

# INTRODUCTION

*By Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins*

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.*

—T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”

**N**ot learning from wars can be catastrophic. The next cohort of national security leaders may not achieve the sublime mental state envisioned by T.S. Eliot, but they must make every effort to learn the lessons of the Long War. For that reason, in his second term’s *Strategic Direction to the Joint Force*, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin E. Dempsey charged senior officers “to apply wartime lessons learned to provide best military advice and inform U.S. policy objectives and strategic guidance.”<sup>1</sup> Major General Gregg F. Martin, USA, then-President of National Defense University (NDU), wrote:

*In addition to continuing to analyze and teach the lessons of past conflicts, [NDU] must research, disseminate, and teach the strategic and operational lessons of over 10 years of war. These efforts will play an important role in both improving the quality of strategic leadership and performance of our graduates and contributing to new national and military security strategies and innovative operational concepts to meet emerging needs.*<sup>2</sup>

This volume represents an early attempt at assessing the Long War, now in its 14<sup>th</sup> year. Forged in the fires of the 9/11 attacks, the war includes campaigns against al Qaeda, major conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and operations in the Horn of Africa, the Republic of the Philippines, and globally, in the air and on the sea. The authors herein treat only the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, the largest U.S. efforts. It is intended for future senior officers, their advisors, and other national security decisionmakers. By derivation, it is also a book for students in joint professional military education courses, which will qualify them to work in the field of strategy. While the book tends to focus on strategic decisions and developments of land wars among the people, it acknowledges that the status of the United States as a great power and the strength of its ground forces depend in large measure on the dominance of the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force in their respective domains.

This assessment proceeds from two guiding sets of questions about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The core set of questions was suggested by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs: What did we gain? What did we lose? What costs did the United States pay for its response to 9/11, particularly from operations in Afghanistan and Iraq? How should the answers to these questions inform senior military leaders' contributions to future national security and national military strategy? The second set of questions proceeds from the first: what are the strategic "lessons learned" (or "lessons encountered," as the British and the authors of this work prefer) of our experience in Operation *Enduring Freedom* (OEF) in Afghanistan, and Operations *Iraqi Freedom* (OIF) and *New Dawn* in Iraq.

This inquiry is constrained by a number of factors. First, the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq continue. Our combat forces withdrew from Iraq in 2011 and that campaign was formally brought to a close, but it was reopened because of the advances by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) since 2014. Thus, this book reviews two incomplete stories. Second, focusing on the primary operations in Iraq and Afghanistan leaves the lessons of secondary, but still important, operations for another day. For example, the advisory and assistance experience in the Republic of the Philippines may well provide important lessons for the future. Indeed, future U.S. operations in this war are much more likely to resemble what our trainers and advisors did in the Philippines than what their comrades did in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Third, in asking the questions posed above, the book may pay inadequate attention to the nearly 50 nations that have been involved with the United States as coalition partners in various theaters. Warfare today is coalition warfare. While this book focuses on the United States, nothing here should be seen as devaluing the contributions of host nations or coalition partners. Finally, our primary audience is future senior military officers who will work at the strategic level in peace and war: the Chairman, Service chiefs, combatant commanders, their senior staff officers, and all those—military and civilian—who interact with interagency partners, the National Security Council, and the President. Given its focus and audience, this study does not include an examination of the tactical and operational levels of these conflicts.<sup>3</sup>

This inquiry must also contend with the difficulties of learning from history, an arduous task under any circumstances. Great effort is no guarantee of learning the right lessons. There are numerous cases of great powers making significant efforts to learn—only to fail. The French had one of the greatest armies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries but twice learned the wrong lessons from wars against Germany, including a world war in which they were part of the victorious alliance. The causes of faulty learning are varied but include lack of imagination, poor information, misperception, stress, organizational preferences, bureaucratic politics, and inflexible military doctrine.<sup>4</sup> Ideology and personal experience may enlighten or blind the observer to lessons.<sup>5</sup> As noted by military historian Jay Luvaas:

*We should understand the reasons why military men in the past have failed sometimes to heed the correct lessons. Often it has been the result of an inability to understand local conditions or to accept another army or society on its own terms. Sometimes the guidance to observers has been so specific that the major lessons of the war went unheeded simply because observers had not been instructed to look in different directions. . . . Sometimes, doctrine has narrowed the vision or directed the search, as in the case of the French army after World War I. Often, there has been a failure to appreciate that once removed from its context, a specific lesson loses much of its usefulness.<sup>6</sup>*

Henry Kissinger has reminded us that “the study of history offers no manual of instruction that can be applied automatically; history teaches by analogy, shedding light on the likely consequences of comparable situations. But each generation must determine for itself which circumstances are in fact comparable.”<sup>7</sup> Strategic lessons from comparable cases can appear to present the student with conflicting advice. Adam Gopnick, comparing the onset of the two world wars, wrote:

*The last century, through its great cataclysms, offers two clear, ringing, and, unfortunately, contradictory lessons. The First World War teaches that territorial compromise is better than full-scale war, that an “honor-bound” allegiance of the great powers to small nations is a recipe for mass killing, and that it is crazy to let the blind mechanism of armies and alliances trump common sense. The Second teaches that searching for an accommodation with tyranny by selling out small nations only encourages the tyrant, that refusing to fight now leads to a worse fight later on, and that only the steadfast rejection of compromise can prevent the natural tendency to rush to a bad peace with worse men. The First teaches us never to rush into a fight, the Second never to back down from a bully.<sup>8</sup>*

At the strategic level, there are no cookie-cutter lessons that can be pressed onto every batch of future situational dough. A lesson from one era or locale may not fit another. The only safe posture is to know many historical cases and to be constantly reexamining the strategic context, questioning assumptions, and testing the appropriateness of analogies. The lessons of OIF and OEF will join those of other wars, competing for the attention of future decisionmakers and, no doubt, at times confounding them. The difficulty of learning lessons from history, however, should not stop us from trying to learn. Indeed, the rewards of successful learning—think Franklin D. Roosevelt in the run-up to World War II or John F. Kennedy in the Cuban missile crisis—cannot be overestimated. A final caveat: one’s enemies can learn faster and better. The defeated will often learn better than the victors.

For national security professionals, technical and tactical lessons are relatively easy to digest, but operational and strategic lessons are much more

difficult, though not impossible, to capture. Lessons for military or national security strategy are the most important lessons of all, and the ones that military observers often ignore. In the Armed Forces, one often hears, even from senior officers, that certain strategic subjects are “above my pay grade.” That is sometimes true, but at the highest levels of command, the larger strategic lessons must be the focal point of study and education. Carl von Clausewitz reminded his readers that policy, politics, statecraft, and military affairs come together at the highest levels:

*To bring a war or one of its campaigns to a successful close requires a thorough grasp of national policy. On that level, strategy and policy coalesce: [the general who] is commander in chief, is simultaneously a statesman . . . but he must not cease to be a general. On the one hand, he is aware of the entire political situation; on the other, he knows exactly how much he can achieve with the means at his disposal.<sup>9</sup>*

President Kennedy covered similar themes in his 1961 instructions to the Joint Chiefs. Disappointed by senior officers who looked narrowly at issues during the Bay of Pigs crisis, he wrote, “While I look to the Chiefs to present the military factor without reserve or hesitation, I regard them to be more than military men and expect their help in fitting military requirements into the over-all context of any situation, recognizing that the most difficult problem in Government is to combine all assets in a unified, effective pattern.”<sup>10</sup>

Finally, for senior officers and their civilian masters, learning from history is complicated by the nature of organizational life. It is one thing for an individual to experience a phenomenon, learn from it, and apply lessons to a subsequent experience. When generals and admirals talk about learning, however, they are talking about distilling experience, drawing complex conclusions, debating them, resolving differences, packaging lessons, and then inculcating them into the force through doctrine, training, exercises, and joint professional military education.<sup>11</sup> The Armed Forces can forget lessons that are not institutionalized, that lose bureaucratic sponsorship, or that are misapplied in the future. The retention, nurturing, and propagation of relevant lessons are difficult at the tactical and operational levels but even more so at the context-sensitive strategic level.

In a similar vein, the failure to inculcate lessons can cause the apparent repetition of national security disasters, commonly referred to as history repeating itself. For example, the decisionmaking pathologies associated with Athens' Sicilian expedition in the Peloponnesian Wars, the introduction of U.S. combat troops into Vietnam in 1965, and the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 all demonstrate the difficulties of learning, institutionalizing, and consistently applying even well-known or obvious strategic lessons. Sadly, faulty learning and poor decisionmaking echo throughout the ages, but so do the cases of accurate learning, adaptation, and innovation.

Encountering lessons is relatively easy; understanding and institutionalizing them over time is more difficult, especially in the realm of national strategy. The ultimate value of this volume should be determined by the future senior officers and national security decisionmakers who refine and internalize its strategic lessons. Those leaders must then ensure that the lessons are passed down to succeeding generations and applied under appropriate circumstances. If this book assists future military and civilian decisionmakers, it will have achieved its goal.

This book is an edited volume but not a collage of independent efforts. The authors worked together for 10 months and twice met in conference along with expert commentators. At the same time, the authors do not necessarily agree on all the key assessments.

The book is divided in this manner: chapter one focuses on the early, pre-Surge years in both campaigns. Chapter two continues the chronological thread but focuses on assessment and adaptation in the Surges in Iraq and Afghanistan. Chapter three examines decisionmaking at the national level and implementation. Chapter four discusses security force assistance, the coalition's development of indigenous armies, and police forces. Chapter five analyzes the complex set of legal issues attendant to irregular conflict, including detention and interrogation policy. Chapter six develops the capstone conclusions of the study and isolates the most important lessons. Supporting these chapters are three annexes: one on the human and financial costs of war, and, for reference, two others on the key events in both campaigns.

To orient the reader, the lessons encountered in these chapters are divided into a few functional areas: national-level decisionmaking, unity of effort/unity of command, intelligence and understanding the operational environment,

character of contemporary conflict, and security force assistance. Clearly, each observer of the Long War would characterize his lessons in a different manner, but the following observations are what the contributors of this volume thought to be most important.<sup>12</sup>

## **National-Level Decisionmaking**

Strategic lessons begin with decisionmaking, which here entails efforts at shaping goals, developing strategies, crafting plans at the national and departmental levels, and developing ways to carry out those plans. Every chapter in this book raises observations and lessons on these complex processes. Here are the lessons encountered in this study:

- Military participation in national decisionmaking is both necessary and problematic. Part of this comes from normal civil-military tension, but many instances in the Long War also show unnecessary misunderstandings. Civilian national security decisionmakers need a better understanding of the complexity of military strategy and the military's need for planning guidance. Senior military officers for their part require a deep understanding of the interagency decisionmaking process, an appreciation for civilian points of view, and a willingness to appreciate the complexities and challenges inherent in our system of civilian control.<sup>13</sup> Both civilian and military planners should cultivate the art of backward planning, starting with the desired political end-state and working back toward the present.<sup>14</sup>
- In a similar vein, inside the Pentagon, future senior officers also need to study cases in wartime decisionmaking. The case of Iraq is particularly instructive. In the run-up to the Iraq War, the Secretary of Defense—as is his legal prerogative—interjected himself into the military-technical aspects of war planning to a high, perhaps unprecedented degree. History will judge the wisdom of this managerial technique, but it serves as a reminder to future senior officers that the civil-military relationship, in Eliot Cohen's term, is characterized by an unequal dialogue.<sup>15</sup> Secretaries of Defense in the future can leave war planning to the com-

batant commander and the Joint Chiefs or, like Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, dive into the details with a regular stream of questions and memoranda. Senior officers need to be ready for either method, or a hybrid of both.

- Vigorous discussion and clearly presented military perspectives are essential for successful strategy. The best military advice should be provided without fear or favor, but always nested within a larger appreciation of the strategic context and its political, economic, diplomatic, and informational dimensions. This conversation must be carried on in private, not in the public square.
- In most cases civilian leaders will look for a range of suitable, feasible, and acceptable military options, with clear cost and risk estimates. In cases where the objective is poorly defined, military leaders should press for clarity. In so doing, senior officers must remember that civilian policymakers generally lack a military planning background and that formulating policy goals is usually based on discussion and consensus. In this milieu, persuasive arguments matter and will often prevail.
- Four-star officers are presumed to be masters of joint warfare, but at the highest levels, knowledge of the interagency community, the press, and Congress, as well as defense budgeting and international affairs, are also critical. Not every successful flag officer will be well equipped in these fields. In some of the cases examined in this volume, lack of experience in these areas probably inhibited success.
- While the civilian leadership remains firmly in charge of the policy process, senior military figures also have an obligation to provide their military expertise and, if necessary, their respectful dissent to help prevent strategic disaster. In this regard, military officers like their civilian counterparts do not shed personal and professional values when they reach the top. Whenever the use of force is contemplated, the advice they bring to bear must come with a firm moral-ethical component.
- National security is a highly personalized process where trust is the coin of the realm. That trust may take years to evolve but



can be lost in a day. Good working relationships between civilian and military partners, despite differences that may arise on specific issues, will go far toward resolving the natural tension inherent in the civil-military relationship.

- Senior military planners must pay more attention to the linkage between political and military objectives. Civil and military planning for postconflict stability operations was inadequate. Poor postconflict planning set back operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The worst failing in Iraq was, early on, an inadequate number of troops on the ground to establish order and initiate stability operations. This failure sped the onset of an insurgency that evolved into a sectarian civil war.
- Policy and strategy are highly sensitive to budget, election, and news cycles. The health of the Nation's economy is also a key factor. Career military officers are not always attuned to these realities, but civilian decisionmakers are. Awareness of and flexibility with respect to this reality will improve the quality of military advice.

## **Unity of Effort/Unity of Command**

The best strategic decisions exemplify unity of command on the military side and unity of effort in all areas. The campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq suffered from significant problems in this regard, both in the military and in the inter-agency aspects of the operations.

- Whole-of-government efforts are essential in irregular conflicts. The military must improve its efforts to reach across departmental divides. The Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have improved over time but need to work harder on planning for expeditionary activities. Unfortunately, emphasis on working whole-of-government issues is fading across the U.S. Government, except in the field of joint concept and doctrine development.<sup>16</sup> For popular support and policy effectiveness, the national security system must

routinely generate vertical and horizontal unity of effort at every level.

- The United States was often unable to knit its vast interagency capabilities together for best effect.<sup>17</sup> The implementation of national decisions by various agencies and departments was a continuing problem for senior officials. The inability to integrate, direct, prioritize, and apply capabilities in the optimal manner diminished success as much as any faulty strategy or campaign plan. The converse is also true: our greatest successes were those pockets of interagency collaboration stimulated by innovative leaders.

- Continuous monitoring of strategy implementation is part of the portfolio of the National Security Council, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, and field commanders. At national, theater, and high commands, U.S. departments and agencies must work closely early on to develop performance metrics and use them consistently over time to manage the conflict. Honest periodic reassessments should be meticulously planned and ruthlessly executed. This is important for combat, personnel, logistics, and replacement training and education. Short tours are likely to be a constant, and we need to ensure that new personnel and units know the physical territory and demographics of their areas of operations.

- Unity of command is a key tenet in the principles of joint operations and remains relevant to how the Armed Forces use combat power across a range of operations. Unity of command is a time-proven American tradition that has been applied to great effect in the Civil War, World War I, and World War II. This principle, however, seems to have been bypassed in the development of disjointed command and control structures in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, General David Petraeus noted that we did not get the strategy and command and control architecture right in Afghanistan until 2010.<sup>19</sup> Creating unity of command within large coalitions will remain a high point of military art.

## **Intelligence and Understanding the Operational Environment**

Intelligence in war is always problematic. Not only are understanding, analysis, and prediction difficult, but the thinking enemy also attempts to deceive us at every twist and turn. In these two campaigns, the difficult mission of intelligence agencies has been compounded by the need for additional intelligence on the indigenous population.

- Neither national nor military intelligence in Iraq and Afghanistan was a success in supporting decisionmakers. Intelligence on Afghanistan itself was initially scant and not actionable. In Iraq, prewar intelligence was wrong about weapons of mass destruction, the Iraqi police, and the state of Iraqi infrastructure. U.S. forces had little information on tribal dynamics and the potential role of Iran. In both wars, U.S. intelligence failed in telling battlespace owners about the people whom they were protecting. The effects of these shortcomings were grave.
- The biggest advances in intelligence came in improved support for the warfighter at the tactical level, and the intimate relationship that developed between special operations forces and all-source intelligence. General Martin Dempsey stated that a captain at a remote site in Afghanistan in 2008 had more access to national technical means and high-level intelligence than he had as a division commander in 2003.<sup>20</sup>
- Neither national-level figures nor field commanders fully understood the operational environment, including the human aspects of military operations.<sup>21</sup> To fight, in Rupert Smith's term, war among the people, one must first understand them. We were not intellectually prepared for the unique aspects of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. In both conflicts, ethnic, religious, and cultural differences drove much of the fighting. Efforts to solve this problem—Human Terrain Teams and the Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands Program, for example—came too little and too late. Our intelligence system was of little help here primarily because the Intelligence Community did not see this as its mission. The need for information aggregation stands as an equal to classical all-

source intelligence. Our lack of understanding of the wars seriously retarded our efforts to fight them and to deal with our indigenous allies, who were often more interested in score-settling or political risk aversion than they were in winning the war.

- Understanding the operational environment calls for a whole array of fixes, such as improving language training, predeployment training, area expertise, and reforming the intelligence/information apparatuses. The Army's regionally aligned forces concept appears a step in the right direction. The renewed emphasis on the human domain and human aspects of military operations should be reinforced and sustained over time. There can be no substitute for excellent joint professional military education, reinforced by dedicated self-study by career officers and noncommissioned officers. For senior officers and advisors, every dollar spent on civilian graduate education in policy sciences and history is returned many times over.

- U.S. leaders must also know themselves and the social, political, and systemic constraints that will affect the ability to respond well to the threat. If we ask more than the public and its representatives in Congress can bear or the national security system can provide, our ability to counter the threat will be handicapped. For example, public support for war depends on the perception that we are defending vital or important U.S. interests. Even in those cases, political support for policy or strategy in war is short-lived and can be extended only by success.

- In the same vein, future senior officers and policymakers must understand constitutional, domestic legal, and international legal norms. This is fundamental to honoring their oath to the Constitution. Moreover, if the United States is seen as violating these norms, it damages U.S. standing and undercuts the legitimacy of our policy.

- To address legal norms and intelligence-gathering, planning for military operations must include detention planning. Policymakers and joint force commanders must sort out the complex

legal and practical issues in advance of arrival in the country in question.

## **Character of Contemporary Conflict**

The analysis of these two campaigns reinforced a number of lessons about the nature of war and the character of contemporary conflict. Again, few of these lessons are new.

- When conventional warfare or logistical skills were called for in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Armed Forces generally achieved excellent results. At the same time, the military was insensitive to needs of the postconflict environment and not prepared for insurgency in either country. Our lack of preparation for dealing with irregular conflicts was the result of a post-Vietnam organizational blindspot. Military performance improved over time. Indeed, field-level innovation on counterinsurgency showed an admirable capacity for learning and innovation. Furthermore, the development of Army and Marine Corps doctrine on counterinsurgency and the inculcation of the doctrine into the force was an excellent example of systemic adaptation. The doctrine for counterinsurgency and stability operations needs revision, and this work is well under way.
- In a similar manner, with great fits and starts and a great deal of managerial attention, the acquisition system of the Department of Defense was able to create, field, and deploy the equipment needed to turn the military we had into the military we needed. Long-term planning in the Services for future wars can retard warfighting adaptations in the near term. The speed of battlefield learning was admirable, and the speed of technological innovation in this war was satisfactory.<sup>22</sup>
- A prudent great power should avoid being a third party in a large-scale counterinsurgency effort. Foreign expeditionary forces in another country's insurgency have almost always failed. Exceptions to this rule came only where the foreign expeditionary

force controlled the government and did not have to contend with insurgents who possessed secure sanctuaries.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, it should be remembered that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan did not begin as insurgencies, but evolved in that direction. The Armed Forces must be ready for combat across the spectrum of conflict, and irregular wars on the low end of the spectrum will remain the most frequent form of conflict that they encounter.

- Another salient issue in irregular conflicts is the question of sanctuary. In Iraq and Afghanistan, our enemies exploited base areas in adjacent countries. This presents the United States with a dilemma. Does the Nation violate international understandings about the sanctity of borders, or does it allow an enemy to have secure bases from which to launch attacks?

- Wars that involve regime change are likely to be protracted conflicts. They require a substantial, patient, and prudent international effort to bring stability and foster reconstruction, especially in the wake of weak, corrupt, or failed states. These exercises in armed nation-building are complex, uncertain, and, with the passing of time, increasingly unpopular in the United States. In the often used words of General Petraeus, progress in such conflicts will be “fragile and reversible.” Nevertheless, regime change and long-duration stability operations will at times be necessary. The alternatives are inaction or kinetic “success” followed by political chaos. In the view of the editors, there was an option not to invade Afghanistan or Iraq, but there was never a politically acceptable option to leave Afghanistan or Iraq shortly after the conclusion of the initial phase of major combat operations.

- Long and complex conflicts are likely to be coalition efforts, which lend legitimacy and ease manpower and material requirements. Coalitions also confound unity of command and may hurt unity of effort. On balance, sound coalitions of the willing contribute more to success than they detract from it. In the modern world, they are also a foolproof guide to public support and acceptance. Robust coalitions endure and show international support, which is somewhat self-replicating. Lesser coalitions are

a reminder of perceived illegitimacy and an indicator of serious problems.

- In a counterinsurgency, success will depend in part on the political development of the host government, whose weakness, corruption, and ineffectiveness are ironically an important factor in the development of the insurgency. There are few assets in the State Department or USAID inventory to mentor and assist a host government in political development. In collateral areas, such as humanitarian assistance, development, rule of law, and reconstruction, State and USAID have more assets, but far fewer than large-scale contingencies require. Ideally, the United States should have a civilian response corps, but the urge to develop whole-of-government capabilities is waning. As former National Security Advisor Stephen J. Hadley notes, there needs to be a national discussion on these critical issues.<sup>24</sup>

- Strategic communications was a weak point in our performance in Washington, DC, and in the field. Making friends, allies, and locals understand our intent has proved difficult. At times, the situation on the ground will block good messaging. However, our disabilities in this area—partly caused by too much bureaucracy and too little empathy—stand in contradistinction to the ability of clever enemies to package their message and beat us at a game that was perfected in Hollywood and on Madison Avenue. War crimes and clear evidence of abuse of locals or detainees have further hobbled our efforts, especially when every person with a cellular phone is a photojournalist. This is not a psychological operation or public affairs issue. Strategic communications is a vital task for commanders and senior policymakers at every level.

## **Security Force Assistance**

Security force assistance—especially the building of indigenous police and military forces—is a key strategic activity, which in Iraq and Afghanistan was the centerpiece of the coalition exit strategy. It was also an area where success-

es followed a painful process of trial and error, and coalition approaches were often mismatched with the local population and circumstances.

- In Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States developed host-nation ministries and military forces modeled on Western institutions and structures. In Iraq, initial efforts focused on creating an army to defend the country from external enemies. In Afghanistan, the decision to focus on a national army and police force, albeit at the insistence of the government of Afghanistan, increased tensions with local tribes and ethnic groups. The political, economic, social, and cultural conditions of these countries made U.S. approaches problematic and perhaps unsustainable without a significant long-term presence.
- Whenever possible, U.S. forces should be placed in a supporting role to the host nation. U.S. assistance should usually be framed as “transactional” and “conditional,” based on shared objectives and situational variables.<sup>25</sup> Where possible, the host nation must take ownership of the training effort and associated architecture. It must be held accountable for its progress and shortcomings.
- Improving our ability to teach others to defeat an insurgency or terrorists is likely the key to future U.S. participation in irregular conflicts. U.S. advisors can only train what they know. Before they deploy, advisors must be educated culturally and politically to organize ministries and/or train forces that fit the operational environment and local needs. Except for the special operations forces, the United States is not well organized to accomplish this mission. The Services generally do not reward individuals for this kind of service. Two possibilities commend themselves: the United States can form military assistance groups, or it can develop and refine ways to prepare conventional units for this mission in a rapid and effective manner. The ad hoc approach to preparing advisory and assistance forces should not be our primary methodology.



In conclusion, this book is an assessment of two unfinished campaigns, written for future senior officers, their key advisors, and other national security professionals. The lessons identified here emerged from a study rich in strategic context and immediate circumstances. Any application of these lessons must be done with an understanding of situational context, particular circumstances, and mission at hand. The lessons identified here will be theirs to debate, accept or reject, refine, and institutionalize. They will have to mix them generously with the lessons of other wars and apply them appropriately, guided by their mission and the situation at hand. Learning strategic lessons will be difficult but not impossible. In the future, the national interest and the lives of our men and women in uniform will be hostage to how well we have learned and institutionalized these strategic lessons.

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Martin J. Dempsey, *18<sup>th</sup> Chairman's 2<sup>nd</sup> Term Strategic Direction to the Joint Force* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, n.d.), 4, available at <[www.jcs.mil/portals/36/Documents/CJCS\\_2nd\\_Term\\_Strategic\\_Direction.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/portals/36/Documents/CJCS_2nd_Term_Strategic_Direction.pdf)>.

<sup>2</sup> National Defense University 2020 Design Paper, unpublished, December 2012.

<sup>3</sup> For operational lessons, see Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis (JCOA), *Decade of War, Volume 1: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations* (Suffolk, VA: JCOA, June 15, 2012), available at <<http://blogs.defensenews.com/saxotech-access/pdfs/decade-of-war-lessons-learned.pdf>>. As this book was being prepared, two teams of Army officers were working on operational histories of the U.S. Army in Iraq and Afghanistan.

<sup>4</sup> For an earlier discussion on the problems of learning, see Joseph J. Collins, "Desert Storm and the Lessons of Learning," *Parameters* (Autumn 1992), 83–92.

<sup>5</sup> David Petraeus, "Lessons of History and Lessons of Vietnam," *Parameters* (Autumn 1986; reprinted Winter 2010–2011), 48–50.

<sup>6</sup> Jay Luvaas, "Lessons and Lessons Learned: A Historical Perspective," in *The Lessons of Recent Wars in the Third World: Approaches and Case Studies*, volume 1, ed. Robert Harkavy and Stephanie Neuman (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1985), 68.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 27.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Gopnick, "The Big One: Historians Rethink the War to End All Wars," *The New Yorker*, August 23, 2004, 78–79.

<sup>9</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 111–112.

<sup>10</sup> National Security Action Memorandum no. 55, Subject: Relations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the President in Cold War Operations, June 28, 1961. In General Petraeus's and General Lloyd Austin's conception, general and statesman is the correct formulation, but in their interviews for this volume, they stressed the importance of the general first getting the military advice right, based on the facts on the ground and other considerations. David Petraeus, interview by Joseph J. Collins and Nathan White, March 27, 2015; and Lloyd Austin, interview by Richard D. Hooker, Jr., April 7, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> For a precis on the learning organization, see John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 6, 10–11, 215–223. Nagl attributes much of his discussion on learning theory to Richard Downie, *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> For an example of how an evaluator would have shifted emphasis, Lieutenant General David Deptula, USAF (Ret.), noted in correspondence with the editors, “I offer that perhaps more attention could have been given to the issue of the importance of greater encouragement and consideration of options at the strategic level. Also, greater attention could have been given to the important topic of the application—or lack thereof—of the tenets of joint doctrine/operations in the context of organization and employment. The complete failure of strategic communications/perception management and an anachronistic structure for the optimal application of a whole-of-government approach are also areas that I believe deserve greater attention and elaboration.”

<sup>13</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin E. Dempsey in his interview for this study offered the following guidelines (in shortened paraphrasing) for participants in the national decisionmaking system: Learn the civilian national security decisionmaking system. The military starts with objectives and works toward options. The civilian leadership begins with options and works backward toward objectives. Military leaders must accommodate this system and offer options that are suitable, feasible, and acceptable. Civil-military or interdepartmental friction is not necessarily bad. Accept it and embrace it. Develop relationships and then build trust with civilian contemporaries. Be prepared to engage in national discussions and speak on grand strategy issues. The most persuasive arguments normally win. Most big decisions are made in conjunction with budget cycles. Adapt to the leadership style of the President and Secretary of Defense, but above all, in every decision, maintain your moral compass. Martin E. Dempsey, interview by Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins, January 7, 2015. For a collateral discussion of civilian and military decisionmakers talking past each other, see Janine Davidson, “Civil-Military Friction and Presidential Decision-Making,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (March 2013).

<sup>14</sup> John Allen, interview by Richard D. Hooker, Jr. and Joseph J. Collins, January 27, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 208–224.

<sup>16</sup> For a table showing the decline of unity of effort organizations and initiatives, see Linda Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence: Lessons from 13 Years of War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND), 117–119.

<sup>17</sup> Some close observers believe that in any conflict or postconflict situation, the United States should have one person, military or civilian, who is in charge of all American policy and people in the theater in question. See, for example, Stanley A. McChrystal, interview by Joseph J. Collins and Frank G. Hoffman, April 2, 2015. General David Petraeus recommended that in complex contingencies, we should make better use of existing headquarters, even if they have to be repurposed. See David Petraeus, interview by Joseph J. Collins and Nathan White, March 27, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> For example, in Afghanistan in 2006, Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan passed control of the ground fight to the International Security Assistance Force, and operations became fragmented among the U.S. Central Command commander; Supreme Allied Commander, Europe; and U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) commander. As former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates notes in his memoir, “efforts in Afghanistan during 2007 were being hampered not only by muddled and overambitious objectives but also by confusion in the military command structure” (page 205). Furthermore, Gates adds that command relationships in Afghanistan were a “jerry-rigged arrangement [that] violated every principle of the unity of command” (page 206). The problem persisted even after Secretary Gates ordered it rectified in the summer of 2010, nearly 9 years after the war started. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the often raw relationships between conventional forces, who were battlespace owners, and various types of special operations forces (SOF, such as theater SOF, USSOCOM-subordinated SOF, non-U.S. SOF, and so forth) were common complaints. This problem improved over time but is still an issue. Efforts to bridge the gap between conventional and SOF must continue. The editors thank Major Claude Lambert, USA—a strategist and intern in the Center for Complex Operations at the National Defense University—for this observation.

<sup>19</sup> Petraeus, interview.

<sup>20</sup> Dempsey, interview. In his interview for this volume, General Lloyd J. Austin III, U.S. Central Command commander, noted that intelligence support to the warfighter was “light years ahead of where it was in 2003.” Austin, interview by Richard D. Hooker, Jr., April 7, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> This was a major point first made in JCOA, *Decade of War, Volume I: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of War* (Suffolk, VA: JCOA, June 15, 2012), 2–5. It was also a major finding in Robinson et al., 59–71.

<sup>22</sup> The problems in developing and fielding the equipment that matched current warfighting requirements are discussed in Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 115–148. General Austin lauded in particular rapid equipment fielding efforts, the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization, and advances in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. Austin, interview.

<sup>23</sup> In the past, among the great failures in third-party expeditionary force participation in

## *Hooker and Collins*

insurgencies are the French in Indochina and Algeria and the United States in Vietnam. One can find many successes against insurgents that used unconscionable tactics. The two great successes among great power efforts were the United States in the Philippines (1899–1902) and United Kingdom in Malaya. There have been many cases in which the United States achieved positive outcomes when it did not have to use a major expeditionary force.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen J. Hadley, interview by Joseph J. Collins and Nicholas Rostow, October 7, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Dempsey, interview.