

**Organizational Culture and Hypocrisy: Explaining the U.S Army's Resistance to  
Learning Counterinsurgency in Iraq (2003-2007)**

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**Abstract**

This paper adopts an organizational analysis approach in order to examine the extent to which cultural factors within the U.S Army have influenced the U.S Army's adaptation to and learning from the counter-insurgency/nation-building mission in Iraq prior to the 2007 'Surge'. By applying the concepts of organizational culture and hypocrisy to the study of the U.S Army case study, this paper will shed greater light on the constraints and opportunities that conventional militaries face when seeking to adapt to and learn from the complex reality of low-intensity conflicts. While traditional notions of organizational adaptation have relied on unitary conceptions of learning, the question of learning in organizations that are not homogenous and that have various intra-organizational routines, identities and aims that may be challenged by their members as well as by external actors, has been to a certain extent overlooked in research. As a result, this paper, when applying the concepts of organizational culture and hypocrisy to the issues of organizational adaptation and learning, analyzes the predicaments organizations deal with when identities within them are actually not shared, when norms and routines are varied and perhaps at odds with each other (Fiol, 1994), and when such organizations are subject to often contradictory demands for reform and adaptation both from within and from without their organizational setting. Under such conditions, organizations often resort to the organization of hypocrisy in order to cope with such multiple demands.

## Introduction

This paper adopts an organizational analysis approach (Avant, 1994; Legro, 1995) in order to examine the extent to which cultural factors within the U.S Army and the nature of civil-military relations within the U.S have influenced the U.S Army's capability to learn how to operate more effectively within the counter-insurgency/nation-building mission in Iraq. By applying the concepts of organizational culture and hypocrisy to the study of the U.S Army case study, this paper will shed greater light on the constraints and opportunities that conventional militaries face when seeking to learn to operate within the complex reality of low-intensity conflicts (LICs). It will also test the validity of organizational culture as an explanatory tool in the context of non-conventional force transformation (Gray, 1999; Johnston, 1995; Kier, 1995; Legro 1996). This paper will, accordingly, contribute to the general field of international relations that has employed cultural approaches in explaining institutional behavior and organizational change, particularly within the context of conflict.

**Comment [O1]:** How exactly will this contribute to IR?

By adopting the concepts of organizational culture and hypocrisy, this paper sets out to analyze and highlight the difficulties with which the U.S Army has had in trying to adopt and transform its doctrine, organizational structure, and operational methods, to the growing phenomenon of low-intensity conflicts since 9/11. Specific attention will be given to the U.S Army's counter-insurgency campaign in Operation Iraqi Freedom prior to the 2007 'surge'. While other foreign militaries and other branches of the U.S military have contributed significantly to the campaign in Iraq, the reason this paper focuses on the U.S Army is due to the fact that it is by far the largest military organization that has been operating on the ground in Iraq. Hence, its institutional weight and the effects of its actions on the overall counter-insurgency campaign in Iraq have been considerably greater than those of any other

intervening institution in Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Such research could not come at a more crucial time given the difficulties that militaries such as the U.S Army have encountered in trying to defeat contemporary insurgencies.

This paper, when applying the concepts of organizational culture and, as shall be seen below, ‘organizational hypocrisy’ to the issues of organizational learning and adaptation, analyzes the predicaments organizations deal with when identities within them are actually not shared, when norms and routines are varied and perhaps at odds with each other (Fiol, 1994), and when such organizations are subject to often contradictory demands for reform and adaptation both from within and from without their organizational setting.

This paper, although problem-driven and, thus, particularly beneficial to research and decision-making communities that have and are currently grappling with the complex challenges that Western conventional militaries face in LIC warfare, will in any case engage with the corpus of theoretical literature that has adopted the concept of organizational culture as an important variable in explaining institutional adaptation and learning (or the lack thereof) to the changing character of warfare and low-intensity security threats since the end of the Cold War. Moreover, the paper adopts an ‘eclectic theorizing’ method, which brings into consideration the outcomes identities have on ‘both formal and informal institutions’ and the outcomes of ‘ideational rather than material structures, specifically the effects of identity on actor interests’ (Hemmer and Katzenstein, 2002: 577).

Comment [O2]: This is all very vague.

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<sup>1</sup> In November 2007, out of the total 164,424 U.S. military personnel deployed in Iraq 104,833 belonged to the Army. The Marine Corps was the second largest contingent amounting to 24,241 Marines (O’Byrant & Waterhouse, 2007: 1-2). Remaining coalition troops levels as of July 2007 numbered around 11,451 (Bowman, 2007: 10).

## The Challenge of Low-Intensity Conflicts

According to the U.S Army's field manual, *FM 7-98 'Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict'* (1992: 1-1), a low-intensity conflict can be defined as:

A politico-military confrontation between contending states or groups. It is below general war and above routine peaceful competition. It often involves protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies. LIC ranges from subversion to the use of armed force. It is waged by a combination of means, employing political, economical, informational, and military instruments.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of examining the extent to which militaries learn from LICs is crucial in that, as suggested by recent experience, as well as by contemporary military experts, future warfare is likely to involve increasingly low-intensity conflicts (Gordon and Solinger, 2004).

Not only are such LICs likely to become more common, but also more challenging. These operations, in fact, already entail huge economic expenditure, high domestic and international political costs, problematical moral dilemmas, and public-image blunders that can affect the strategic outcome of an overall mission.

Due to a change in values in Western democratic societies, the conduct of LICs by Western democracies has become increasingly restricted by the need to handle LIC conflicts ethically and in a less costly way, particularly in terms of avoiding casualties (Moskos *et al*, 2000). As a result, upper echelon military commanders may feel uneasy in delegating responsibility to lower-level commanders in spite of an official decentralized command doctrine (O'Neill, 1992). Operations in LIC zones may also result in greater political interference from the government sanctioning the use of the military in a particular mission (Cohen, 2000). At the same time, though, the impact of military officers over the planning of national security policy has been more invasive than previously noted (Desch, 2001). This is due to the fact that military organizations usually 'have a monopoly on expertise, military

**Comment [O3]:** Is the question simply about learning? What about the difference in capabilities? A foreign army fighting an illegitimate war is likely to run into the same problem as Vietnam. It is an unwinnable war. And, does that not also mean that this kind of research is an ideological attempt to pretend that this isn't the case.

**Comment [O4]:** Really? Just keep the media out, and use private contractors.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Kinross (2004: 36-7) lists, for example, 'insurgencies/counterinsurgencies, terrorism/counter-terrorism and peace enforcement', though not peacekeeping (which emphasizes consent and not force) as LICs.

operations are complex and not easily understood by nonspecialists, and [in conflict] the time for altering prearranged plans is limited' (Legro, 1996: 122). Rosen (1989), for example, has demonstrated how political leaderships have limited ability in inducing organizational change within militaries given that such militaries are often able to decide how they should organize for and conduct warfare.

Given the very complex and 'fuzzy' nature of such conflicts, conventional militaries do not like to fight them. The uncertainty that underpins many LIC operations obliges the military to combine both combat and non-combat roles and to modify swiftly between peace enforcement, humanitarian assistance and counter-insurgency missions. However, a professional culture characterized predominantly by the warrior ethos trains military officers only partially for the normative and cognitive requirements of LIC missions (Coker, 2007; Franke 1997). Cultivating such a culture has proved problematic for militaries that have participated increasingly in LIC missions since the end of the Cold War.

**Comment [O5]:** Seems to be the key argument. What is the right 'ethos'?

Despite the worldwide increase of LIC warfare and attempts at adopting new doctrines in order to address the problem, most armed forces have continued to focus their training and materiel acquisition efforts on high-intensity conflicts. Conventional militaries have continued to resist the possibility that the tools, doctrines and methods in which they have invested in so much might be unsuitable to the new challenges they face (Manwaney, 1991). Such unsuitability has had obvious strategic consequences for the U.S-led global war on terror, mainly, a mixed military record during the counter-insurgency phases of the Afghani and Iraqi campaigns. Hence, there is a great need to analyze why such military organizations have struggled to learn from contemporary LIC warfare despite its growing incidence.

**Comment [O6]:** Where is the evidence that they have struggled to learn?

Moreover, such resistance to learning from new security challenges has become even more costly since the end of the post-Cold War era during which an increasing number of non-conventional missions have been taken on board by the U.S military, and Army in

particular, as a result of increased international instability. 'Given the generally equivocal nature of low-intensity threats to the core national interests of a specific state, the legitimacy of the use or threat of such military force in order to stabilize and impose order over a particular theatre of operations' has become crucial within the context of military and humanitarian interventions (Catignani, 2008: 4). The legitimacy of military interventions has become, in fact, an important factor in post-Cold war interventions. Consequently, *ius in bello* requirements have particularly come under greater scrutiny and the way a military has come to operate on the ground has had clear strategic repercussions especially in relation to the legitimacy associated with such interventions.

**Comment [O7]:** Thus, we are not simply talking about the practical aspects of fighting a LIC, but also such things as legitimacy, public opinion.

### **Organizational Culture and Military Innovation**

Military innovation (Kier, 1995; Rosen, 1989) has been the subject of research by three other main schools of strategic thought, mainly those that have focused on civil-military relations, interservice politics and intraservice politics (Grissom, 2006). In contrast, this paper will adopt the 'open systems' organizational culture approach in order to understand and explain the factors encouraging or hindering innovation specifically related to LIC warfare. The 'open systems' approach regards organizations as being deeply entrenched in, and influenced by, the environments in which they operate in. Consequently, one must analyze the multifaceted interdependent relationship between organizations and their environment (Farrell 1996: 124). The paper adopts the 'open systems' organizational culture approach in that it is a key explanatory tool for determining why militaries may persist in maintaining war-fighting methods that are not compatible with new and developing strategic and operational realities (Terriff, 2006). Previous studies have shown, in fact, how specific military cultures have affected the way military organizations have conducted war in the past (Katzenstein, 1996; Terriff and Farrell, 2002).

The organizational culture of a military can be defined 'as the embedded beliefs and attitudes within a military organization that shape that organization's preference on when and how the military instrument should be used' (Cassidy, 2004: 75). Culture can, thus, be understood as a symbolic or cognitive system that influences how organizational members interpret their world. Such a cognitive/symbolic system enables organizational activity: 'complex interaction would be unimaginable if specific actions did not call for specific responses and if members had no understanding of the effects of their actions on others (Kier, 2006: 3). Militaries vary in how they perceive their surroundings and the appropriate ways in which they carry out their mission. This is often influenced also by the nature of civil-military relations. A military's organizational culture, thus, influences how it reacts to constraints laid down by civilian decision-makers. It also influences 'how the organization reacts to changes in its external environment' (Kier, 1995: 70).

Barry Posen's classic study on the sources of military doctrine posits significant emphasis on the role that military doctrines play in shaping military organizations in relation to the international security threats they face. Posen (1984: 13), in fact, argues that 'within grand strategy, military doctrine sets priorities among various military forces should be structured and employed to achieve the ends in view'. Nonetheless, while opportunities and limitations for organizational learning and adaptation are promoted often by the introduction of new technology and doctrine as well as by pressures from the domestic leadership echelons, Elizabeth Kier (1995) demonstrates how organizational culture can persist despite the radical change in doctrine. By focusing on the formal structures of bureaucratic organizations Posen (1984) and others (March and Simon, 1958; Weber, 1978), in fact, assume that such organizations operate 'according to their formal blueprints: coordination is routine, rules and procedures are followed, and actual activities conform to the prescriptions of formal structure' (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 342).

However, previous research has shown that there is often wide divergence between the formal and informal aspects of organizational behavior (March and Olsen, 1976). Furthermore, while authors such as Weick, Sutcliff, and Obstfeld (1999: 109) have argued that ‘learning is stored in routines ... assumptions [also] store much of what an organization learns’ or does not learn. Such assumptions are the product of an organization’s culture. If assumptions cannot be changed then it is difficult to change informal routines, procedures and practices that occur on the ground that undo doctrinal innovation or training regimen changes pushed forward at the institutional level.

Stephen Rosen also shows that ‘[c]hanges in formal doctrine of a military organization [may] leave the essential workings of the organization unaltered’ (Farrell, 1996: 125). He gives the clear example of President John F. Kennedy’s unsuccessful bid to get the U.S Army to develop counterinsurgency warfare capabilities during the 1960s. Given the U.S Army’s main focus on fighting major conventional warfare in the European continent, the U.S Army resisted such civilian pressure or, at most, adopted non-conventional measures that were appropriate for conventional operations despite adopting new doctrinal publications addressing counter-insurgency. Deborah Avant (1984) associates the U.S military’s ability to resist civilian, and particularly presidential, pressures for change to the U.S ‘divided’ political system whereby the military is able to play the executive branch against the legislative one and vice versa. While such an institutionalist approach may help us understand how (or better the processes by which) the military is able to play off one political institution against the other in order to resist external political pressures, **it does not explain adequately why such organizations resort to such practices.**

**Comment [08]:** Key argument! But is he going to argue that its all about ideas and inertia? What about the vested interests of the military?

### **Organizational Culture, Learning and Hypocrisy**

Studies that have looked at how organizational culture may affect organizational adaptation have relied substantially on the concept of organizational learning to explain an organization's or institution's propensity to accept or resist change (Downie, 1998; Nagl 2002). While early conceptualizations identified organizational learning as the sum of individual learning outcomes within an organizational setting, more recent studies have conceived organizations as collective entities. Thus, the concept of organizations as learning collectivities has been developed in order to explain processes of organizational learning and adaptation (Lam, 2001).

Such a concept, however, has proved problematic in that at the heart of many organizational studies there has been an underlying idea of concordance and conformity, which in turn has encouraged the belief that learning organizations have, for example, shared goals, identities, values and cultures (Brown; 1969; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Feldman and Feldman, 2006). A significant part of this learning process has been posited on the concept that the U.S Army – as a whole – is a 'learning organization'. However, the question of learning in organizations that are not homogenous and that have various intra-organizational routines, identities and aims that may be challenged by their members as well as by external actors, has not been fully explored, although Rosen (1991) and particularly Builder (1991) do explore sub-cultures by looking at inter-branch differences within the armed services.

The degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity of a specific organization is important in determining the extent to which it learns, given that learning occurs when 'consensual knowledge' is employed to stipulate 'cause-and-effect linkages about any set of phenomena' deemed important by the organization. Learning presupposes that the organization's members are encouraged to question former beliefs about the suitability,

of ends of action and think about the selection of new ones, to “revalue” themselves.... And as members of the organization go through the learning process, it is likely they will arrive at a *common* understanding of what causes the particular problems of concern. A common understanding of causes is likely to trigger a shared understanding of solutions (Haas, 1990: 21, 23, 24).

Given the need to achieve ‘consensual knowledge’ regarding the necessity to modify ineffective practices and policies, it is often difficult for organizations to actually ‘learn’. It is rather more common for organizations to adapt. Adaptation entails the capacity to alter one’s behavior in order to deal with challenges in the guise of new requirements without needing to reassess one’s whole program and the logic on which such a program relies upon for its legitimacy. ‘Adaptation is incremental adjustment... It is change that seeks to perfect the matching of ends and means without questioning the theory of causation defining the organization’s task[s]’. It ultimately does not necessitate new consensual knowledge (Haas, 1990: 34, 37). Argyris similarly distinguishes between learning and what this paper equates with adaptation when employing the concepts of ‘single-loop’ learning and ‘double-loop’ learning. Single-loop learning does not raise questions regarding the basic blueprint, objectives, activities of the organization and the norms and assumptions underlying them. Argyris, on the other hand, defines double-loop learning as ‘processes of learning where the participant questions fundamental aspects of the organization’ (1976: 367). Adaptation, moreover, is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for an organization to learn.

In the case of military organizations, adaptation happens when at the operational and tactical levels lessons are applied in an *ad hoc* manner leading to a modification in prescribed practices, but only within circumscribed areas/units of the organization. Whilst conducting operations, soldiers ‘accumulate tacit knowledge through hands-on experience’ and the process of adaptation remains ‘personal unless they are articulated and amplified through social interaction’ (Nonaka, 1994: 21, 22). Such social interaction, though, has a limited

**Comment [O9]:** Again, are there any successful examples of conventional militaries that have adapted to the requirements of LIC?

reach and effect within the overall organization and, thus, does not bring about institution-wide learning. At the organizational level, learning on the other hand requires that operational and tactical lessons are acknowledged, institutionalized, and most importantly accepted by *all* members of the organization. Such lessons usually nullify or discredit the validity of former practices, and more importantly, the assumptions – which were traditionally thought necessary to achieve specific operational end-states – underlying them. Individual or clusters of units within an organization may also learn if lessons are acknowledged, institutionalized and accepted by its unit members. This, consequently, suggests that there are differing rates of learning and substantially dissimilar inducements to learn, depending on context, culture and sort of problem (Haas, 1990: 26).

Nils Brunsson's theory of 'organizational hypocrisy' (2002), which has been used in organizational studies concerning business firms and political institutions, can provide a very useful conceptualization of heterogeneity within military organizations, which although highly institutionalized and hierarchical, still fall short of being a homogeneous organization (Rosen, 1991). Snider (1999), in fact, has shown that even within branches of the military there may be 'sub-subcultures'. This may help explain the diversity of viewpoints on what war-fighting methods should be adopted in order to achieve a particular mission's goals and, ultimately, success. Within the Army, various units are 'heavily influenced by traditions as the mission [or military occupational specialty] they perform' (Murray 1999, 27). Within organizations that operate within heterogeneous political-institutional frameworks, members may possess a multiplicity of notions about what the organization is, what are its goals, what are seen to be as positive organizational outcomes and how such outcomes should be achieved. Brunsson contends that organizations in which heterogeneity is present, display the attributes of 'hypocrisy' in that a multiplicity of values results in the necessity for organizational incongruity between what is said, what is decided and what is acted upon.

Such inconsistency is particularly due to the fact that ‘modern organizations are confronted not only by consistent demands but also by others that are inconsistent, conflicting or contradictory (Brunsson, 2002: xii). Such ‘conflicting demands are ultimately reflected in organizational structures, processes and ideologies’ [and these] incorporated inconsistencies define “the organization of hypocrisy” (Brunsson, 2002: xiii).

The refutation of shared cultural values has attested to how difficult it has been to reconcile the idea that culture ‘exert[s] some regular influence on behavior of group members’ (Stromberg, 1981: 545). Yet, as Swidler (1986: 277) argues, culture ‘is more like a “tool kit” or repertoire ... from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action’. Such a “tool kit”, in turn, provides the social frameworks for understanding and explaining action. Consequently, a crucial constraining attribute of culture is situated not so much in *values per se*, but in the cultural descriptions of one’s cognitive and normative environment. Commonsense understandings (Swidler, 1986: 279) of what motivates behavior engenders ‘a vocabulary of legitimate action which limits the strategies that individuals and social groups’ can pursue (Derné, 1994: 285). ‘Interpretative repertoires’ are, thus, conceived not as emerging out of the individual actor, but as ‘culturally and historically embedded and socially communicated’. They are, thus, used in order for actors ‘to represent themselves and their ideas’ in a cognitive or justificatory capacity (Marshall, 1994: 91).

By using the concept of organizational hypocrisy to explain the gap between statement and practice that an organization finds itself in when trying to satisfy a myriad of demands from various institutional actors, this paper does not set out to distinguish whether or not there is some ontological ideal for purposive action in low-intensity conflict/COIN scenarios or clearly individuate second-order normative assumptions that an organization *in reality* acts upon. Rather, it is important to observe the explanatory/justificatory linguistic practices that organizations and other institutional actors carry out in relation to the multiple normative

demands they are subject to in the 'communicative domain' of domestic and international politics. Such practices often produce a vocabulary of legitimate action that limits the strategies that individuals and organizations can adopt.

Thus, the analysis of discourse particularly given by those that are considered as representative of the organization and its constituent sub-units may provide insights into the organizational values that are espoused by its members in order to provide both meaning to and justification of decisions and actions that are taken (or omitted) within the organization's institutional environment. As Sussman *et al* (1983: 187) have argued, 'as a reflection of corporate [i.e., organizational] values [or rather organizational culture], speeches provide a potentially rich source of data in that they often represent formal policy statements and may be used to inform, persuade and/or emphasize the beliefs of the organization/institution to both external and internal audiences. Other forms of communication such as policy directives, official studies and reports, and other formal documentation (in the military's case these often come in the guise of doctrinal publications or 'posture statements') can be considered textual communicative practices that are an essential mode through which organizations represent 'reality'. They are 'social facts', in the sense that they are created, distributed and employed 'in socially organized ways' in order to represent 'themselves collectively both to themselves and to others' often for the purpose of justifying themselves and their actions before their stakeholders and political superiors (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997: 45 & 47). This exercise in legitimization, however, becomes a complicated task given that often 'the legitimacy of a given organization is negatively affected by the number of authorities sovereign over it and by the diversity or inconsistency of their accounts as how it is to function' (Meyer and Scott, 1983: 202).

Furthermore, as Brunsson (1998: 265) argues, 'organizational forms [i.e., representations] are not things or practices ... they are presentations.... Organizational forms are part of the

way organizations are presented to the external world or to their own members by authorized people'. Nevertheless, it is sometimes the case, for example, that forms and practices are 'de-coupled', allowing organizations to 'maintain standardized, legitimating, formal structures while their activities vary in response to practical considerations' (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 357). Organizational configurations, regulations, policy guidelines, and publicized collective values and beliefs embraced by organizations, thus, sometimes do not coincide with the informal routines and norms that constitute the daily practices of organizational members and units.

Hence, hypocrisy is a practical coping mechanism by which organizations are able to deal concurrently with multiple contradictory values and demands. This often may lead organizations to 'talk in one way [statement], decide in another [decision] and act in a third [action]' (Brunsson, 2002: xiii). In certain respects, hypocrisy enables an organization to balance conflict inside and outside of it. Hypocrisy enables the organization to balance the pressures between its internal and external environments. Hypocrisy, in other words, allows for organizations to sustain an equilibrium between the values and expectations of contending interest groups within the organization and within the greater political-institutional arena. As such 'hypocrisy' is understood in a neutral rather than critical sense. Hypocrisy, moreover, can be intended as well as unintended. Hypocrisy ultimately makes it easier for organizations to uphold their legitimacy even when they are subject to conflicting demands that often clash with its basic cultural underpinnings (Brunsson, 2002: xv). At different levels of the organization and within the political-institutional arena there may be conflicting demands and interests, which the organization will have to balance. This is particularly the case when the civilian leadership echelon puts pressure on a military organization to adapt to new threats and operational methods in order to address 'new' conflict scenarios.

From the learning and adaptation viewpoints, we can regard the political leadership echelons as 'setting the agenda'. Yet, in such circumstances the threats identified by 'local', that is lower level, military leaders may not be identical to those perceived at the national decision and policy-making levels. On the one hand, such cognitive and normative discrepancies may prove to be a major barrier to the dissemination of the concepts and norms linked with such a 'new' agenda. On the other hand, the promotion of these new concepts and norms may be encouraged, particularly via the adoption of new doctrine as well as 'official' operational and tactical routines and practices [often dubbed by the military as 'Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs), Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), etc.], but their actual implementation may be partial or, on occasion, absent. This is known as 'decoupling' (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

Such resistance to adaptation or learning can be due to various reasons. For example, the national (or even organizational) leadership may have misinterpreted the nature of the threats confronting them (Jervis, 1976, 1988). Alternatively, the perceptions of the *real* threat confronting different institutional actors may be different or even disputed. Resistance to change can also occur when organizational leaders and members have become caught in 'competency traps'. 'A competency trap can occur when favorable performance with an inferior procedure leads an organization to accumulate more experience with it, thus, keeping experience with a superior procedure inadequate to make it rewarding to use' (Levitt and March, 1988: 322). Significant time constraints or pressures, and instances of 'bounded rationality' during critical phases of the decision-making process (Simon, 1956), 'will not only induce falling back on routine responses, but will also lead to a preference for those routine responses which are rehearsed more often' (Becker, 2004: 650).

As one lieutenant colonel admitted on the U.S Army's performance during the counter-insurgency phase in Iraq, 'It's much easier for us to just default to kinetic [i.e., military

forceful] operations' (Nettles, 2006). For a military that, in fact, had preponderantly prepared for, invested in and sought after major combat operations as the ideal type engagement, the temptation in falling back into more conventional and familiar routines and practices during unfamiliar and stressful scenarios became even more enticing, yet also strategically counter-productive during the initial years of its involvement in Iraq (and Afghanistan). Falling back on routines in a multifarious organization enables its members to reduce 'the complexity of the real world and to reduce uncertainty' by limiting incoming information leading to 'suboptimal outputs' (Haas, 1990: 38). The lure of falling back into routines to reduce uncertainty for conventional militaries becomes even greater, but also more problematic, in LICs, which are inherently complex and filled with uncertainty due to the asymmetric nature of the conflict.

This has been the case of the U.S Army despite the fact that it has undergone significant adjustments – including the adoption of a new counter-insurgency manual (FM 3-24, 2006) – before and during recent re-deployments to Iraq in order to adapt to, or at least prepare more effectively for, counter-insurgency operations (Cone 2006). Moreover, despite the fact that many statements from the civilian and upper military leadership echelons have asserted, particularly in the past, that the U.S Army and military in general are capable of operating in LIC environments and that they have been able (or at least are making a major effort) to learn from the counter-insurgency and nation-building tasks they are currently facing in Iraq (and Afghanistan), when analyzing observations and testimonies of mid-level and senior field grade officers taken from the Operational Leadership Experiences interview database (see below), the discrepancies between what the U.S Army is doing, what its leadership has decided upon doing and what it actually has declared it has done and is doing on the ground, are often apparent and at odds with the requirements and demands originating from the

**Comment [O10]:** So what should they have done?

civilian leadership. This discrepancy will be analyzed after the following section, which will briefly outline the methodology used for the empirical analysis of this paper.

### **Cultural Approaches and Methodology**

Until relatively recently, the major method that sought to explain organizational and institutional behavior within the field of the social and economic sciences has been based on rational choice theory, which explains and recognizes human and organizational behavior on the basis of maximizing self-interest (Shepshele and Boncheck, 1997; Stevens, 1993). Yet, when behavior is viewed in the context of attitudes, values and biases, for example, then cultural approaches may provide more efficacious explanations than the rational choice approach (Thompson, M. *et al.* 1990).<sup>3</sup> March and Olsen (1995), furthermore, have argued that behavior is, in fact, constrained by factors ‘other than utility calculations, which include internalized principles and values, cultural features, identity and habit’ (Lecours, 2005: 10). The importance of adopting the notion of culture as an explanatory concept in understanding organizational adaptation to low-intensity conflicts is, moreover, encouraged by the fact that militaries involved in such conflicts are often deployed within the context of international military or humanitarian interventions. Consequently, as Rubinstein (2005: 13) argues, ‘how people [as well as organizations] organize themselves in relation to an intervention, as well as the meaning that they both give and take from the intervention, results in large measure from *social and cultural dynamics*’ [Emphasis mine]. In order to build an ‘external legitimacy for their actions’, as well as, ‘internal credibility for their operations’ (Shamir and Ben-Ari, 1999: 22), forces involved in LICs have very often resorted to ‘meaning management’ (Ouellet, 2001: 80). Yet, as Max Weber has argued when distinguishing the normative from

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<sup>3</sup> For a concise overview on the debate regarding the methodological and heuristic validity of cultural approaches to security studies see, Duffield *et al* (1999).

the empirical sciences ‘in no case does [meaning] refer to an objectively “correct” meaning or one which is “true” in some metaphysical sense’ (1978:4).

When analyzing organizations, the evaluation of organizational culture has been particularly associated with the use of qualitative methods (Kluge, 2003; Schein, 1990). In order to highlight the extent to which the U.S Army has balanced the multiple needs of having to prepare for major conventional combat operations, operate effectively in low-intensity conflict scenarios while having to satisfy domestic, international and media scrutiny in its overall operational conduct on the basis of *jus in bello* principles this paper has selected illustrative excerpts from the semi-structured in-depth interviews carried out by the ‘Operational Leadership Experiences Project’. The ‘Operational Leadership Experiences’ (OLE) interview database is run by the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, KS.

The OLE database has archived over 800 firsthand, multi-service accounts from military personnel who planned and/or participated between 2001 and 2007 in operations in the Global War on Terrorism in Afghanistan and/or Iraq.<sup>4</sup> After having read initially through 65 interviews of officers involved in Operation Iraqi Freedom in order to get a cursory understanding of the ‘lessons learned’ (as well as other issues) addressed in them, an initial selection of such interviews was taken from the database by conducting the following keyword searches: 1) ‘hearts and minds’; 2) ‘kinetic’; 3) ‘non-kinetic’; 4) ‘Phase IV’; 5) ‘Learning’; 6) ‘stability and support operations’ (and ‘SASO’); and 7) ‘nation-building’. This selection was re-checked in order to make sure that they related to combat, combat support, SASO, nation-building and other COIN-related operations conducted specifically in Iraq.

Thus, 385 interviews were chosen and converted from PDF into text files through the use of *Omnipage*’s optical character recognition software. Once these files were modified, *Atlas.ti5*, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program was used in order to

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<sup>4</sup> See: Operational Leadership Experiences Project, *Combat Studies Institute*, <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/csi/OLEProject.asp>.

select from the 385 interviews quotations that addressed and explored concepts and accounts relating to the learning/adaptation experiences that officers had in order to conduct more effectively the counter-insurgency campaign in Iraq following the cessation of major combat (i.e., 'Phase III') operations. These quotation paragraphs were saved and printed out. They were read through in order to survey the discourses and explanations associated with the successes and failures of the COIN campaign in Iraq.

Following such a selection, illustrative statements taken from field grade officer interviews depicting what occurred and still occurs today in the Iraqi counter-insurgency campaign (action) until early 2007. These were taken in order to understand the extent to which actions and practices carried out on the ground either contradicted or corresponded to the claims relating to the U.S Army's 'full spectrum' and, thus, SASO/COIN capabilities made by doctrinal publications and those that have been expressed by the higher echelon military and civilian leaderships prior and during the Iraqi campaign (statement). These were, furthermore, taken in order to also comprehend the extent to which actions and practices carried out on the ground either contradicted or corresponded to the official directives and policy decisions taken by the Bush Administration and by Congress calling for the U.S Army to change its strategic and operational conduct in Iraq (decision).

By compiling such data and comparing discrepancies between them, this paper explores to what extent resistance to learning and/or adaptation to low-intensity conflicts within the U.S Army has been a result of its organizational culture and how such resistance has been mediated by the U.S Army's ability to balance conflicting internal and external interests and pressures through the organization of hypocrisy.

## **U.S Army 'Culture' and Way of Warfare**

As argued earlier, organizations often include several heterogeneous subcultures, which may bring into question the extent to which one culture may be recognized in causal accounts of organizational behavior. Nonetheless, as Edgar Schein (1992: 14) sustains, to the degree that we locate 'certain assumptions that are shared across all units of an organization, then we can legitimately speak of an organizational culture, even though at the same time we may find a number of discrete subcultures'.

Despite the rise in number of U.S interventions in crisis areas around the globe since the end of the Cold War, which have often entailed peacekeeping and peace-enforcement type operations, the U.S military's aversion to what it until recently has revealingly called 'military operations other than war' (MOOTW) has been well-documented.<sup>5</sup> According to David Segal (2001: 618) 'traditional American military culture has been characterized by two related elements: the core activity of combat and the role of the warrior'. As such, the U.S Army's predilection for high-intensity conventional warfare and its dislike for low-intensity or asymmetric warfare have been acknowledged in studies carried out, for example, by Robert Cassidy (2004) and Andrew Krepinevich (1986). Such a predilection for major conventional warfare has led the U.S Army to overlook the challenges of low-intensity conflicts in the past by dedicating nominal time and resources to studying and preparing for such conflict scenarios.

Research, furthermore, has shown that even during the 1990s in spite of the U.S military's increasing understanding that low-intensity non-conventional conflicts had become if not the greatest, at least the most common, scenario in which U.S military forces would have to deal with and operate in, officer attitudes throughout the services, but particularly within the U.S Army, were ambivalent towards the need to actually take on board such 'secondary' or 'new' missions and towards making any real efforts in trying to adapt to them

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<sup>5</sup> See: *Joint Publication 3-07: Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 16 June 1995).

(Avant and Lebovic, 2000; Segal, Reed and Rohall, 1998). Avant and Lebovic's study (2000) found, furthermore, that this lack of enthusiasm for conducting post-Cold War missions within the U.S military was in part influenced by officers' perception of Congress, and the general public, as lagging behind the president, in their support for such missions (Eichenberg, 2005).

Due to the inability to clearly anticipate what specific threats the U.S was going to confront in the post-Cold War era, the U.S military was encouraged during the late 1990s to prepare for all contingencies. In 1997 a report by the National Defense Panel (NDP), a group charged by Congress to give a second opinion on the Clinton Administration's Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) called for a committed 'transformation strategy'. This entailed the development of those technologies that could 'dissipate the "fog of war" and gain significant advantages' (Odeen *et al*, 1997: iii).

While such advantages were supposed to benefit the U.S military in all types of operational contingencies, operational methods, major weapons systems, as well as training and force structure changes seemed to reinforce the military's preference for fighting major conventional force-on-force battles. That is, transformation developments based on the concept of the Revolution of Military Affairs (RMA) reinforced the Army's conventional war-fighting predispositions rather than prepare them for 'full spectrum dominance' as envisaged and declared emphatically, for example, by the Chairman of Joint Chief's of Staff policy publication *Joint Vision 2010* (1996) and reiterated in *Joint Vision 2020* (2000).<sup>6</sup> Full spectrum dominance is an U.S military concept, which calls for the U.S military to obtain control over all elements of the physical and virtual battlespace across the full spectrum of military operations (i.e., from high-intensity conventional warfare to SASO-type operations).

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<sup>6</sup> On the RMA see: [The RMA Debate, The Project on Defense Alternatives, http://www.comw.org/rma/](http://www.comw.org/rma/).

During the early 1990s, in fact, the U.S developed its initial peace-keeping/peace-enforcement operations on an *ad hoc* basis with modest interagency planning and coordination with often the U.S Army taking *reluctantly* the lead in such interventions, because of its greatly superior planning, organizational, manpower capabilities and material resources compared to those belonging to any other civilian agency, including the Department of State. When such operations were taken on board, the emphasis on casualty aversion and on force protection of U.S. armed forces often led to limited and, thus, ineffectual engagements (Record, 2000).

During the late-1990s in spite of the rhetoric for defense transformation, the U.S Department of Defense and military continued to invest in conventional warfare capabilities. Transformation efforts were deferred mostly due to underfunding and ‘plagued by the “migration of funds to operating and support accounts’ employed to subsidize U.S peace-keeping and other overseas operations (Larson 2002: 257). So, U.S military transformation and full spectrum dominance rhetoric hid the fact that most efforts to obtain these two goals were, in effect, focused on reinforcing – or at least salvaging given the large budgetary cuts imposed by the executive and legislative branches on the U.S military following the end of the Cold War – its conventional capabilities and weapons platforms despite the military’s growing involvement in stabilization and peace-keeping operations.

Even the U.S Army’s declaration of intent to push forward the transformation agenda and the aspiration to achieve full spectrum dominance could not conceal the cognitive dissonance within its organization, which believed that conventional means and values and goals underpinning the *modus operandi* of conventional warfare could be applied to lower intensity conflict scenarios. Having analyzed, in fact, the U.S Army Posture Statements (APS) between

**Comment [O12]:** Is this it? What are the actual problems that the US army faced?

1997 and 2008,<sup>7</sup> one can clearly perceive the erroneous assumption that conventional weaponry and a conventional combat posture could be simply applied to the lower spectrum of conflict. An analysis of the APS also demonstrates the extent to which the Army was (and is) still intent on hanging onto its conventional war-fighting posture. For example, despite the occasional acknowledgment in APS 1998 that future warfare would (and will) entail a greater incidence of LIC, within the same paragraph the Army declared that most of its problems would revolve around conventional threats:

Today's complex global environment has called for an increasing number of missions at the lower and middle portions of the spectrum of military operations.... Since the majority of the world's military forces are armies, military engagement with them *normally calls for army-to-army contact* [Emphasis mine].

**Comment [O13]:** But then why is this all analysed as 'culture'? Surely it is economic self interest.

In spite of further assertions that LIC warfare threats would continue to increase in the future and were inherently complex, the Army's call for the need to focus on conventional warfare capabilities was further reiterated in APS 2000 because of the demanding nature of such conflicts:

Since mid to *high intensity conflict remains the most demanding mission* along the spectrum of military operations the most important measure of readiness for a particular unit is its ability to perform the essential tasks it would *most likely have to perform* in this type of conflict [Emphasis mine].

The essential task again was seen as that of fighting conventional warfare and even after the attacks of 9/11 and months into the prosecution of the U.S' global war on terror, APS 2002 still continued to reveal the tension between the Army's recognition of the increasing

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<sup>7</sup> The annual Army Posture Statement (APS) is an unclassified review of Army roles, missions, accomplishments, plans, and programs. Written to support the Secretary and Chief of Staff of the Army posture and budget testimony before the U.S Congress, the APS serves a wide audience as a crucial reference on the state of the Army and what it plans to achieve in the future.

occurrence of LIC threats, but its desire to remain grounded in conventional war-fighting preparations because of the possibility of some future conventional threat:

The attacks of 11 September provide compelling evidence that the strategic environment remains dangerous and unpredictable.... Yet, the potential for large-scale conventional combat operations will continue to lurk just beneath the surface.

Not only has the U.S. military focused mainly on high intensity conventional warfare, it has traditionally adopted an approach based on Colin Powell's doctrine of 'overwhelming force', which according to Eliot Cohen has led the U.S. military culture to exhibit two major cultural attributes: 'the preference for massing a large number of men and machines and the predilection for direct and violent assault' (Aylwin-Foster, 2005: 34). As Gray (2006: 35) argues, 'the exploitation of machinery is the American way of war' in that U.S armed forces 'are culturally attuned to favoring technological solutions over other approaches'. Very often, though, technology in LICs becomes ineffectual. For example, signals and electronic intelligence as well as the use of high-tech weapons platforms almost become impotent when the enemy operates from and conceals himself within the local population. Very often pinpointing the enemy requires human intelligence, which is almost always gathered from parts of the population that are supportive of the counter-insurgent's goals.

Despite declarations that the U.S Army was working towards achieving full spectrum dominance, which would allow it to also operate effectively in the LIC environment, most technological and force structure developments underpinned its conventional warfare biases. Consequently, many of the changes identified, but also called for in the APS tended to reinforce the U.S Army's preference for and biases towards large-scale, technology-intensive, rapid and lethal maneuver warfare.

The 1997 APS stated, for example, that '[a]dvancements in technology will change warfare in the 21st century. Soldiers ... will still be required to close with and destroy the

**Comment [O14]:** Very general statement. What about the case of Iraq?

enemy'. The 1998 APS envisaged the ability of a precise and maneuver dominant military as also relevant in 'defeating an enemy armed with machetes and rifles'. Even a decade later, and despite the reality of the counter-insurgency and nation-building missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the 2007 APS still saw the military's transformation efforts – this time incarnated in the form of the modular brigade combat system – as converting the Army 'into a more lethal ... force'. These transformation efforts, which in effect buttress the Army's conventional mindset and capabilities, were again rhetorically framed as a shift away from its posture, which was 'previously focused primarily on traditional challenges to better address the full spectrum ... of challenges'. Previous APS, however, had stated otherwise.

The U.S. Army's confidence in overwhelming force is intimately linked to its emphasis on force protection. Kier (2006: 13), in fact, states that 'the Army often relies on and justifies the use of overwhelming force as a tactic to save American lives'. The emphasis on force protection through the use of stand-off weapons systems as well as through the extensive use of armor on both personnel and military vehicles leads often to an increase in the physical and, thus moral, distance between U.S. troops on the ground and the local civilian population. This, in turn, makes it very difficult for U.S. troops to gain the trust and support from the local population in order to operate more effectively, particularly when that entails relying on them to improve security and governance capabilities on the ground (Lyll & Wilson, 2009). Distance from the population and, thus, the inability to engage with it and its needs and ultimately win its 'hearts and minds' seriously debilitate the prospect for success in a counter-insurgency campaign.

In spite of the U.S. Army's preference for force-on-force conventional warfare, the U.S. Army reinforced its public commitment to adapt its forces in order to fight/operate within the full-spectrum of operations the Bush Administration's 2006 National Security Strategy

**Comment [O15]:** Surely, this point is central to the whole analysis. It is also part of the political expectations. But is this organizational?

envisioned it would have to prepare for. The U.S. Army's 2007 Posture Statement (p. 10) stated, in fact, that the U.S. Army would have to,

be able to conduct joint, multinational operations anywhere across the spectrum of conflict. This spectrum ranges from the low end – emphasizing stability and civil support operations – to the high end – emphasizing major combat operations (which focus on *more familiar offensive or defensive operations*) [Author's emphasis].

However, while the U.S. Army has deemed its forces as capable of conducting the full spectrum of operations, in reality such forces have been composed mostly for the 'more familiar offensive and defensive' conventional high-intensity missions against the conventional forces of other states. Moreover, one can make a case that changes over the last few years to the Army's organizational force structure have not corresponded with numerous changes in doctrine, education and training. Discussion on the various force structure programs that currently seem to propagate a continued emphasis on major conventional warfare go beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to say, nonetheless, that many weapons procurement and battle-system development programs are still suited for Cold War conflict scenarios that are not fit for purpose in the LIC missions that the U.S. Army is currently involved in and will be involved in the near future (Williams, 2006). As Kosiak has shown, even though defence budget requests for financial year 2008 contained research and development (R&D) funding for programmes generally perceived to be critical for transformation, 'defense R&D funding still appears to be very much focused on traditional kinds of weapons programs' (2007: 19).

The U.S. military's preference for conducting 'rapid decisive operations' (RDO) in order to win battles as quickly and as economically as possible was reinforced by its positive experiences during the initial Afghani and Iraqi invasions. While the Department of Defense has asserted that 'the principles of RDO may be applied across the range of military

operations' (*Joint Forces Command*, 2001), the fact that insurgencies tend to be long-drawn-out conflicts may lead campaign planners to prepare missions on the basis of the incorrect assumption that insurgencies can be 'fixed' quickly. For quite sometime the basis of effective operations in Iraq was perceived by the leadership in Washington D.C. to be situated in a 'transformed military equipped primarily for rapid-dominance war fighting, whereas strategic success is more probably found in the slow stabilization operations' (Hills, 2006: 635-6; Gray 2006).

**Comment [O16]:** Surely they are more, even, than this.

The U.S. Army's performance in its post-conflict Phase IV operations – that is, during the security and stability operational phase – has proved to be rather lacklustre and has challenged the U.S. Army's contention that it is 'spectrum capable'.<sup>8</sup> A significant reason for such a mixed performance in Phase IV operations can be attributed to the Department of Defense's as well as the U.S. military's failure at effectively planning and providing the necessary resources for such a contingency. Such a lack of preparation was partly due to the rosy forecasts that policymakers had of post-invasion Iraq: 1) U.S. and Coalition forces would be greeted as liberators rather than occupiers; 2) post-conflict stabilization efforts (i.e., 'Phase IV' operations), thus, would run relatively smoothly and would not require a major effort by and participation of U.S. armed forces; 3) given this optimistic assumption, the early redeployment of most U.S. armed forces from Iraq was anticipated by the civilian and military leaderships. Maj. John Adams (2007) underlined this assumption when commenting on the difficulty that the U.S. armed forces confronted once Phase IV operations began:

**Comment [O17]:** Is this it? Surely this needs a much more thorough assessment.

I think we felt that Phase IV was going to be a lot easier than it was, and felt that the Iraqi population would throw their arms up when we came in, be glad that Saddam's gone, and that fairly quickly things would get back to normal... I think the overall difficulty was underestimated.

**Comment [O18]:** But again these are not organizational issues but rather highlight the problems behind the whole Iraq war. Why pretend otherwise, and accept the aims as legitimate?

<sup>8</sup> There has been, nevertheless, quite a lot variation in the conduct of Phase IV counter-insurgency operations between U.S. Army units. For example, during the first year following the cessation of major combat operations the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division carried out much more effectively security and stability operations based on non-kinetic principles than those carried out much more aggressively and kinetically-focused by the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (See Ricks, 2006a).

More importantly, such a lack of preparation and overall unsuccessful transition to the COIN and SASO campaign were due to the U.S. Army's organizational aversion to such LIC missions. Hence, most of the pre-war planning was focused on the major combat phase and explained by a mid-ranking officer as a 'natural' thing for Army planners to do:

Within CFLCC [Coalition Forces Land Component Command], you had Phase IV planners, but the priority was on Phase III. I think *this is a natural thing for an Army officer because that's what we know how to do best. Phase III, high intensity, is what we're trained to do and it's what we're good at* (Arnold, 2005) [Author's emphasis].

In the case of Operation Iraqi Freedom an aversion to LICs also led the U.S. Army to reluctantly and belatedly recognize the development of an insurgency following major combat operations in mid-2003 (Hashim, 2006). Lt.-Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, commanding officer of the coalition ground forces between June 2003 and 2004, called the growing insurgency at the time 'strategically and operationally insignificant' (Bacevich 2008). This statement was far from being accurate. Between June 2003 and January 2004, Sanchez's campaign plan focused on conventional battles and a quick removal of U.S troops. Thus, little was done to address the growing insurgency. Rather, offensive operations were carried out in order to 'mop-up' what he considered to be remnants of the Ba'athist regime.

When Gen. George Casey replaced Sanchez in summer 2004, a slight modification in strategy took place. Nonetheless, it was not geared towards effective counterinsurgency. Whilst Casey's campaign plan downplayed offensive operations, it emphasized a quick U.S exit strategy, based on building Iraqi security and governance capacity, as well as the force protection of U.S units on the ground, which were increasingly retreating into their safe, but operationally counterproductive, 'Forward Operating Bases' stationed, in effect, far away from key population centers. .

**Comment [O19]:** What difference would it have made if they were prepared better?

**Comment [O20]:** They shouldn't have invaded in the first place.

Under considerable domestic and international criticism as well as a result of its ostensible ‘lessons learned’ and in order to obviate the many shortfalls both it and the U.S military experienced during Phase IV operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Department of Defense and the Armed Services began a large number of doctrinal, educational and training reforms, which to a large extent focussed on developing better COIN/SASO capabilities. The DOD issued, in the ‘Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations Directive on 28 November 2005 in order to underscore the policy that,

Stability operations are a core U.S. military mission that the Department of Defense shall be prepared to conduct or support. They shall be given priority comparable to combat operations and be explicitly addressed and integrated across all DOD activities including doctrine, organization, training, education, exercises, material, leadership, personnel, facilities, and planning (DOD Directive 3000.05, 2005).

With such a directive, stability operations were to be elevated to the same level of priority and importance as combat operations. Such a reform supposedly would entail a major cultural shift within the U.S military. Yet, the directive also stated that stability operation duties ‘are best performed by indigenous, foreign, or U.S civilian professionals’ (DOD Directive 3000.05). Despite these calls for change, expectations within the military that nation-building functions were still somebody else’s business were still widely present and another of the reasons why the U.S Army had not prepared well for Phase IV contingencies. As one colonel put it,

My personal opinion is that one of the reasons we weren’t as prepared for Phase IV as we could have been is our somewhat dependent experience in the Balkans in the 90s. Who did Phase IV for us? Someone else did. The UN did it in Bosnia; the UN did it in Kosovo (DeLuca, 2006).

However, at present, even U.S civilian capabilities are conspicuously absent in spite of the creation in July 2004 the State Department’s Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction

**Comment [O21]:** There is a political point being made in this paper that the aims of the US were theoretically achievable and thereby that the military is responsible for the failure to achieve these goals. And there seems to be some ambiguity here. Is the problem that there was a counter-insurgency, which was entirely unexpected? Or is it that the US army could not adapt to fight the counter-insurgency?

and Stabilization, which would improve in the future civilian efforts at post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction efforts. This decision was taken as a result of the State Department's inability, if not ineptitude, at coordinating and leading the nation-building effort in Iraq between April 2003 and June 2004 under the auspices of the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) and subsequently the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Notwithstanding experiences in previous missions, the lesson of preparing for and coordinating better SASO/nation-building missions had not been learnt from previous interventions. Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice admitted, in fact, that, 'I don't think the U.S government had what it needed for reconstructing a country. We did it *ad hoc* in the Balkans, and then in Afghanistan, and then in Iraq' (Rohde and Sanger, 2007). This led many in the U.S Army to express their frustrations on the lack of the State Department's ability to contribute effectively in the nation-building effort during the ORHA/CPA administrations. For example, Col. Cardon (2006), remarked that, 'The other area that was disappointing – you often hear it said that the Army's at war but the U.S government is not.... The State Department was too small to do what it needed to do. We had no local governance'. Despite the policy decision to develop better civilian reconstruction capabilities, very little funding and manpower investment has been put into this project (Bensahel, 2007).

At any rate, as a result of the DOD directive and of other institutional calls, from the Bush Administration and Congress, for improvements in nation-building and stability operation capabilities as well as a result of the grave difficulties encountered in carrying out SASO/nation-building tasks in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S Army published in December 2006 the new *Counter-Insurgency Field Manual* (FM 3-24), under the direction and authorship of external advisors as well as several 'maverick' officers – led by Lt. Gen. David Petraeus – many of whom had operated in Iraq in a much less kinetic-based and more

population-centric manner and who had intellectually bought into the military's need to dramatically change its counter-insurgency strategy, operation and tactics (See: Ricks, 2007). The U.S Army's new COIN Field Manual emphasizes, amongst other things, the need to adopt a less kinetic approach that focuses on the centrality of the COIN mission's political objective(s), particularly that of winning over the population's support (that is, its 'hearts and minds') by improving security, but especially governance conditions, the need for greater interagency cooperation and civilian agency participation in the COIN effort, and the need to adapt and learn on a continual and systematic basis in order to improve COIN capabilities (FM 3-24, 2006).

As a result of such a new emphasis on SASO and COIN operations, the Army set up new education and training practices in order to apply lessons learned from both campaigns as well as put into practice principles originating from the new doctrine manual on counter-insurgency. Part of the process of trying to alter the Army's organizational culture requires modifying professional education programs and practices within it. Operational lessons need to be adopted in 'the curricula of military schools and training institutions, in the structure of military organizations [and] in the creation of new organizations to deal with new or changed situations' (Nagl 2005, 7). Recording and disseminating lessons within the organization are crucial phases between organizational adaptation and organizational learning.

The Army, in fact, has made significant efforts to portray that it has diminished the stress placed on teaching and training for major conventional warfare by increasing time and effort spent on teaching on how to conduct SASO and COIN operations and on developing cultural awareness and language skills. For example, in the past the Army's Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas used to incorporate only around 30 hours of COIN coursework for the majors attending the year-long course, today the CGSC offers

over 200 hours of COIN core courses and further 40-plus hours of COIN elective courses (Feickert, 2008: 6).

Yet, even as late as 2007, Col. (Ret.) Kevin P. Reynolds, has shown that still only '6.2 percent of the courses offered and approximately 4.8 percent of the hours in the core curriculum' addressed counterinsurgency issues and that only two of the 90 elective offerings during Academic Year 2007 addressed 'counterinsurgency or a directly related subject' (Reynolds 2007). Whilst the Army War College has significantly increased tuition hours dedicated to COIN, the subject of COIN still comprises a very small part of the overall curriculum. He estimated, in fact, that only 0.5 percent of the hours of the total curriculum would, in fact, focus on counterinsurgency-related issues (Reynolds, 2007; 7-8). Moreover, at the Captain Career Course at Fort Knox, KY even in late 2006 around '70% of the training [was] for conventional warfare' (Kaplan 2007).

The Army, furthermore, has adjusted the Officer and Non-Commissioned Officer education system in order to incorporate cultural awareness and language skills training into educational programs. Yet, the curtailing of course durations in such foundational courses due to the high tempo of operational deployments associated with the GWOT has limited the effect that such courses have had on soldier's overall assimilation SASO/COIN lessons and best practices (Feickert, 2008: 6).

Unit training has also been tailored to consider the lessons learned in combat and the demands from both the Bush Administration and Congress to also tackle more effectively the counter-insurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. Before Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, the Army's various combat training centers for the most part trained units for 'force-on-force and manoeuvre combat operations against Warsaw-type Pact mechanized and armor forces', whereas the training centers, according to Army reports submitted to Congress' House and Senate Armed Services Committees and to the Congressional Research

Service, now focus on “‘continuous, complex counterinsurgency and civil affairs operations’ and working with Interagency, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and civilian organizations’, yet again, the hasty, frequent and often extended deployment rotation of units to Afghanistan and Iraq has resulted in some units not having the time for a CTC pre-deployment exercise dedicated to developing key COIN/SASO skills (Feickert, 2008: 7).

Despite the assertion in the 2007 APS that, ‘the rigor and relevance of our CTC [Combat Training Center] Program is enhancing our capabilities across the full spectrum of operations, very often the direction training would follow would often depend on the way a particular commander would envision the conflict prior to the unit’s deployment. This was particularly the case during pre-deployment training. Even those that did receive instruction prior to their deployment that emphasised a less kinetic-based approach to counter-insurgency often acknowledged such principles, but did not really internalize them due to their self-identity as warriors (rather than nation-builders). Col. Ted Martin (Martin, 2005), at the time a 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division squadron commander, commented on his counter-insurgency pre-deployment training by stating that, ‘maybe it’s a two-week block of instruction to get you thinking about it. They you go back to business [i.e., routine], because really, a battalion commander’s job is to fight and win. **It is not to build nations’.**

**Comment [O22]:** This was an impossible and unrealistic task!

Whilst the lack of pre-deployment training in COIN/SASO skills may be attributed to the high operational tempo that the U.S Army has been since the start of the GWOT, it could be argued that the extent to which a unit prepared for COIN/SASO before deploying to Iraq may have corresponded with the extent to which their commanding officer bought into the Army’s need to learn how to conduct effective COIN. If unit commanders stressed the importance of adopting a COIN/SASO approach to their impending deployment, then pre-deployment training would make time for the training and absorption of less kinetic-based COIN tactics, techniques and procedures, the opposite would usually be true for commanders that still

favoured a more conventional and kinetic solution to the Iraqi insurgency. As Lt.-Col. Brown (2007), a Cavalry regiment commander, highlighted that,

[O]ur preparation was primarily focused on scenarios in an environment that was similar to OIF I, yet we were deploying for OIF 04-06 - and the fight had evolved during that time. We trained for OIF 04-06 with the assumption that the enemy was going to confront us the way they had in OIF I. My soldiers believed the enemy would confront us directly with firefights, ambushes and so forth. Instead, the enemy rarely came and faced us directly in firefights.... So, the tactics had evolved and the war had evolved but we hadn't trained for that. We went in with expectations of how the enemy and also how the population was going to behave - and it didn't occur.

**Comment [O23]:** If they were trained, would it have made any difference?

On the other hand, the case of Col. H.R. McMaster, commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment during its deployment to Iraq between 2005 and 2006, provides an example of how, despite time and resource constraints, his regiment was able to learn from its previous COIN experiences in 2003 and 2004, and adopt new operational training techniques in order to employ a much more effective and population-centric COIN campaign in its subsequent deployment to Iraq in 2005. McMaster was, in fact, able to turn around dramatically the security environment in the city of Tal Afar from an insurgent safe haven in which insurgent activity, sectarian violence and economic dislocation were widespread into a secure and stable city in which the population did not fear collaborating with and support the U.S COIN effort.<sup>9</sup> Under the leadership of McMaster, the regiment had,

10 months to prepare to go back to Iraq in February 2005, so we used that time to really learn as much as we could from the experience in Iraq between 2003 and 2004 and then apply those lessons to our training strategy and our standard operating procedures: how we intended to fight the fight in Iraq, bring stability to communities and develop indigenous security forces such that those gains would be sustainable over time.

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed account of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment's successful COIN in Tal Afar and McMaster had played a crucial role in preparing his troops for a population-centric campaign, see: Packer 2006; PBS Frontline 2007; Ricks 2006).

The brigade's operational vision of sustainable stability, its tactics as well as pre-deployment preparations ultimately reduced daily insurgent attacks from six to one during the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR's deployment in Tal Afar. However, the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR's replacement, the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division, very quickly caused a major rise in insurgent activity leading to the re-adoption of large-sweeping cordon and search operations, which understandably led to the alienation of the population that had been painstakingly won over by the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR's population-centric tactics during the previous year. The gains obtained by the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR, in effect, were squandered by the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division's kinetic approach (Burton & Nagl 2008: 310). These two cases are very clear examples on how two combat units – the former Cavalry and the latter Armour – of the U.S Army with previous operational experiences in Iraq during Phase IV operations, with the benefit of COIN 'lessons learned' being feedback through the various educational and training channels of the military, ended up operating very differently and with almost opposite operational outcomes.

Despite such recent reforms in doctrine, education and training, it is very hard to conceive how previous experiences in peace-keeping/peace-enforcement missions during the 1990s as well as the counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan begun shortly after 9/11 were not systematically learnt, adopted and applied within the U.S Army as a whole for the Iraq invasion and subsequent occupation. In a sense, this lack of ability, if not desire, to learn from prior SASO missions was encouraged by George W. Bush Administration's decision in early 2001 to close down the U.S Army's Peacekeeping Institute. During his 2000 presidential campaign Bush, in fact, stated that, 'I would be very careful about using our troops as nation builders. I believe the role of the military is to fight and win and, therefore, prevent war from happening in the first place'. Interestingly, Lt.-Col. Gary Keck, a Pentagon spokesperson, underlined the fact that the decision to close the institute was the Army's (Holt, 2003).

In spite of the U.S Army's self-representation (even prior to Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom) as a 'learning organization' and as 'full spectrum' capable, the reality on the ground and its effectiveness in carrying out post-combat SASO/nation-building operations within quite a few units proved to disprove abruptly such claims in both campaigns. A classic example of the Army's preference for offensive-kinetic operations even during the initial stabilization and reconstruction phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom is given by Lt. Col. Troy Perry (2006).

'[T]he kinetic piece was always expected to be done and pushed really almost the whole time we were there. It was very clear that the kinetic piece was important to Major General Ray Odierno and he was much happier if you were briefing him if you were involved in operations. Colonel Frederick Rudesheim would say that we should be doing cordon and knocks but General Odierno was still saying they should be cordon and searches, meaning that General Odierno was still okay with it being a much harder entry than what eventually we moved to. I think Colonel Rudesheim moved to the idea that we don't have to go break in the door, blast open the gate, or kick in the door and throw all the books and everything else on the floor and put a bag over everybody's head. Colonel Rudesheim got that much earlier on.

As stated above, assumptions drive what organizations learn. The assumption that SASO/nation-building operations were somebody else's mission, notwithstanding the fact that the U.S Army had participated and led such missions whenever U.S governments decided to intervene during the 1990s, had led the U.S Army to not really adapt to and learn from such experiences in a systematic manner. According to Maj. Adams (2007),

We don't like doing nation building stuff... It seemed to me at the time of my deployment that we had this idea, as misguided as it was, that we'd fight the fight, hand it over, and the civilians would fix everything and make the civil governance and all that stuff work. Once the regime fell, though, we found ourselves doing quite a lot of different kinds of nation building type stuff.

Units that were able to apply previous lessons in Iraq were usually those that had members who had participated in previous military and humanitarian interventions. According to Major Richard Coyle (2006), 'A lot of the success in Iraq has been due to guys who were NCOs, lieutenants, captains and majors and lieutenant colonels in places like Bosnia and Kosovo. A lot of that translated and was captured as far as how you deal with civilians'.

One way, then, that one can explain why some units performed better than others, why some units learnt and adapted better than other units, is by reverting back to the notion of heterogeneity within organizations. Due to the fact that the U.S Army was under the twin pressures of the civilian leadership echelons to 'transform' – which is predicated mostly on the development of technologies and war-fighting methods best suited for high-intensity conflicts – as well as develop 'full spectrum' capabilities – which ideally would also enable it to tackle LIC scenarios – was compelled to represent itself as being capable of transforming for every foreseeable scenario, even though it was focused primarily on cultivating its capabilities for the higher end of the conflict spectrum. Thus, it was very often those units that either had personnel in key leadership positions that had served in previous LIC interventions or that had personnel who internalized SASO/nation-building tasks as an integral and essential task of the mission in Iraq that made the effort to integrate non-kinetic approaches to the overall counter-insurgency campaign in Iraq.

Different views on how the insurgency could be fought not only depended on a commander's previous operational experience. There were, in fact, many that had none at the time of OIF. Assumptions on how to address the insurgent threat as well as views on whether or not U.S Army actions were aggravating or ameliorating conditions on the ground depended also on that person's level of command and the degree to which such a commander

stuck to his unit's customary routines. Maj. Kevin Broadnax, a company commander of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division during his deployment in Iraq, recounts:

One of the things I saw early on was that the fight we were in was different than we had seen and we needed to change some things. I brought it up to my boss but it wasn't well received.... I brought these things up to my boss and the comment I received was, "*This has worked since World War II. There's no need to change it at this point*" [Emphasis mine] (Broadnax 2006).

Broadnax clearly illustrates the case in which a senior commander's cultural biases and ingrained ways of operating (i.e., routines) have influenced him to preserve the tactics, techniques and procedures despite facing a very different reality and, thus very different operational requirements, than those that were effective during World War II (!).

The limited application of non-kinetic SASO/nation-building techniques and procedures were not so much the result of some institutional memory based on a system-wide and systematic collection of SASO/nation-building best practices learnt in previous LIC campaigns. Rather, they were the result of the fortuitous presence of personnel that had operated in previous peace-keeping and peace enforcement operations and that were flexible and adaptive enough to apply such 'lessons' in an *ad hoc* manner. While such individual initiative did lead some units to carry out SASO/nation-building functions effectively, it also points to the lack of overall institution-wide awareness and ability to perform such functions.

Thus, a lot of the 'learning' done on the ground was in reality adaptation and mostly unit-specific and occurred as a result of the greater desire of some units rather than others to adapt to Phase IV operations. Such a desire was the result of how a particular unit perceived itself and what its mission was to be. One former senior CPA official explained that, some of the commanders had paid:

Close attention to the lessons learned over the years [about countering insurgency] and are applying them in theater but it is not division or battalion wide. It often is up to the individual commanders. For instance

the 2BCT [Brigade Combat Team] Baghdad of the 1AD [Armored Division] here is doing it 3 different ways dependant upon the commander of the individual unit. One is using lots of low level intel ideas coupled with a get on the ground approach that is paying high dividends. The other two don't care and just go about business as usual [i.e., offensive-kinetic operations] (Hoffman, 2004: 9).

'Learning' (or rather adaptation), furthermore, was often carried out in an improvised and *ad hoc* manner. According to Major Douglas Merritt (2007), 'There was a lot of learning on the fly and, to be honest with you, a lot of the teachers were the young NCOs. They had figured it out while on patrol and they were able to teach what worked and what didn't'. While such *learning* on the fly enabled units to adapt out of sheer necessity, it perpetrated the Army's *ad hoc* approach to learning and applying lessons not specifically associated with what it deems as its core function: fighting wars.

To be fair, there has been an acceptance on the part of the U.S Army that reforms needed to be carried out in order to improve its forces' capabilities within LIC scenarios and, as seen above, doctrinal, education and training programs have taken place. But one must ask whether or not such reforms will have a deep effect on changing the U.S Army's overall war-fighting culture in the long-run. In other words, will the decisions and changes associated with such reforms continue during as well as outlive the Afghani and Iraqi contingencies? March and Olsen (1983) have argued that 'organizational legitimacy and survival may benefit from reforms, from maintaining belief in a future better than the present' (Brunsson and Olsen, 1993: 44). Reforms are, in fact, often carried out in order to portray to external stakeholders that things are being done to obviate current failures and weaknesses. Such initiatives, in turn, deflect criticism and further external pressures to change by pre-empting them. Whilst some progress had occurred over during 2006 in the counter-insurgency campaign in Iraq, the White House's *Initial Benchmark Assessment Report* (2007: 3) to Congress asserted that the 'security situation in Iraq remains complex and extremely

challenging'. Within the Bush administration, though, the assessment and mood of the campaign pointed much more towards impending failure. Senior military advisors such as Gen. Jack Keane, member of Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee, saw part of the U.S failure in Iraq as situated the limitations of some commanders still grounded in the conventional warfare mindset. According to Keane, some [commanders] do not make good counterinsurgency leaders – lack of intellectual flexibility, agility in dealing with a high degree of uncertainty (Woodward, 2008: 134).

Even commanders that had played relatively recently a significant role in SASO/nation-building mission in Iraq and that had undergone training and indoctrination relating to COIN best practices, have expressed doubts on the effectiveness that the reforms aimed at improving U.S Army capabilities in such missions have had on the cultural biases of military officers:

I saw generals hold officer professional developments (OPDs). I saw emails. I saw a lot of nods to the new COIN doctrine and I saw a lot of people doing the right thing intellectually and hypothetically to acquiesce to the COIN manual.... [A]nd yet.... [w]e still have U.S soldiers doing cordons.... We still continue to fight insurgents directly instead of focusing on the infrastructure and the essential services of the people. The brigade combat teams (BCTs) need to be re-missioned away from the essentially kinetic mission. They're given AORs [areas of responsibility] and told to secure them, so of course security takes top priority; and as far as most American commanders are concerned, the best defense is a good offense so they're going to go out and kick ass and kill terrorists.... I don't think you can do anything to change the cultural heart, the deep belief that killing people and breaking things is what a brigade does.... Their only understanding - especially that colonel who has been a conventional warrior his entire life - is to kill them back, and I don't believe any manual in the world is going to overcome that mindset. Until you have that individual experience that makes you realize you're doing the wrong thing, these guys won't change (Whitney, 2007).

**Comment [O24]:** And isn't that what they do?

Whilst experience may improve the chances of adapting or even learning, as seen earlier, even units with multiple deployments under their belt, may continue to operate along kinetic/offensive-type operations. If unit commanders continue to bolster assumptions in which conventional warfare capabilities and force-protection methods are the best way to deal with (usually this means to destroy) the enemy, then even in the face of failure, some units may continue to maintain such a conventional posture. Some might not even understand the emphasis that FM 3-24 puts on winning the hearts and minds of the population and on the need to balance stabilization with support operations. Maj. David Voorhies (2007), a military transition team advisor deployed in Iraq in 2006-2007, even questioned the meaning of FM 3-24 by stating that, 'the new COIN manual indicates that it's less combat operations and more militarized social work. So what does that mean?' For an officer working very closely with the Iraqis in order to set up indigenous security forces to ask such a question seems quite farcical, but instead reflects the views of some officers that did not (or want) to get 'it'. Others, nonetheless, did get 'it'. Maj. Kevin Brown (2007), for example, realized the fact that using military force alone to counter the insurgency would not lead to success:

I also realize that I can keep executing military operations but the solution is not military. The solution in a counterinsurgency is political. That was the problem with the fight in my AO.... I could provide temporary security by massing in an area with a large number of soldiers, but that's not the long term solution to the problem.

Nonetheless, questioning what 'militarized social work' really meant could have also been a reflection the discrepancy between the stated aims of U.S Army strategy in Iraq between 2004 and 2006, which was predicated on the need to develop Iraqi governance and security institutions in order for the U.S military to redeploy from Iraq. The emphasis, however, was on trying to get U.S forces out as soon as possible (Woodward, 2008: 131). And yet the advisory role that the military had taken on board in order to expedite transition

from a U.S.-based to an Iraqi-based political and security arrangement was not considered crucial or at least buttressed enough in order to really achieve the goal of transition. As one reservist who served in the 80<sup>th</sup> Institutional Training Division opined, when commenting on the lack of training and resources the division suffered: 'I don't think the conventional army understands counterinsurgency.... What it comes down to is that the MiTTs [Military Transition Teams] ... we had over there should have been the main effort, and *not just on paper* [Emphasis mine] (Burke 2007). The US civilian and military leadership's declarations and decisions were not seriously implemented on the ground due to manpower and resources constraints. They basically did not put their money where their mouth was.

Similarly another officer cynically commented how, notwithstanding the development of written guidelines on how to conduct the advisory effort and the touting by officials that the advisory effort would be key in achieving the U.S' exit strategy:

They're putting together a combat advisor handbook, doctrine if you will, to help future folks like me tasked to do this mission. It is considered the strategic exit strategy for Iraq.... Now, we were told that as well and a lot of that, I thought, was *lip service* because it certainly didn't look like we were being treated or resourced as the strategic exit strategy [Emphasis mine] (Voorhies 2007).

This discrepancy between stated aims and actual practice and resourcing for advisory work was exposed in a 2007 report, by the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations (2007: 140), which concluded that even though 'the Department of Defense has recognized that stability operations, including developing indigenous security forces ... are a core U.S. military mission.... [T]he services lack sufficient standing military advisory capability to meet current, and potential future, requirements for this mission'. Sending such mixed and contradictory messages from the civilian and military leadership can only but convince officers with conventional mindsets that SASO-type skills and missions may not be

that crucial after all. These can only but reinforce their conventional career and operational biases and dismiss SASO-type missions as a passing fad.

## Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the extent to which cultural factors within the U.S Army have influenced the U.S Army's adaptation to and learning from the counter-insurgency/nation-building mission in Iraq prior to the 2007 'Surge'. It applied the notions of organizational culture and hypocrisy in order to examine the difficulties which the U.S. Army experienced whilst trying to learn from or adapt to effective counter-insurgency methods. By discarding the traditional notions of organizational adaptation based on unitary conceptions of learning, this paper tried to demonstrate the great difficulty with which an organization, when constituted by multiple and often contradictory identities, norms and routines, has in learning due to the fact that learning is based on 'consensual knowledge'. Under such conditions of heterogeneity, organizations often resort to the organization of hypocrisy in order to cope with multiple demands within and outside its institutional setting. Very often declarations of learning and adaptation may not reflect actions, that is, the reality on the ground.

This paper argued that under such conditions, very often corrective actions or reforms are actual adaptations rather than instances of learning, given that such changes often do not essentially put into question the fundamental assumptions, values, practices and routines underlying the organization's self-identity. Changes very often are context-specific, have not been implemented institution-wide and more importantly are seldom internalized by the majority of its members. In other words the U.S. military actions and its effect on the ground at least during the first four (crucial) years of the conflict do not attest to the U.S. Army's past declarations that it is 'full spectrum capable' and most recent assertions that it has learnt how to carry out successful counter-insurgency and nation-building functions.

**Comment [O25]:** Again, were these really cultural factors? Also, what about International Relations?

Finally, whether or not U.S Army reforms/adjustments will have a significant and long-term effect on U.S Army approaches to COIN/SASO missions remains to be seen. Yet, the Army's past unsuccessful track record in learning and applying comprehensively lessons associated with LIC missions and the scepticism on the U.S Army's ability to change its 'cultural heart' that pervades many quarters of the U.S Army, do not point to future cases of successful learning in relations to LIC scenarios. Errors may be repeated, and the U.S Army may find itself again trying to learn lessons that it could and should have learnt in previous LIC missions, but did not because of its ability to resist, through the practices of organizational hypocrisy, external pressures for change that go against its overall enduring war-fighting culture.

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