1 INTRODUCTION

The United States stormed into Iraq in March 2003 boasting the world's best-trained and -equipped military. Using a host of technologies and new weapons that had been integrated into its force structure over the preceding decade, the invasion force made quick work of its adversary in a march on Baghdad that took only three weeks.[1] The invasion unveiled a "Shock and Awe"[2] campaign of rapid dominance packaged under the ostensibly new paradigm of "effects based operations."[3] The invasion framed the impressive application of combined arms conventional military power that routed Saddam's armies and delivered U.S. forces into downtown Baghdad in three weeks. The invasion force applied a new generation of sensors, standoff munitions, and digitized command and control systems to great effect during the invasion against a marginally competent enemy.[4] The invasion seemed to confirm to many the primacy of U.S. global military power.

As is now widely known, however, the actual invasion of Iraq represented only the opening phase of the war. Unfolding events gradually drained away the initial sense of optimism over the removal of Saddam and the defeat of his army as the security environment inside Iraq deteriorated over the summer of 2003. By the winter of 2003–4 it became clear that, while Saddam's army had been defeated, armed resistance to the invading and occupying force had only just begun. While the U.S. political leadership tried to discount and marginalize the initial appearance of Iraqi resistance groups in the summer and fall of 2003,[5] the American military gradually became aware that it was immersed in a full-blown insurgency—a kind of warfare for which it had failed to prepare.[6] The American military slowly came to the inescapable conclusion that the methods and equipment for defeating Saddam's Army wouldn't work against

increasingly well organized and adaptive insurgent groups. The U.S. military either had to adjust or face defeat.

This book addresses a discrete, but arguably vital, part of the U.S. war in Iraq in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces during 2005 through early 2007—a period when the United States clearly faced the prospect of battlefield defeat and strategic disaster. It focuses on counterinsurgency, or COIN, operations by a series of Army and Marine Corps battalions operating in a variety of environments during this period. The book seeks to answer one central question: how did the units examined in the pages that follow adapt to the growth of the insurgency during this period? The book presents evidence suggesting that the units successfully innovated in war—a process that drew upon a complex series of forces that enabled the units to transition successfully from organizations structured and trained for conventional military operations to organizations that developed an array of new organizational capacities for full-spectrum combat operations.

The research for this book adds an interesting dimension to the established popular narrative of America's counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq. That narrative contains several elements. The first is that military success magically materialized after President Bush sent an additional 20,000 troops to Iraq (the so-called surge) in the spring of 2007. The second is that military success materialized only after General David Petraeus decisively reoriented American battlefield tactics toward COIN, once he assumed command of U.S. forces in Iraq during the same period. The third is that improved battlefield performance directly followed the promulgation of new counterinsurgency doctrine in December of 2006.[7] While each of these narratives is correct in an overall sense, they are also incomplete and present only part of the story of how America's ground force decisively reoriented itself toward irregular warfare in Iraq. Evidence presented in this book suggests that by the time President Bush announced the "surge" and Petraeus was named to "rescue" the COIN campaign in the spring of 2007, the units in the following case studies had already built successful COIN competencies and were experiencing battlefield successes—most dramatically in Anbar Province in the fall of 2006. Importantly, in Anbar, at least, these were not ad hoc unit innovations made to no strategic effect. In Anbar, it is clear that the wartime innovation process *did* produce strategic effect and proved instrumental in the defeat of the Sunni insurgency, as will be addressed in Chapter 4. The units examined in this book showed an ability to adapt and innovate in the field dating from late 2005 with little direction from higher military and civilian

authorities. None of the units examined herein received what could be considered command-level guidance from the headquarters level on how to structure their counterinsurgency operations.[8]

It is clear that the commitment of additional troops in 2007 proved instrumental in improving the security situation throughout Iraq and most particularly in Baghdad, just as it is clear that the appointment of Petraeus—a leader committed to COIN—represented an important signal of America's commitment to the new methods of fighting the insurgents. It is equally clear that the promulgation of new doctrine helped to systematically enhance the preparation of incoming units to conduct counterinsurgency, just at it is clear that the manual for the first time provided senior military leadership at Multi-National Forces Iraq, or MNF-I, with a template around which to structure and direct a national-level counterinsurgency campaign. While the promulgation of new joint COIN doctrine in December 2006 unquestionably helped to better train and prepare incoming units that subsequently arrived as part of the surge in the spring of 2007, it does not explain the improved battlefield performance of the units studied here in the eighteen preceding months. This book argues that it is somewhat misleading to assert that the new doctrine suddenly and systematically enhanced battlefield performance that had been notably lagging. This book presents evidence suggesting that tactical momentum (particularly in Anbar Province—the epicenter of the Sunni insurgency) had been building for the previous eighteen months largely as a result of innovation exhibited at the tactical level by a number of Army and Marine Corps units.

Prior to the appointment of General Petraeus as military commander in February 2007, U.S. military commanders in Iraq, Tampa, and Washington had not systematically re-examined the nation's approach to fighting the war. Within Multi-National Forces Iraq (MNF-I), there was debate in late 2006 over the desirability of increasing the number of U.S. troops on the ground but little examination over the overall approach.[9] In early 2006, however, a drafting team headed by Conrad Crane and Jan Horvath working under General Petraeus at Fort Leavenworth feverishly prepared a new counterinsurgency manual—an effort that in itself happened because of the recognition that deploying forces needed a new doctrinal template to prepare them for COIN operations in Iraq.[10] This book has little to add to the already told story of the preparation of the new manual and the important impact of the new doctrine on military operations in Iraq after the manual's publication in December 2006. This book instead chronicles the parallel search for solutions to the insurgency that pro-

ceeded on an ad-hoc basis at the tactical level in several U.S. units fighting the insurgents during the same period that the team worked to develop the new COIN manual. These parallel searches for solutions to the tactical and operational problems in fighting the insurgency were loosely connected in that the team preparing the new manual was generally aware of the tactical experiences of U.S. units fighting the insurgents. The team preparing the new manual certainly knew of the ad hoc, tactical innovation process, as can be seen in certain sections of the doctrinal manual.[11] In the field, however, brigade and battalion commanders received little in the way of headquarters-level guidance or information from the team writing the new doctrine or from other higher headquarters on how to conduct counterinsurgency operations. In the cases studied here, it is clear that the improved battlefield performance of certain American units during 2005–6 occurred in the absence of, and not because of, competent top-down direction from the highest reaches of the civilian and military hierarchy. As recounted in several well-known summaries of the period, the White House, State Department, Defense Department, Joint Staff, the Central Command, and MNF-I appeared incapable of jointly formulating and directing the execution of a unified strategic plan in Iraq that linked the application of military force to clearly defined political objectives.[12]

During congressional testimony in October 2005, then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice described the U.S. military strategy in Iraq as "clear, hold, and build." Whatever those terms meant, they had never been communicated in any operational form to the military prosecuting the counterinsurgency, and senior military commanders had no idea what she was talking about.[13] Rice's approach seemed to draw upon an article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* by Andrew Krepinevich in which he called for an "ink spot" strategy which recommended that U.S. military forces stop focusing on killing insurgents and instead shift to providing local security for the Iraqi population.[14] On the military side, ideas had surfaced independently in the summer of 2005 that units should structure their operations along a number of simultaneous Logical Lines of Operations, or LOOs, to apply their capabilities across the full spectrum of the combat environment.[15] President Bush echoed Rice's words in October 2005 without input from those prosecuting the war. In November 2005, the White House released a *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* that repeated the "clear, hold, and build" approach, though there is no evidence that this document provided the basis for a military strategy that was communicated to forces fighting the insurgents.[16] If anything, the White House gave conflicting

messages on military strategy throughout the period. In a speech at the Naval Academy on November 30, 2005, President Bush described the U.S. approach somewhat differently from clear, hold, and build, telling cheering midshipmen: "We will continue to shift from providing security and conducting operations against the enemy nationwide to conducting more specialized operations targeted at the most dangerous terrorists. We will increasingly move out of Iraqi cities, reduce the number of bases from which we operate, and conduct fewer patrols and convoys."[17] In December 2005, Bush repeated the mantra coming from MNF-I Commander General George Casey, telling an audience at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington DC: "As Iraqis stand up, we will stand down."[18]

While political leaders appeared confused over military strategy, senior U.S. military commanders with responsibility for Iraq operations articulated a relatively consistent set of objectives. MNF-I Commander General George Casey and the Central Command's General John Abizaid pursued an approach from 2004 through 2006 that sought to turn over responsibility for local security to the Iraqis as quickly as possible.[19] Casey and Abizaid believed that the insurgent violence was directed primarily at the U.S. occupation. Both believed that U.S. troops represented an "antibody" to Iraqi culture and society and that lowering the profile of U.S. troops by consolidating them at a few isolated military bases would reduce insurgent violence. Neither saw the insurgency as a complex, tribal, ideological, and sectarian battle for political power and influence between a variety of different groups with competing objectives. To his credit, Casey clearly realized that American units needed to build COIN competencies, although he refused to embrace or operationalize a national-level campaign plan that reflected general principles of counterinsurgency. In August 2005, he commissioned Colonel William Hix, who headed the MNF-I strategy office, and Kalev Sepp, a COIN expert at the Naval Postgraduate School, to survey U.S. units to determine their COIN proficiency. The survey found that 20 percent of units in the field were demonstrating COIN proficiency; 60 percent were struggling to reorient themselves; and 20 percent of the units showed little COIN proficiency at all. Interestingly, the survey found the younger officers more flexible and interested in exploring COIN capacities than the senior battalion and brigade commanders.[20] There is no evidence that Casey ever used the study to argue for enhanced COIN training with either the Army or Marine Corps back in Washington. Casey's establishment of the COIN Academy in Taji, Iraq, in late 2005, however, demonstrated his awareness that U.S. units needed to

reorient themselves away from traditional conventional-style military operations and reflected his lack of confidence that the lack of preparation for COIN could be remedied in predeployment training.[21] The academy conducted five-day courses to familiarize incoming U.S. commanders with the tenets of COIN theory. The curriculum drew upon the writings of David Galula and other noted COIN theorists.[22] The academy played to mixed reviews, however, and the administration of the facility eventually was turned over to retired military officers with little background or expertise in COIN. The MNF-I command emphasis during this period of the war overwhelmingly remained on building up the Iraqi Security Force, or ISF, and conducting "decisive" military operations like that which happened in November 2004 in the assault on Fallujah. Once the Iraqis became capable of independent operations, both Abizaid and Casey sought to withdraw U.S. forces to several major operating bases and then withdraw them from the country altogether—as quickly as possible. Neither Casey nor Abizaid ever promulgated a nationwide campaign plan to counter the emerging insurgency as it gathered strength and momentum in late 2003 and 2004.[23] In the summer of 2005, Colonel Hix's office finally produced an overarching campaign plan that formalized the approach of building up the ISF. The plan, however, did not emphasize the core COIN principles of local security and population protection.[24] Many officers in the field felt a disconnect between Casey's emphasis on demonstrating "progress" in developing host-nation military capabilities and the difficult realities of standing up a new ISF in places like Anbar Province. Some within the MNF-W staff felt pressure to generate indicators showing unrealistic progress in the development of the ISF so that Casey could realize his objective of extricating the United States from Iraq as quickly as possible.[25] A PowerPoint briefing slide describing Casey's campaign dated June 12, 2006, did not refer to local security, the insurgents, or the need for the United States to adopt a new approach to COIN.[26] During the summer of 2006, Casey unsuccessfully pushed a plan in the interagency in Washington to draw down U.S. forces in Iraq from fourteen brigades to five or six by the end of 2007.[27] Growing increasingly skeptical of Casey's approach, the White House formed an ad hoc group to review U.S. strategy in the fall of 2006 that provided three options for a revised Iraq strategy. In January 2007, President Bush chose the group's option to increase troop strength.[28] In the spring of 2007, as General Petraeus took over command, the focus on building up the ISF had not changed substantially. In a briefing prepared for Petraeus by MNF-I deputy commander General Ray Odierno, dated February 8, 2007,

the emphasis remained on setting the conditions "for the ISF to emerge as the dominant security force."[29]

The disconnect between battlefield commanders and the confused national level leadership adds another interesting twist to the problems facing tactical commanders responsible for structuring field-level operations. All the cases examined in this book show that the search for tactical solutions to the problems presented by the insurgency proceeded for the most part without interference from higher headquarters at MNF-I or any other headquarters elements that might have imposed solutions that dictated battlefield tactics, such as the Central Command in Tampa, Florida, or the Joint Staff in Washington, DC. Moreover, there is no evidence that the political leadership in the Defense Department or other executive branch agencies sought to impose solutions at the tactical level—although General Casey clearly faced political pressure from Secretary Rumsfeld to avoid "Americanizing" the war. Despite the pressure on Casey, however, no school solution materialized à la Vietnam that allowed systemic biases at senior levels to impose themselves on commanders leading engaged forces. Ironically, the lack of a school solution can be explained partly by the lack of a doctrinally approved joint approach to fighting an insurgency before December 2006, when the Army and Marine Corps jointly released a draft of *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*. While the Army had released an interim doctrinal manual, *FMI 3-07.22, Counterinsurgency Operations* in October 2004, the manual applied only to Army units and contained no guidance on structuring COIN operations at the "joint" level. The interim manual generally emphasized the kinetic side of COIN, focusing on destruction of the enemy's forces—as opposed to full-spectrum operations.[30] These limitations mitigated the manual's impact in Iraq, since most military units were faced with a requirement to master full-spectrum operations and conducted tactical operations as joint task forces that incorporated units and organizational components from across the Department of Defense. Unconstrained by an established COIN doctrine, and impelled by desperation to find anything that worked, brigade commanders and their subordinates covered in the following case studies received wide flexibility to structure their operations to fight the insurgency. As a result, commanders and their supporting organizations freely cycled through a series of actions that helped reduce the effectiveness of insurgent operations directed at their units.

The case studies in this book chronicle an iterative process of organically generated tactical adaptation and innovation that unfolded over time in a dis-

tinctive progression. The process began in what could be described as tactical, ad hoc adaptation in which individual leaders reacted to local circumstance by cycling through different ways of employing their units and equipment on the battlefield. Some of these adaptations succeeded and others failed. As leaders identified successful adaptations, the process gathered momentum and new organizational standard operating procedures emerged that became more widely adopted by military units fighting the insurgents.[31] Organizational innovation then manifested itself through the emergence of a series of new standard operating procedures that collectively resulted in fundamental changes to the ways in which the units examined herein fought the insurgents. As these innovations produced success on the battlefield, they eventually fed into more formalized military doctrine that followed later.[32] While execution of the innovation process happened in the field, it is clear that the process involved many actors throughout the military chain of command. Individuals, units, and headquarters elements stretching from Anbar to Baghdad, Fort Leavenworth, the Pentagon, and beyond searched for solutions to the problems being encountered on the battlefields of Iraq. The argument in this book is that this process was led largely from the field during this discrete period of the war.

BATTLEFIELD INNOVATION AND COUNTERINSURGENCY AMERICAN STYLE

This book argues that the collective momentum of tactical adaptation documented in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 can be characterized as organizational innovation. The term "innovation" is defined as the development of new organizational capacities not initially present in these units when they arrived in Iraq and that had only tangential grounding in established capstone doctrine. This definition could be regarded as encompassing only short-term, situational tactical adaptation. This book, however, argues that tactical adaptation can serve as a way station along the route toward more comprehensive innovation. In the cases examined here, multiple tactical adaptations occurred iteratively over time that eventually produced new organizational structures and new organizational capacities built in war that fundamentally changed the nature of organizational output delivered over the course of the units' deployment. This definition of the concept of innovation suggests that innovation per se need not be permanent, or enshrined in new doctrine in order to be considered as innovation.

The new capacities built iteratively over time changed the way these units

fought the insurgency. This book's case studies detail a process of wartime innovation that manifested itself as a series of organic, bottom-up procedures developed within the battalions and brigades fighting the insurgents. While the innovation process developed organically, that process drew upon information and enabling processes nested in a variety of sources outside the units themselves. Innovation occurred within the units through the fusion of the information and enabling processes that ultimately produced new organizational outputs. Basic capstone doctrinal grounding in military operations proved to be a fundamental building block for the innovation process. Previous experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan helped shape the innovation. Non–institutionally blessed sources of information on COIN theory and history were consciously drawn upon by units as they intellectually reoriented themselves toward full-spectrum operations. A variety of digital domain platforms helped units freely pass information and lessons learned back and forth, which helped the process of adaptation and innovation. The innovation produced new organizational capacities that shaped successful military operations across the spectrum of kinetic and nonkinetic operations to reduce insurgent-generated violence. Wartime innovation in the cases studied here flowed from agile, flexible, decentralized organizations that featured flattened and informal hierarchical structures. Throughout their deployments, each of the units covered in the following case studies demonstrated significant learning capacities that proved central to the innovation process. The case study narratives built on primary source data present a picture of military organizations acting in ways that are contrary to the popularly accepted view that military organizations function as bureaucratically inclined, hierarchically structured organizations slow to respond to changes in the external environment. In the cases studied here, the exigencies of wartime produced much different organizational behavior.

The American wartime experiences chronicled in this book are historically significant given the previous and disastrous experiences of the United States in fighting irregular war in the post–World War II era. At first blush, the comparisons between Vietnam and Iraq seem attractive. The military fought both wars in the context of strategic confusion, in which the relationships between military operations and strategic objectives appeared unclear. As shown by the case studies in this book, however, the U.S. military experience in Iraq bears little relationship to the historical experiences of the Vietnam War—at least insofar as the adaptive and innovative capacities of America's military institutions are concerned. Moreover, unlike Vietnam, the Army and Marine Corps

did institutionally embrace COIN competencies and eventually produced doctrine as evidence of that institutional commitment. Evidence presented in the pages that follow suggests that certain American ground units (both Army and Marine Corps) in Iraq evolved into flexible, adaptive organizations taking advantage of twenty-first-century human and technological capacities. The units examined in the following pages proved to be technologically advanced, complex organizations with a highly educated and trained workforce that embraced environmental complexity and searched for optimal solutions to operational problems. The organizations covered in this study did not satisfice—or take the path of least resistance—in their search for solutions to the tactical problems posed by the insurgency in Iraq.

By 2005 various U.S. brigade and battalion commanders, as illustrated in the case studies that follow, began independently to change their approach on the battlefield, embracing requirements for a COIN campaign tailored to the Iraq environment. That change was required is not in question—many observers have cogently chronicled the U.S. ground forces' initial stumbling attempts to adapt to the insurgency in 2003 and 2004.[33] The units covered in this book built new innovative core competencies within their organizations, drawing upon such factors as: (1) digitally based communications and data systems that seamlessly passed information on a continuous basis between units preparing for their deployments; (2) imaginative battlefield leadership that delegated authority, welcomed the concept of distributed operations, encouraged the free flow of information throughout the organizational hierarchy, and freely changed their organizational structures in the field in order to apply their capacities across the spectrum of kinetic and nonkinetic operations; (3) the use of advanced technologies and analytical methods to combat insurgent networks; and (4) a continuous education process in which units kept seeking information and expertise from many different sources to aid in their tactical decision-making processes.

The emergence of American COIN competencies in the field adds an interesting twist to another of the popular narratives of the period. Prior to the Iraq war, the Bush administration initiated a process called "transformation" to reform the Defense Department's sprawling military and civilian bureaucracies. This process overwhelmingly featured top-down direction from the Defense Department's civilian leadership to executing organizational elements. Then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's now well known micromanagement of the Central Command's war plan reflected an attitude that civilian manage-

ment could and should wrench hidebound military bureaucracies around to a new way of fighting. Rumsfeld's new way of war, however, had little to do with counterinsurgency and activities he derisively referred to as "nation-building." Rumsfeld insisted on fewer troops than initially wanted by military commanders and sought to make the invasion an advertisement for a new American way of war featuring precision guided munitions, speed of movement, and effects-based operations.[34] The irony of the argument in this book is that the U.S. military indeed transformed itself during the Iraq war, though not in the ways envisioned by Rumsfeld. Prior to December 2006 and the promulgation of the new doctrine, the most important part of the transformation occurred not in the invasion but in the counterinsurgency campaign afterward, and not through top-down direction but through ground-up, organic processes in which tactical units eventually embraced and mastered the very nation-building skills that Rumsfeld sought to avoid.

MILITARY DOCTRINE AND ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATION

The process of organically generated military innovation described here suggests that lack of an established doctrinal approach to COIN did not constrain units in the following case studies from becoming proficient in irregular warfare. The argument presented here is that formalized doctrine played an important but ultimately only a tangential role in structuring the COIN operations of the units examined herein from late 2005 through early 2007. The Department of Defense defines doctrine as "[f]undamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application."[35] To be sure, definitions of this concept have evolved throughout the twentieth century for American military institutions. The current definition followed a healthy debate over the degree to which doctrine represented concrete rules and techniques to be applied on the battlefield, versus a view that doctrine represented only a guide for action with significant leeway delegated to unit commanders in structuring combat operations while in contact with the enemy.[36] In his analysis of relationships between the formation of doctrine and the organizational experiences in the Marine Corps in the early twentieth century, Keith Bickel pointed to the existence of "formal versus informal" doctrine. Formal doctrine represented formalized institutional knowledge promulgated in doctrinal manuals used for training forces. Informal doctrine, by contrast, exists in parallel to formalized doctrine in the form of professional journal articles, personal letters recounting

battlefield lessons and experiences, and field orders that come to represent a body of knowledge that, Bickel argues, finds its way into formalized form.[37]

Scholars typically examine and analyze changes in military doctrine, viewing these changes as an important indicator in assessing the degree of innovation in military organizations.[38] This is understandable. Changes in military doctrine are easy to identify since, first and foremost, these changes must be written down. Doctrine's explicit character does not, of course, guarantee its institutional effect. Not all doctrinal changes succeed in changing real-world military behavior. Those that do manifest themselves as a host of observables that provide evidence of a new outlook and new practices in the areas of training, unit organization, and tables of equipment—all of which can be observed and analyzed directly.

In the case of the United States and most other advanced militaries, twentieth-century military doctrine demonstrates a reasonably logical progression of an approach to warfare that has sought to apply firepower against the enemy in successively more complicated ways at successively greater distances.[39] The U.S. Army's Airland Battle doctrine, introduced in 1986, reflects this progression.[40] Indeed, the application of combined arms on twentieth-century battlefields reveals an iterative and evolutionary process as successful modern militaries slowly mastered the capabilities offered to them by the integration of advances in indirect fire and precision-guided munitions, communications, intelligence, and the ability of units to fire and maneuver effectively in coordination with other combat arms.[41]

In Iraq, however, analysis of Army and Marine Corps doctrine as it existed before 2003 provides little indication of how these organizations would fight an insurgency. Indeed, prewar capstone military doctrine emphasizing traditional conventional military operations that focused on fire and maneuver proved to be of little use in fighting the insurgents in Iraq. Importantly, however, while the specific tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) might not have been used, the processes of unit command and coordination established by capstone doctrine provided a procedural roadmap over which the innovation process flowed. Over the period studied in this book, battlefield commanders in the following case studies drew upon established doctrinal processes to construct altered organizational structures with new TTPs to apply new COIN competencies appropriate to Iraq's environment.

While the execution of the battlefield innovation process happened within the units in this study, it would be a mistake to characterize that process as

strictly either "bottom up" or "top down." The processes of wartime innovation in the units studied here did not result solely from factors within the unit, nor was the process prompted solely by top-down processes featuring the articulation of a new military doctrine, whether created by forceful civilian intervention from above or by dynamic senior military leadership at the headquarters level. The innovation process exhibited by the units in the following case studies was dialectical in nature and drew upon a complex series of forces from both within and outside the units that fused together in ways to produce organically generated change—change that eventually "pulled" tactical practice, institutional innovation, and (finally) authoritative doctrinal pronouncements along behind it.

Established doctrinal processes as described in foundational capstone doctrine like the Army's *FM 3.0 Operations* provided a framework and common understanding for the units as they responded to the insurgency. The Marine units also drew upon their established doctrine to help provide a framework to structure their COIN operations. All of the units examined in this book exhibited firm grounding in doctrinally bounded processes and applied those processes to the problem of COIN in Iraq. Instead of being hampered by rigid bureaucratic organizations bound up in red tape,[42] wartime experiences in Iraq show that networked, informal, and cross-functional organizations sprang up over the course of military operations that fused disparate organizational elements, both military and civilian, into a synergistic whole applied to great effect against the enemy. In many respects, the organizations responsible for combating the insurgency proved to be very unbureaucratic in their behavior. These organizations produced the tactical flexibility *and* innovation that fundamentally changed the way that U.S. forces fought the insurgents. These changes, which encompassed a wide array of kinetic and nonkinetic activities, dramatically reduced the military effectiveness of insurgent operations in the cases examined in this work.[43]

The U.S. military experience in Iraq has not proven to be a replay of the military experience in the Vietnam War. During Vietnam, the U.S. Army refused to adapt itself institutionally to the combat environment created by its enemies, despite being directed to do so by President Kennedy, and despite undeniable evidence that its operations were not defeating the Viet Cong insurgency.[44] While certain organizational components like the Marines (Combined Action Platoons in I Corps) and Special Forces (Civilian Irregular Defense Group in the Central Highlands) explored innovative approaches to fighting the coun-

terinsurgency in Vietnam, these changes never received institutional support at what would now be called the "joint" level, and slowly withered away as the Army doggedly pursued more conventionally oriented military operations.[45]

As of this writing, U.S. forces have ceased combat operations in Iraq. This book does not argue that the American use of force in Iraq will produce a stable, peaceful, and democratic government or society there. It also does not argue that the improved military capacities exhibited by U.S. military units "won" the war or even that these capacities were primarily responsible for the reduction in insurgent violence in Iraq. As in all forms of warfare, the political dimensions of the armed struggle inside Iraq perhaps proved to be the most important factor framing the U.S. struggle with the insurgents during this period of the war. In Anbar Province, for example, the growing disaffection of nationalist-oriented insurgents with Sunni extremists during the period of this study provided a vital political backdrop that created a political opportunity for U.S. military units. National-level political developments in Iraq during the period were equally important in pushing Iraqi nationalist oriented insurgents into a closer relationship with the U.S. military. The point that needs emphasizing is that improved American COIN competencies represented one—albeit an important—element in a complex series of factors that led to the improvement of security inside Iraq. One unfortunate result of the American military experience and the supposed success following the increase of forces in 2007 is the widespread and largely unsupported assertions proclaiming that the increased troop levels achieved some kind of "victory" in Iraq. This is a dangerous and incomplete reading of history and forms part of an argument asserting that well-executed tactics supporting supposed principles of counterinsurgency can somehow magically produce victory. This is again a dangerous and misleading reading of the circumstances of the war in Iraq as it is elsewhere in places like Afghanistan.

History may judge that U.S. military adaptation and innovation did not happen fast enough to keep pace with evolving political circumstances within both Iraq and the United States. One of the wider implications of this book is that leaders need to consider the adaptive and innovative abilities of their military organizations in the decision-making process used to decide when to apply force in pursuit of strategic objectives. As much as political and military leaders want to believe that their military organizations can accomplish national objectives in a variety of different operational environments, the reality is that these institutions cannot seamlessly and effortlessly transition between dramatically

different scenarios and demonstrate immediate effectiveness across all spectrums of combat. When the sequences of organizational adaptation and innovation become desynchronized from overarching political realities governing the war, the state applying force can face problems in achieving its objectives no matter how adaptive and innovative their military institutions may be. Whatever the strategic and political outcome in Iraq, it should not obscure the organizational flexibility that eventually unfolded at the tactical level in certain units fighting the insurgency. This organizational flexibility produced wartime innovation that fundamentally changed the conduct of the war against the insurgents in the years preceding the promulgation of formal, joint doctrine.

MILITARY INNOVATION AND GRAND STRATEGY

Why weren't America's armed forces ready to fight an irregular war when they arrived in Iraq? There certainly was no shortage of national-level guidance suggesting—even directing—the advisability of developing competencies to fight a counterinsurgency. In the five years following the September 2001 attacks, the Bush administration promulgated an enormous variety of documents intended to provide strategic guidance to the nation's civilian and military organizations. Indeed, no U.S. administration in history has ever released such a flood of paper explaining different aspects of the nation's grand strategy.[46] In addition to explaining the nation's global interests and objectives to the public, this collection of documents effectively provided the "commander-in-chief's intent" to military organizations for their use in tailoring their resources, plans, and programs to achieve the nation's objectives. These organizations were expected to translate political and strategic guidance into military actions, or outputs, that addressed the objectives articulated at the strategic level. This collection of documents arguably subjected U.S. military institutions and their associated civilian bureaucracies to their most far reaching changes since the end of World War II.[47] Then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld characterized these changes as "transformation," a process that was meant to fundamentally alter the management and operational activities of all elements of the Defense Department's sprawling civilian and military bureaucracies.

The 2001 and 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Reviews* particularly emphasized the need to reorient these diverse organizations away from "traditional" Cold War state threats to meet the challenge of coping with irregular warfare, disruptive attacks by adversaries wielding dangerous new technologies, and catastrophic attacks by sub- and nonstate actors wielding mass-destructive weapons.

Other Defense Department internal studies echoed the call to build irregular warfare competencies in the same period. Soon after the Marine Corps and Army blasted their way into Fallujah in November 2004, the Defense Science Board released a report titled *Transition To and From Hostilities* that called for the Defense Department to build new organizational competencies to manage stabilization and postconflict reconstruction activities following the conclusion of conventional military operations.[48] As the Army and Marines swept through the towns on the Iraqi-Syrian border in November 2005, the Defense Department published DoD Directive 3000.05, *Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations*, which formalized acceptance of the Defense Department's portion of the postconflict mission. The new directive operationalized National Security Presidential Directive 44, *Management of Interagency Efforts Concerning Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations*, which gave the State Department primary responsibility for coordinating governmentwide efforts to mount reconstruction activities in war-torn countries like Iraq.[49]

It seemed reasonable to expect that military organizations would respond vigorously to such presidentially directed change, particularly when supported by explicit follow-on implementing instructions from the Secretary of Defense to his military departments.[50] But as has been chronicled elsewhere, it is clear that the U.S. military remained unprepared for the kind of warfare it encountered in Iraq—despite ample official warning for two years prior to the invasion.[51] When the Iraq war began, U.S. Army *Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Operations*, provided the doctrinal principles guiding the application of force by the main U.S. ground component.[52] The manual's core concepts were rooted in maneuver warfare and the associated theoretical elements of applying "combat power" to defeat an enemy. Only two out of the twelve chapters (Stability Operations and Support Operations) focused upon nonmaneuver warfare issues, and only one and a half pages of the entire document even mentioned the term "asymmetry."[53] Prior to September 11, 2001, irregular warfare, terrorism, and insurgency were of scant concern to the U.S. Army. And despite the putatively galvanizing effects of Al Qaeda's attacks on that day, President Bush proved no more successful than President Kennedy, forty years before, in generating the institutional change called for by new strategy documents oriented toward the conduct of irregular warfare.