam, the precision guided bomb will not ensure victory in Afghanistan.\(^{183}\)

The involvement of the President and Secretary of Defense has also been suggested as an intervening variable. In the case of Vietnam, such intervention on the part of Johnson was crucial to the creation of the CORDS program. In Afghanistan, the opposite has been the case. From as early as the first days after 9/11, Secretary Rumsfeld was looking ahead to a war with Iraq and pushing the president in that direction. The result was a diversion of resources to the effort in Iraq and a down-grading of the priority attached to U.S. efforts in Afghanistan.\(^{184}\) I cannot help but question whether the U.S. established a broad coalition and included such a large role for NATO forces in Afghanistan in order to keep sufficient resources available for the pending invasion of Iraq.

Fighting wars with allies, rather than alone, has benefits, but it also increases the number of institutional fault lines that must be bridged for success.\(^{185}\) Goldwater-Nichols helped to break down barriers within the U.S. military establishment but ceding such a large portion of the effort in Afghanistan to allied forces has counteracted many of those gains. Thus, in Afghanistan, as in Vietnam, the commitment of national civilian leaders

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has proven key to marshalling the resources needed to pursue an effective counterinsurgency strategy. That commitment was forthcoming in the final years of Vietnam. It is unclear whether that support will materialize in Afghanistan. The question that remains is what the United States can do to better integrate its civilian efforts. Attempts at reform are underway and they will be given brief attention here.
Chapter 7: Avenues for Improvement – GNA II or a New CORDS?

There is widespread agreement that PRTs are a viable concept but that the civilian side of operations needs to be strengthened. Drolet writes that “there must be a designated lead agency for the reconstruction and capacity development phase of any operation… the Department of State is an ideal candidate.”\(^{186}\) Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Peter Pace, has similarly called for reform, arguing that “we’re going to need all the agencies of national power to be responsive inside the enemy’s loop. We do not have a mechanism right now to make that happen.”\(^{187}\)

These recommendations are particularly relevant to winning the civilian population during an insurgency. Indigenous insurgents are more capable, culturally, of operating in this space and they are able to use violent tactics that are counterproductive in the hands of counterinsurgents. The Goldwater-Nichols Act has increased the ability of battlefield commanders to choose appropriate operational strategies and bring force to bear in a limited, coordinated manner. Achieving a ‘whole of government’ response to insurgency, however, will require similar commitment and competence from civilians ‘inside the enemy’s loop.’

The Center for International and Strategic Studies has hosted a multi-phased project titled “Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: U.S. Government and Defense Reform in a New Strategic Era” that mirrors the Goldwater-Nichols Act in a number of its suggested reforms for the civilian bureaucracy. Alongside efforts to attract and retain more qualified civilians in national security positions, “Beyond Goldwater-Nichols” has

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\(^{186}\) Drolet, 14.

recommended joint training for military and civilian personnel and the development of standard operating procedures that are common across military and civilian agencies. In an interesting borrowing of concepts from Goldwater-Nichols, civilians would be required to have several years of experience in a different national security agency before entering the senior executive service. A new agency for stability operations is recommended as well, and would report to the State Department. Finally, the study recommends presidential designation of a high-level civilian (likely an ambassador) to serve as coordinator for U.S. interagency efforts in-country.\textsuperscript{188}

The Bush administration addressed the question of interagency cooperation with National Security Presidential Directive 46 and several of its provisions reflect the same strategies expressed by “Beyond Goldwater-Nichols.” NSPD-46 assigns responsibility for stabilization and reconstruction activities to the State Department. The result has been formation of the Interagency Management System (IMS) for Reconstruction and Stabilization, which includes agency coordination at the level of Assistant Secretaries, ‘civilian planning cells’ that will work with the unified combatant commands, as well as the development and expansion of civilian rapid response teams.\textsuperscript{189} This combined effort would mean increased attention from officials in Washington and a greater capacity for de-militarizing the civilian space in-country. The latter would be accomplished by providing more civilian personnel to take over roles that the military has been forced to assume.

Two potential problems should be raised however. If funding to civilian efforts is not both increased and unified toward a common goal, those agencies with the most money and coherent organization will set the agenda. Second, mechanisms for coordination that do not include a single chain of command will be dependent upon the personalities of those involved for success. Past experience with bureaucratic turf wars indicates how unlikely it is that this will take place.

One alternative to a ‘Goldwater-Nichols II’ is a ‘CORDS II.’ This should incorporate the personnel development initiatives described above, while merging the civilian and military efforts into one chain of command. Like the CORDS program in Vietnam, it would mean integrating civilians into every level of the development and reconstruction hierarchy and choosing personnel based on their individual qualifications rather than civilian or military status.

Such an approach would not be without risks, particularly to civilian control over the military. Critics would no doubt decry the ‘militarization of development,’ overlooking the fact that such a program would take what has already been militarized and inject meaningful civilian influence into it. A parallel is perhaps to be drawn to efforts at including anthropologists in military counterinsurgency planning. Created in order to understand local political structures, such programs allow military planners to maximize the political impact of military operations. This means that force can be used more sparingly because it is used more appropriately. Any compromise of the civilian-
military distinction, however, provokes a knee-jerk reaction and a group of anthropologists quickly sought to dissuade their colleagues from participation.¹⁹⁰

The risk of not following such a strategy, however, is that a reformed civilian bureaucracy will look much like the military bureaucracy before Goldwater-Nichols. Just as the regional CINCs possessed responsibility for the completion of key missions but not the requisite authority, so too are civilians likely to find themselves lacking.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This thesis has attempted to understand the significance of the Goldwater-Nichols Act to American counterinsurgency efforts. Starting from assumptions about how institutionalized parochial interests drive an offensive strategy, analysis was focused on the cases of Vietnam and Afghanistan. The result is a set of insights which suggest the inadequacy of the realist paradigm to predict when a country will bring appropriate forces to bear in COIN operations. It has also suggested how bureaucratic structures may bring national power to bear more effectively.

The next step, in line with Alexander George’s model of structured, focused comparison, should be the examination of other case studies in terms of the variables employed here. This will allow for the refinement of theories concerning insurgency and military response. Equally important are the implications for national policy. If the conclusions of this thesis are correct, Americans will have to overcome their distaste for mixing civilian and military affairs in order to prevail against insurgencies. The alternative is to keep muddling through, which serves no one.


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