A Revolution from the Middle: How the U.S. Army Transformed Its Way of War

By Adam Joyce
New School for Social Research
adamjoyce.politics@gmail.com


Abstract: How and why did the U.S. Army embrace counterinsurgency warfare and nation building after decades of resisting it? I argue in this paper for a micropolitical approach to understanding continuity and change in institutions. While change tends to be slow, it is first driven by shifts among mid-level agents away from the institution’s paradigm. This tension provides opportunities to reformers, who work informally with actors across institutional boundaries to develop and disseminate new discourses, and to create a broad consensus for transformation. I apply this perspective to the Army’s overhaul of its way of war during the 2000s. Through an examination of decades of doctrine, interviews with participants, and analysis of documents from meetings among a range of officers and experts, I show how an informal network capitalized on the erosion of the Army’s post-Vietnam paradigm. Officers, academics, officials, human-rights advocates, and journalists slowly cultivated relationships, created a new approach to armed conflict, and spurred the Army and its civilian overseers to transform its way of war. While it is too early to say if the Army’s changes are likely to endure, it appears unlikely that the institution will revert to its previous paradigm. The micropolitical perspective suggests that mid-level agents, and their informal relationships, help to drive institutional transformation.

In the fall of 2009, a U.S. Army colonel who had participated in both invasion and stability operations during the Iraq War lamented the ascendance of a new institutional paradigm. While critics of the Army’s performance in Vietnam had for decades castigated the institution as “so conventionally minded and hidebound that it was unable to see a better way of population-centric COIN [counterinsurgency warfare],” Gian P. Gentile said, the transformation of the mid-2000s created a similar, though inverse, problem. “The Army is so tactically oriented toward population-centric
counterinsurgency that it cannot think of doing anything else,” he wrote, citing not just the Army’s approach to Iraq but also its planning for the Afghan war under President Barack Obama.¹ The charge that officers could not think about or see the need for approaches other than COIN suggests the power of the new paradigm created by David Petraeus and an array of officers and experts during the mid-2000s.

The question I ask in this paper is how the Army was able to shape a new paradigm, given that so many analysts saw the institution as unlikely if not impossible to change.² After laying out my perspective on why institutions transform, I examine the process through which the Army altered its approach to war. By analyzing interviews with participants, as well as their writings and interactions, I show that three factors were key. First, early in the 2000s, junior officers drifted away from the Army’s post-Vietnam way of war, which emphasized the use of force to achieve battlefield victory. Second, some of these mid-level actors interacted with experts outside the institution in order to develop new ideas and create consensus for change. Last, Petraeus took advantage of these shifts by building on the informal network for change, disseminating its ideas, and building a broadly based consensus for a new paradigm. While Petraeus’s leadership played a role, his de-formalizing of the development of doctrine – opening the institution to voices from below and outside – was more important.

Understanding this process yields two benefits. One, the Army’s way of war can profoundly affect the broader U.S. security policy, so we should try to specify how it is

Two, the Army resists change. If it happened there, perhaps this case will illuminate the dynamics of continuity and transformation in other organizations.

**Approaches to Civil-Military Relations**

Many perspectives seem not to anticipate or explain the Army’s recent shifts. Realism, or balance-of-power theory, contends that objective conditions of international politics drive changes to military organizations. Another approach, constitutionalism, holds that reforms must be imposed from outside, especially by civilian authorities. A third perspective, which I label institutionalist, contends that the military’s hierarchical structure or its culture frustrate transformation; therefore, leaders must drive transformation. All of these perspectives shed light on some aspects of this case. There were significant shifts international politics in the early 2000s; however, other changes, like the end of the cold war, did not result in immediate transformation. Civilians did press for change – but many of them, like Donald H. Rumsfeld, sought a far different Army than the one that resulted. And while many Army officers did believe the institution should embrace counterinsurgency warfare, the leadership did not necessarily drive the changes.


One area of promise in the literature on military politics is the study of culture, which Elizabeth Kier describes as “the set of basic assumptions, values, norms, beliefs, and formal knowledge that shape collective understandings.” Analysts like Kier, James Q. Wilson, and Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr. hold that a military organization’s culture or concept or essence influences how it conceives of its core missions and capabilities. For example, Krepinevich contends that the “Concept” of conventional war, massive firepower, and troop protection caused the U.S. Army to lose a winnable war in Vietnam. Carl Builder argues that the nature of such internal biases makes it difficult if not impossible to reform an organization like the Army through structural shifts. The military is not a machine, he says, and structural changes are not sufficient to change policy because they do not alter culture.

Studies of military culture may better explain organizational behavior, but they tend to be pessimistic about the potential for transformation. I wish to use the strengths of this literature – the notion of culture, beliefs, and ideas as key to institutional order – and try to build an account that helps to explain change as well. For this reason, I have looked to literatures of historical institutionalism and American political development in order to understand how and why institutional culture can shift.

Parts of this broader literature indicate that social actors understand themselves and the world around them through language. As Kier, Krepinevich and other military

---

9 Builder, *Masks of War*, 204.
scholars argue, institutions are ordered by paradigms that explain their core missions and capabilities.\textsuperscript{11} These paradigms shape behavior and outcomes, which in turn reinforce the paradigm.\textsuperscript{12} However, paradigms are also malleable, and agents may use multiple, overlapping discourses.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, while discourse is a basis of order, it also provides resources for change.

Victoria C. Hattam and Joseph E. Lowndes argue that political transformation entails subtle shifts in discourse that unfold over long periods. Decisive, official breaks are often preceded by such informal changes among agents.\textsuperscript{14} The problem here is that institutional chaos appears to be the norm; agents at relatively low levels can interpret and shift rules in such a way that outcomes are never fully predictable.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, many works in American political development challenge the idea of order.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Swidler} Ann Swidler argues similarly to Pocock that culture is a “‘tool kit’ of symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems”: Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” \textit{American Sociological Review} 51, no. 2 (April 1986), 273.
\end{thebibliography}
However, in the Army we observe relatively long periods of continuity. For example, after publishing AirLand Battle doctrine in the early 1980s, the Army enjoyed a decade of relative harmony because officers, leaders, and civilian officials embraced one conception of warfare. That paradigm, encapsulated by the Weinberger doctrine, required overwhelming force, a strict separation of military and civilian tasks, and the guarantee of public support before troops are deployed.\textsuperscript{17} This does not mean there were no dissenters but that all of these agents used the institution’s official paradigm as a basis for their own, unofficial discourses. This fit between the top and the middle of the institution meant that officers on the ground and those helping to plan and carry out operations followed the paradigm, which in turn grew stronger. Eliot A. Cohen castigates the Bush administration for allowing the military to restrict the war effort to driving Iraqi forces out of Kuwait instead of focusing on Saddam Hussein’s power.\textsuperscript{18} But civilians themselves accepted this approach to warfare, which charged civilian authorities with crafting narrow and militarily achievable goals.\textsuperscript{19} The broad consensus meant that the Bush administration was unlikely to act against the status quo.

\textit{The Micropolitics of Continuity and Change}

This suggests there are two central factors driving continuity and change in an institution like the Army. The first is the alignment between the top and middle of the institution. During periods when there is broad acceptance of the paradigm among mid-

level agents, as in the 1980s and early 1990s, the institution is unlikely to change. However, if over time these lower-level actors shift away from the paradigm, this provides an opportunity for reformers to try to consolidate a new paradigm.

This leads to the second component in the process of change. The institution is likely to resist transformation: leaders owe their careers to it, and most have internalized the paradigm. Because of this, reformers must create cross-boundary networks of officers, officials, and experts in order to develop ideas, disseminate them, and create a consensus for change inside and outside the institution. These informal associations, theorized by Hugh Heclo and Peter M. Haas, among others, harden into pressure groups as agents discover mutual interests in change, share their new approaches, and lobby for transformation. Note that this consensus is important because while insiders must develop the new paradigm, civilian authorities must also adopt the official discourse if it is to survive in the short term. I term this two-stage process – the gradual shifting of the middle away from the top, followed by the work of informal networks to propose solutions and press for transformation – a micropolitical perspective.

In the rest of the paper, I focus on the second part of the process. First, I examine the nature of the transformation by comparing the Army’s post-Vietnam paradigm to its 2008 capstone doctrine, *FM 3-0, Operations*. Next, I briefly sketch how officers had already diverged from the paradigm during the planning for and execution of the Iraq War. This sets the stage for the main section, examining how the network for change

---

developed: the people involved, inside and outside the Army, and the range of institutions and constituencies they represented; the ideas they developed; and how the network helped to disseminate these ideas and establish them as a new way of war.

**Major Shifts to the Army’s Way of War**

Before exploring how the reform network came together and how it worked, I analyze the contours of the Army’s paradigm transformation. The surest signs of a major shift in Army thinking are changes to its capstone doctrine, which defines the institution’s way of war. Capstone doctrine shapes education and training, and it guides the development of organizations, technology, and weapons.  

It is true that doctrine can be misinterpreted, resisted, or ignored. However, John A. Nagl, who worked with Petraeus on the counterinsurgency field manual, says doctrine codifies “both how the institution thinks about its role in the world and how it accomplishes that role on the battlefield.”

In this sense, it is the official expression of the paradigm.

After the Vietnam War, the Army debated for nearly a decade not only the proper ways and means of operations but also the political circumstances necessary before military action. Most of these tenets were advanced by Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger’s “doctrine” restricting the use of American forces to situations where civilians clearly define the goals, provide enough military power to defeat the enemy, and

---


guarantee public support. The following comparison shows that the Army overthrew most core themes of the post-Vietnam paradigm when it published a new capstone manual in 2008. The counterinsurgency field manual of 2006 presaged most of these shifts, suggesting that the process that developed this doctrine also paved the way for a new way of war.

Table 1 indicates how the institution changed in the mid-2000s as it aimed to translate civilian policy into military strategy. One of the most important shifts was the new emphasis on strategic success rather than winning on the battlefield. The Army’s 1982 capstone doctrine declared, “Defeating enemy forces in battle will not always insure victory. Other national instruments of power and persuasion will influence or even determine the results of wars.” That manual, and the others that followed, contended that those “other” instruments of power would be wielded by civilians, not the military. Civilians were to allow the military to win on the battlefield, then develop solutions to consolidate that victory as enduring success.

The paradigm of the mid-2000s changed this. Planners were no longer to focus solely on devising operations to defeat the enemy force. Instead, the battlefield victory must be sustainable, which requires developing a plan for how the armed forces will shape the peacetime order. The 2008 capstone doctrine, *FM 3-0, Operations*, made clear that commanders must “work to achieve unity of effort through cooperation and coordination among all elements of the force – even those not part of the same command structure.” The Army would no longer wait for civilian elements or strictly follow the

---

country plan of an ambassador. Instead, it would ensure that the interagency process functioned properly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discursive Theme</th>
<th>Variant</th>
<th>Post-Vietnam Paradigm</th>
<th>FM 3-24, 2006</th>
<th>FM 3-0, 2008</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vital Interests</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal of Army</td>
<td>Battlefield victory</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategic success</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Resort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order of Operations</td>
<td>Sequential</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simultaneous</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interagency Responsibility</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Combat Power</td>
<td>Destructive</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constructive</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This logically comports with another theme in the table, the simultaneous application of offensive, defensive, and stability operations. AirLand Battle did not address stability operations. While the Army did add a chapter on “low-intensity conflict” to its 1993 capstone manual, this was relegated to the back of the book. However, the new paradigm built in the 2000s suggested that only by simultaneously engaging in military, political, and economic work could the Army achieve its overall goal of securing strategic objectives. Along with this, the Army came to see itself playing a major, if not superior, role in preparing and implementing full-spectrum strategies for complex contingencies. This stands in stark contrast to the post-Vietnam
A Revolution From the Middle

paradigm, which stressed the responsibility of American or host-nation civilian leaders to manage low-intensity conflict. The Army would provide military advice and assistance, but it would deploy regular troops only if the guerrilla forces fought conventionally – and these forces would pull out as quickly as possible. By contrast, the Army of the late 2000s saw itself as more than a combat force, and its doctrine suggested it would take on more nonmilitary tasks. FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency, declared that military forces would “fill the gap” when civilians do not have the capacity to act.

The Paradigm and Military Tactics

Following from these shifts to themes of military strategy, Table 2 shows the nature of the paradigm transformation in areas relating to operations and tactics. Where the post-Vietnam paradigm held that overwhelming or decisive force was necessary to defeat the enemy, the new paradigm emphasized tailoring force to political goals. This shift in discourse potentially allows civilian leaders to ask the ground force to intervene in unconventional conflicts where massive firepower is unwise or impractical. It also means officers must take more risks in order to attain strategic goals. This was a major change from the 1980s and 1990s, when, critics alleged, General Colin Powell limited the potential uses of force.

26 Department of the Army, FM 100-20, Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict (1990), 2-24.
28 By 2008, the phrase “overwhelming force” appeared once, to highlight how not to conduct stability operations. See Army, FM 3-0 (2008), 3-16.
Table 2. Army Paradigms Compared: Military Tactics and Operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discursive Theme</th>
<th>Variant</th>
<th>Post-Vietnam Paradigm</th>
<th>FM 3-24, 2006</th>
<th>FM 3-0, 2008</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Force</td>
<td>Overwhelming / decisive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tailored to political goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective Attainable?</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of Military Action</td>
<td>Enemy</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belligerent parties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noncombatants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army Role</td>
<td>Apply military power</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synchronize with national power</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apply all elements of national power</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key to Battle Command</td>
<td>Commander’s skill</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subordinate initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The new paradigm also diverged sharply from its predecessor in elevating civilian noncombatants as a focus of Army activity. The capstone manual of 2008 declared that future conflicts would be fought “among the people.” Given the shift in the Army’s role, with soldiers potentially wielding all forms of national power, the new paradigm suggested that ground troops would aim not just to protect noncombatants but also to help them develop political and economic institutions. In some cases, soldiers would even do it themselves:

Stability operations may be necessary to develop host-nation capacities for security and control of security forces, a viable market economy, the rule of law, and an effective government. Army forces develop these capabilities by

30 Army, FM 3-0 (2008), 1-4.
working with the host nation. The goal is a stable civil situation sustainable by host-nation assets without Army forces.\textsuperscript{31}

Among the economic tasks the manual envisioned were “restoring employment opportunities; initiating market reform; mobilizing domestic and foreign investment; and supervising monetary reform and rebuilding public structures.”\textsuperscript{32} In addition, soldiers closest to the people were to exercise their initiative; commanders were to pay close attention to subordinates in order to understand the needs of local areas of operation (See “Key to Battle Command” in Table 2).\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{The Paradigm and Civil-Military Relations}

The final area of change involved the Army’s relationship with the government and the American people (see Table 3). After the Vietnam War, the Army stressed that U.S. leaders must clearly state the strategic goals of any mission involving the armed forces; they must cultivate public support for any operation or war before deploying troops; and they must maintain that support for the duration of the conflict. As the early 1980s capstone doctrine stated:

If the American people are to commit their lives and resources to a military operation, they must understand the purpose which is to be achieved. Political and military objectives and operations must therefore be presented in clear, concise, understandable terms: simple and direct plans and orders cannot compensate for ambiguous and cloudy objectives.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 3-13.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 3-16.
\textsuperscript{33} Army, \textit{FM 3-0} (2008), 5-4.
\textsuperscript{34} Department of the Army, \textit{FM 100-1, The Army} (1981), 17.
Note the responsibility of civilian officials: they provide clearly defined goals in order to deliver public support for the war effort. In addition, the paradigm held that if civilians did not understand the purpose of the armed forces, then generals would have to explain the limitations of military power or rewrite unclear objectives. Table 3 shows that the Army officially overturned all of these themes in the mid-2000s.

### Table 3. Army Paradigms Compared: Civil-Military Relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discursive Theme</th>
<th>Variant</th>
<th>Post-Vietnam Paradigm</th>
<th>FM 3-24, 2006</th>
<th>FM 3-0, 2008</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearly Defined Objectives</td>
<td>Political</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Military</td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td>● •</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of American People</td>
<td>Fixed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shaped by civilians</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shaped by military</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military’s Interaction With Civilian Authorities</td>
<td>Explain limitations of military power</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rewrite unclear objectives</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The theme of rewriting of unclear objectives from civilian leaders was added to doctrine during the early 1990s.

The old paradigm’s strict separation of civilian and military responsibility formed the backbone of the Weinberger doctrine. The new paradigm, to the contrary, no longer demanded that elected leaders clearly define the objectives of war, or that those goals be solvable by military means. Its silence on the potential limitations of military power—which had been a mainstay of official discourse since Vietnam—suggests that the Army

---

believed it could adapt to any situation, and that commanders should not question the utility of force.

This new paradigm, optimistic about the utility of force, also charged the Army with building and maintaining the public support for its missions. Capstone doctrine emphasized the importance of media relations, not just in shaping the conflict zone but also in bolstering the support of the American people. For example, the 2008 operations manual admonished commanders to “develop and maintain the will necessary to attain the national strategic end state.” Under this, the manual notes that this includes “the will of the American people to support the mission.” In this way, where the post-Vietnam paradigm assumed that national will to be the purview of civilian officials, the new one gave the Army much of the responsibility for cultivating and maintaining it.

The shifts in these themes added up to a profound transformation of the Army paradigm. The institution accepted responsibility not just for combat but also for considering how their actions affect the larger strategic purpose. It was willing to wield more than military power, and to focus on noncombatants, to achieve these ends. And it no longer seemed to question the utility of force while, at the same time, it defined as part of its mission developing and maintaining U.S. national will.

The Erosion of the Army’s Post-Vietnam Paradigm

I do not have space here to explore the breakdown of the Army paradigm throughout the 1990s. But planning for the Iraq War shows that the Army entered the new century riven by competing views over its way of war. The post-Vietnam paradigm

36 Army, FM 3-0 (2008), A-4.
prevailed in capstone doctrine, and this official discourse persisted through leaders like Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki. The general clashed with the administration over the technology, speed, and manpower of the twenty-first-century force, frustrating reformers like Rumsfeld. At the same time, Shinseki cautioned the Bush administration to take seriously the stabilization of post-Saddam Iraq: it would require troops, time, and a willingness to help ease social “tensions.” So even the mainstream of the Army was moving away from some strictures of the paradigm.

Others diverged more radically, emphasizing speed and technology rather than overwhelming force. For example, the Rumsfeld Pentagon recruited Colonel Douglas A. Macgregor, a theorist of modern warfare, to brief Central Command on how to invade Iraq with a very small number of troops. In his memoir, Centcom Chief Tommy R. Franks suggests he did not need such lectures because he was a “maverick” who had already moved beyond the Gulf War model. While this analysis is self-serving, the military did invade Iraq much differently than it had in the early 1990s: it did not unleash airpower before the ground attack; it scaled back its troop numbers; and it advanced on Baghdad very quickly, often avoiding heavy battles along the way. So there were enough mavericks inside the Army to help Rumsfeld subvert the paradigm.

A different group of dissenters saw stability operations as crucial to warfighting. Many journalists have shown that many officers on the ground in Iraq did not attend to

---

38 Eric K. Shinseki, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, 25 February 2003; Paul D. Wolfowitz, testimony before the House Budget Committee, 28 February 2003.
political, social, and economic needs, seeing their job as restricted to employing violent means. However, these same writers – like Thomas E. Ricks and George Packer – did find soldiers who took nonmilitary work seriously. Petraeus is the leading example of this, but there were others as well. Even Raymond T. Odierno – whom Ricks appears to blame for abuses at Abu Ghraib prison – tried a mix of political and economic initiatives to pacify his area of responsibility.

Indeed, a Rand study of post-invasion problems found that Army planners had anticipated many issues that troops would confront after Saddam’s fall. Indeed, some officers had even created what could have been workable blueprints for peace operations. However, the study noted, efforts by Centcom to focus on post-invasion operations were scuttled by civilian authorities and internal leadership.

Rand also hailed a study by the Army’s Strategic Studies Institute that included a detailed “Mission Matrix” of 135 tasks required to rebuild Iraq. One of its most notable aspects is how many stabilization and rebuilding tasks the matrix saw as the Army’s responsibility. For many of these tasks, it suggested the Army would play a key role not just in the immediate aftermath of Saddam’s ouster but for at least two years after major combat operations. By my count, this was in approximately one third of the tasks (forty-

---

46 Bensahel et. al., *After Saddam*, 39.
five out of 135). While many of these tasks are arguably the purview of the military, the matrix envisioned Army involvement in nonmilitary areas like the restoration and maintenance of government newspapers, as well as radio and television outlets; the repair of airports, bridges, dams, and other infrastructure; and the care and relocation of refugees and displaced persons.47

The report was also important for the attention it brought to author Conrad C. Crane as the U.S. effort bogged down. Many of his ideas spread through articles in *Military Review and Parameters*. He also presented his ideas to military and nonmilitary audiences, and he spoke to “a couple hundred officers” at the Army War College about what they could expect on the ground in Iraq and how they might approach their tasks.48 One of these officers was Peter R. Mansoor, who once worked for Crane at West Point and commanded a team of soldiers in Baghdad for more than a year, beginning in the summer of 2003. Mansoor’s account of his year in Baghdad shows that he tried to boost local economic activity and democratic participation. In Mansoor’s conception, troops on the ground should tailor force to political goals and synchronize military and nonmilitary forms of power. As well, because their proximity to the ground gives them a greater grasp of operational needs, these soldiers should take the initiative in stability operations. Mansoor castigated the decision in 2004 to pull units like his out of populated areas.49

47 Conrad C. Crane and W. Andrew Terrill, *Reconstructing Iraq: Insights, Challenges, and Missions for Military Forces in a Post-Conflict Scenario* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, 2003), 63-76.
48 Conrad C. Crane, email interview with author, 27 April 2012.
49 Peter R. Mansoor, *Baghdad at Sunrise: A Brigade Commander’s War in Iraq* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), 298, 332.
Mansoor’s story demonstrates the collapse of the Army’s paradigm, as well as the beginning of the process that would develop a new one. Officers on the ground began to trade ideas for how to improve stability operations, and experts like Crane pressed them to employ the full range of national power to do so. Mansoor, in an email to Crane, laid out the array of nonmilitary means his troops employed:

We have stood up governing councils from neighborhood to district to city level. We have conducted humanitarian action in numerous areas to include repair of electricity, water, sewer, hospitals, and schools; created refuse collection systems; and built numerous recreational facilities (particularly soccer fields). We have cleared hundreds of tons of UXOs [unexploded ordnance] and weapons caches. I have already hosted Fox News, ABC, ITN, UP, Reuters, the New Yorker, and an Indian news service. On any given day I deal with the political realm of the Coalition Provisional Authority, the humanitarian realm of the NGOs, and the military realm of firefights/improvised explosive devices/snipers/mortar attacks.50

Crane forwarded to colleagues this July 2003 note so “it could be used as a ‘wake-up call’ for incoming students about the importance of what they will learn here.”51 This was three and a half years before George W. Bush would allow the Army to implement a new strategy in Iraq.

The cases of Mansoor and Petraeus, as well as the examples from reporters covering the first year of the war, demonstrate the effects of the paradigm’s erosion. Some officers deployed to Baghdad emphasized strategic success, synchronizing all forms of American power, tailoring military force to political goals, protecting civilian noncombatants, and privileging the knowledge of those – like commanders such as Petraeus and Mansoor – closest to the ground. These officers used informal and Internet-

50 Ibid., 356.
51 Conrad C. Crane, email, 14 July 2003, excerpted in Mansoor, Baghdad at Sunrise, 355.
based channels to share ideas about how to counter an irregular enemy.\textsuperscript{52} And counterinsurgency experts William Hix and Kalev I. Sepp were advising the commander of ground forces in Iraq at the time, General William Casey.\textsuperscript{53} (Later, Colonel H.R. McMaster would help to popularize the kinds of tasks Petraeus, Mansoor, and others attempted.)\textsuperscript{54} But this did not institutionalize a new way of war, which would require a cross-institutional network for change.

\textbf{An Informal Network Develops and Consolidates the New Paradigm}

The 2006 counterinsurgency field manual helped to change the Army’s way of war, but this did not necessarily mandate a change in doctrine. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the institution also wrote doctrine on low-intensity conflict. Instead of influencing the broader organization, these manuals were marginalized. The transformation of the paradigm that we observe in the 2000s required not just a manual but a consensus that the institution had to change accordingly. To do this, reformers inside the institution interacted in networks of officials and experts. These agents developed new ideas, disseminated them, and lobbied a range of constituencies, including the president, required to make these changes stick.

In early November 2005, a group of officers met in Washington to hash out how to forge a new way forward in Iraq. The extraordinary aspect of this conference is that it included not just Army insiders but also policy makers, nongovernment experts across

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[52] John A. Nagl, interview, Operational Leadership Experiences in the Global War on Terrorism (Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Combat Studies Institute, 9 January 2007).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the ideological spectrum, human-rights advocates, and journalists like Ricks, Packer, and James Fallows. Indeed, the organizer of the meeting was not Petraeus or any other officer, but Sarah Sewall and Harvard University’s Carr Center for Human Rights Policy. Many of the attendees had written scathing critiques of the Army’s performance after the ouster of Saddam Hussein. The meeting allowed Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus, who had just been promoted to lead the Army’s development of doctrine and training, to meet with many officers and Army intellectuals who would form a team to rewrite the counterinsurgency field manual. He also used it to recruit civilians to advise him, formally and informally.

Just as important, the workshop, titled “Counterinsurgency in Iraq: Implications of Irregular Warfare for the U.S. Government,” helped to establish a discourse concerning the Army’s way of war. For example, where the Army’s 1980s approach to irregular warfare emphasized the sovereignty of the local government, this conference stressed the need to ensure the protection of human rights before Iraqis were given full control. As the report on the conference proceedings said,

Trading short-term security for long-term democracy and peace was unacceptable to all involved. Panelists raised questions about the conduct of indigenous allies with whom the U.S. forces often work closely to defeat insurgents. The forceful and decisive local leaders often appear to be attractive partners, yet they often lack a commitment to core principles of effective counterinsurgency (i.e. legitimacy, calibrated force, etc.). Some participants seemed to imply that defeating an insurgency requires supporting such actors. Other participants warned that, however expedient in the short-term military struggle, autocratic military commanders would ultimately
undermine U.S. objectives for the host nation’s future stability.\textsuperscript{55}

In contrast to the Army’s previous doctrine on low-intensity conflict, which reified the host nation, this new discourse advanced democracy and legitimacy as hurdles that a host nation must clear before being allowed sovereignty. The report concluded that the conference had established an “apparent consensus on the need for interagency reform and military adaptation.”\textsuperscript{56}

The Carr Center was not the only venue within which new ideas circulated and took hold. For example, in that summer of 2005, defense expert Eliot A. Cohen, a longtime critic of the post-Vietnam paradigm, convened a workshop on counterinsurgency that featured an array of officers and experts, many of whom (including Cohen) would attend at least one Carr Center conference.\textsuperscript{57} The Carr Center network exemplifies the kind of cross-institutional intercourse required for a transformation. As I show, this informal network was not created in 2005 but built slowly over more than half a decade, beginning before the invasion of Iraq. Over time, participants built trust, came to understand the concerns of all sides, and coalesced around a discourse.

Most important, the Carr Center conferences and other similar meetings helped to forge consensus inside and outside the institution that the United States had to remain in Iraq, that the Army would at least temporarily lead the long-term effort to rebuild the country, and that the American people had to be convinced to support the conflict. Most

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{57} Fred Kaplan, \textit{The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 125.
of these elements were codified by *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, and, later, *FM 3-0, Operations*. This largely informal process officially overturned the longstanding paradigm and established a new one. The consolidation of this new way of war also profoundly affected U.S. foreign policy by deepening the American commitment to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

*An Unlikely Alliance Grows Slowly*

This network was, in part, the brainchild of an unlikely outsider. Sarah Sewall had served in the first term of the Clinton administration as deputy assistant secretary of defense for peacekeeping and peace enforcement policy but had left for the Carr Center in the late 1990s. She created the Project on the Means of Intervention, not to analyze why the United States goes to war, but instead to examine the issues surrounding how it fights. The Project on the Means of Intervention solicited working papers from the many stakeholders involved in modern conflict and planned conferences where they could meet face to face. Sewall says she did not have a specific goal in mind when she sponsored the project’s first workshop in fall 2001, on the U.S. war over Kosovo, but she wanted to ensure that it allowed officers, academics, human-rights advocates, and journalists to interact across boundaries.

Sewall felt strongly that there would have to be many more such conferences in order to establish a “lexicon” of humanitarian concerns surrounding the conduct of war and to build trust among the increasingly diverse array of actors found on the modern

---

58 Sarah Sewall, phone interview with author, 6 December 2011.
59 Ibid.
battlefield. By building ties through regular meetings, as well as exchanging ideas, individuals could “shed their institutional barriers and allegiances” and gradually “expand their horizons” or even change their views. As word spread and the meetings began to address issues surrounding ground combat, an increasing number of Army officers and experts began to attend. Between 2001 and 2006, the Project on the Means of Intervention hosted at least fifteen workshops on humanitarian aspects of warfare, a subject increasingly salient as the United States fought two wars and sent special-operations forces across the globe.

A Key Insider Widens the Network

One early participant in the Carr Center workshops was Conrad Crane, the retired officer and scholar at the Army War College who developed the Iraq stabilization matrix. Crane encouraged his colleagues to participate in the Carr Center conferences and helped Sewall, whom he had met in the 1990s when teaching at West Point, to line up potential attendees for early workshops. He cautions that from his perspective, these meetings were not necessarily venues through which to convince officers of the need for change but instead to explain to a broad audience how the institution was transforming itself.

Others who participated in the workshops agree that the goal, at least early on, was not to change the Army but to solve problems. For instance, a year after the inaugural workshop, Sewall organized her first conference focusing on ground operations. This was a salient topic: the United States had invaded Afghanistan the year

---

60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Conrad C. Crane, email interview with author, 16 April 2012.
63 Ibid.
64 Fred Krawchuk, phone interview with author, 27 April 2012.
before and was still there, and the Bush administration was signaling its intent to depose Saddam Hussein. One officer with experience in Desert Storm and in 1990s peace operations criticized military planners and commanders for neglecting issues of civil affairs and humanitarian assistance, and assuming that they could simply turn stability operations over to others. But she also echoed a human-rights advocate in urging NGOs “to shed the arrogance that lays sole claim to all expertise on humanitarian affairs.”

Throughout the conference, aid workers with experience on the ground in the Balkans and in Afghanistan offered their views on modern war – notably that the Army was beginning to take on too many nonmilitary tasks, which put NGOs at risk of being identified with one side of the conflict.

Crane used these early conferences to help think through issues surrounding the Army’s potential invasion of Iraq for his report on how to rebuild the country. He and coauthor W. Andrew Terrill used a wide range of venues and contacts to understand the problems and propose solutions. In their report on how to stabilize Iraq, the authors cited a fall 2002 Carr Center workshop for helping to provide insights from NGO representatives about their needs as they prepared to resume work in Iraq:

> Years of sanctions and neighbors with restrictive border policies have severely reduced the number of non-governmental organizations and international agencies prepared or positioned to enter Iraq. To facilitate participation of such groups and speed the reintegration of Iraq into the international community, sanctions and associated licensing requirements need to be removed as

---


67 Crane, interview, 27 April 2012.
soon as possible, probably at the beginning of Stabilization.  

The study also reported the suspicions of NGOs that the U.S. military uses humanitarian aid “for political advantage,” a sentiment voiced in several workshops. Therefore, in addition to creating a diffuse network through which ideas about war and human rights could circulate, the Carr Center also enabled planners and officers within the Army to gain practical insights about issues surrounding modern conflict.

*The Network Coalesces*

These initial meetings set the stage for a more active network. The November 2005 conference on the Iraq War sparked interest because of the growing informal network of officers, scholars, and advocates, and because of Petraeus’s attendance. While the Carr Center was not the only node in this growing network, it proved to be crucial in three areas: building a team and a set of unofficial advisers for the writing of a new counterinsurgency doctrine; developing a new discourse; and creating a consensus outside the network through the mainstream press and through conservative scholars who could lobby the president. In this section, I explore the process and how it produced the formal change that had been so elusive in the past.

The November 2005 workshop helped bring together the institutional insiders and civilians who would write the new counterinsurgency field manual, as well as many who would advise the effort. The conference featured at least thirty-four attendees from the Army, including active-duty and retired officers, as well as civilian experts employed by the institution. Petraeus used the face-to-face meeting to assemble a team of informal

---

69 Ibid., 45.
and formal advisers, such as John A. Nagl, and to name Crane as lead writer of the new field manual.\textsuperscript{70} Michele A. Flournoy, a Clinton administration veteran who would later found a think tank with Nagl, commented on an early draft of the second chapter, concerning the integration of civilian and military actors in the overall effort. As well, five members of the Carr Center whom Crane describes as “international lawyers, human rights experts, and NGO representatives” helped with the writing of \textit{FM 3-24}, providing input into detainee interrogations and “the differences between international human rights law and the laws of war.”\textsuperscript{71}

Sewall describes the fall 2005 meeting as “seminal” and says that she soon convinced the Army to fund a workshop allowing the broad group of informal advisers to review a draft of the field manual.\textsuperscript{72} The workshop was held at Fort Leavenworth in late February 2006, with 150 people attending.\textsuperscript{73} Again, it is important to note the institutional and ideological breadth of the participants.\textsuperscript{74} Many had attended at least one other Carr Center meeting.

Participants and observers have lauded Petraeus and his team for the openness of this meeting. Writers presented overviews of their chapters, and discussants followed with brief critiques. Most important, the organizers opened the floor to discussions of the


\textsuperscript{71} Conrad C. Crane, “Not Too Badly Wrong: American Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Practice,” presentation at Counterinsurgency: History, Theory and Practice symposium, New York University, 22 September 2011; Crane, email interview with author, 23 September 2011. Neither Crane nor the Carr Center would identify these representatives.

\textsuperscript{72} Sewall, phone interview.

\textsuperscript{73} Crane, “Not Too Badly Wrong.”

\textsuperscript{74} While the Carr Center would not publish the names of the attendees, some have been identified in accounts like Crane, “United States,” and Nagl, “Evolution and Importance.”
field manual that Crane describes as “no holds barred.” Attendees followed up with suggestions via informal discussions and email. All told, Crane says, his team received hundreds of pages of critiques. This is one reason Crane contends that the importance of the Carr Center meetings was “to build a network of contacts of individuals with similar attitudes and interests.”

The Network Advances a New Discourse

The Carr Center conferences held in 2005 and 2006 not only hardened the network, they established a discourse. For our purposes, we can identify three broad areas of discursive change:

- the complexity of modern warfare
- the civil-military relationship
- the maintenance of domestic support for the war.

Under each of these general areas are most of the themes I have identified as shifting over two decades. These formed the basis of the paradigm consolidated by the 2008 capstone doctrine.

Within the area of the complexity of modern war are these themes:

- Army’s Goal: strategic success over battlefield victory
- Force: tailoring firepower to political goals
- Focus of Military Action: noncombatants as well as enemy fighters
- Battle Command: importance of subordinate initiative.

For example, most of the participants contended that victory required political and social resolution, not just military success. One contributor, a diplomat who anonymously wrote a conference paper, argued it should have been obvious to civilian and military

---

75 Crane, “United States,” 63.
76 Crane, interview, 16 April 2012.
planners that the Iraq War would not end with the fall of Saddam Hussein. “It is
incredible that anyone would have thought that rebuilding a big country and reversing a
political and institutional culture would only take a few months or years,” this participant
wrote. 77 This interpretation, that the ultimate goal in Iraq was the complete rebuilding of
the state, was broadly shared. Indeed, the silence among participants on the strategic
importance of the Iraq conflict suggests a consensus that the United States had to stay in
the country until it was largely rebuilt. Many participants focused instead on how the
Army could improve its performance. 78

The participants at these conferences also stressed that lower-level officers were
central to prosecuting these conflicts because they understood local conditions and often
had better ideas for how to achieve lasting solutions. The 2005 conference report said
that one key to the Army’s improvement was to focus not on commanding junior officers
but on disseminating the information learned on the ground. 79 Nagl contended that the
Army was already changing informally from the bottom up, with lower-level officers,
many of whom had experience in Bosnia and other peacekeeping missions, innovating in
the field. 80

Petraeus concurred that the ground level was crucial and emphasized that the
Army must decentralize the flow of information. Knowledge gained from the field must
circulate directly to those who need it, he said; it should not be collected centrally and

77 Anonymous, “A Diplomat’s Perspective on the Challenges Facing the U.S. Government in Iraq,” in
Center for Human Rights Policy, 2006), 8.
79 Ibid., 11.
80 John Nagl, “Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons From Malaya, Vietnam, and
Iraq,” PowerPoint presentation prepared for “Counterinsurgency in Iraq” conference, 7 November 2005,
slides 22-23.
then “displayed at a command post” far from the site of conflict.\(^8^1\) Army historian Richard Swain echoed this in his presentation at the 2006 conference, contending that decentralization of control, while unpredictable, spurred innovation and risk taking.\(^8^2\)

This emphasis on the complexity of modern conflict leads logically into the next general area, the interrelationship of civilian and military work. In this area, we find these key themes, all of which shifted from the post-Vietnam paradigm:

- Clearly Defined Objectives: participants were silent on whether civilian officials were to enumerate the political goals
- Military’s Interaction With Civilian Authorities: participants were silent on whether the military should rewrite objectives or explain the limitations of military power
- Interagency Responsibility: attendees pressed the Army to work closely with civilian counterparts and not separate military from political considerations
- Army Role: many participants contended that the Army should wield political and economic, not just military, means – though there were some objections.

I list the first two items because they were conspicuously absent during the workshops although central to the post-Vietnam paradigm. I can find no instances during the Carr Center meetings of late 2005 or February 2006 of a participant suggesting that officers should push back against civilians if they ordered the Army to act without clear goals, or if they deploy troops into areas where military force could not yield results. This silence set the stage for officially overturning these two cornerstones of the post-Vietnam paradigm.

---


The other two themes provoked some controversy at these meetings, even as consensus emerged that the Army should take at least some responsibility for nation-building activities. Some participants held that history demonstrated the need for officers to wield not just military means but all components of state power. “The British Army’s increasing reliance upon non-military methods of asserting control over and gaining the support of the population was the crucial adaptation that ultimately led to success,” the 2005 conference report said of counterinsurgency warfare in Malaya. Because civilian noncombatants were key, participants also emphasized the need for counterinsurgents to understand “the history, culture, social dynamics, economic conditions, religious and tribal linkages, and motivations of the people.” This would help the Army to participate in or even lead nonmilitary components of the conflict.

Petraeus’s writing team believed that in a perfect world, civilians would run stability operations on the ground, at least after an emergency period. However, as Crane and Terrill noted in their report on stability operations in Iraq, the nation-building tasks “will have to be accomplished no matter who is in charge.” Therefore, at the 2006 workshop on the counterinsurgency field manual, Petraeus and his advisers repeatedly stressed that officers must be prepared to take on the full range of military, political, economic, and social tasks required for success. In slides he prepared for the doctrine workshop, Petraeus emphasized the need to operate on “cultural terrain,” and that officer instruction would include insights into the religion and culture of the irregular

---

84 Ibid., 7.
85 Crane and Terrill, Reconstructing Iraq, 47.
battleground. A later slide put it more bluntly: in modern conflict, it said, “Civil affairs [is] essential … and all do it” – a clear admonition that soldiers must wield nonmilitary means.

Richard Lacquement, a colonel charged with writing the manual’s chapter on civil-military integration, declared at the doctrine-development conference, “What’s important are that the tasks are accomplished; secondary is the issue of who does them.” Because of this, “Military units and individuals will have to close gaps created by limited civilian capacity,” one of his slides read. Sewall lauded this, indicating that while some were uncomfortable with the military’s taking the lead, the consensus was that participation in the conflict was more important than the division of labor: “If these other instruments of national power don’t show up, can’t stay, or aren’t effective, the buck then passes back to military forces.” Therefore, Nagl argued, counterinsurgency required far more sophistication than conventional operations: “Counterinsurgency is not just thinking man’s war – it is graduate level warfare.”

The third basic area of the new discourse was the importance of support from the American people in order to prevail in Iraq. The longstanding paradigm required that the public commit to the war effort before troops deployed, and that elected officials marshal and maintain that support. But the Carr Center’s report on its 2005 conference suggests not that the American people should determine whether the United States participates in a

---

87 Ibid., slide 20.
89 Ibid.
war, in Iraq or elsewhere, but that they must support the ongoing effort. “Regardless of their views about progress to date,” the report said, “all agreed that continued U.S. engagement in Iraq hinges upon maintaining domestic support for Coalition efforts there.” Indeed, not only must the public support the effort; the military should play a key role in maintaining that support: “Participants agreed that improving the capacity to conduct irregular warfare effectively will be important in future efforts to forge a broad consensus among the American people about the use of force.” Accordingly, *FM 3-24* stressed that soldiers must manage information not just within the conflict zone but also for global and American audiences. The military, instead of responding to the preferences of the American people, was to try to shape those preferences.

**Petraeus De-Formalizes the Process of Doctrine Development**

The Carr Center workshops brought together a range of experts who would coalesce around a new discourse concerning the Army’s way of war, and who would work directly and indirectly on the new field manual. Petraeus appears to have cultivated such openness and informality. One might assume that, as the leader of the Combined Arms Command, he could simply shake up the institution from the top: impose a new agenda, shift the process of training and education, and force a new doctrine through the institution. Instead, Petraeus used his power to expose the Army to new voices, rather than to seal off his domain and decree a new paradigm. This helped to blunt some of the bureaucratic maneuvers that tended to restrict change. Just as important – more so, in

---

93 Ibid., 18.
Crane’s opinion – it allowed insiders to convince outsiders that there was a growing movement for reform.⁹⁵

For example, in addition to using the Carr Center network as a set of informal advisers, Petraeus declined to use some of the more formal tools at his disposal. One of these was the Rand Corporation and its Arroyo Center, which provides research to the Army. As Petraeus geared up to write the counterinsurgency manual, Thomas L. McNaugher, who at the time was Rand’s vice president for Army research and director of the Arroyo Center, wrote to the general, whom he had met through mutual links to West Point’s Social Sciences Department. McNaugher offered to have the Arroyo Center conduct a study on counterinsurgency, but Petraeus said he preferred those experts to work for him at Fort Leavenworth. McNaugher says that after he told Petraeus he could not spare his researchers, “I never heard from him again.”⁹⁶

However, the writing team did not ignore insights from McNaugher’s experts. Crane credits McNaugher and the Rand researchers with convincing him of the importance of the legitimacy of the host nation’s government to waging a successful counterinsurgency.⁹⁷ This concept is important not just because Crane titled one section of the field manual, “Legitimacy Is the Main Objective.”⁹⁸ It also helped to overturn a longstanding pillar of doctrine on low-intensity conflict. Previous small-wars manuals contended that host-nation governments should try to meet the needs of their people, but

⁹⁵ Crane, interview, 16 April 2012.
⁹⁶ Thomas L. McNaugher, phone interview with author, 19 April 2012.
⁹⁸ Army, FM 3-24, 1-21.
they instructed officers not to concern themselves with local politics.99 The assertion in the new field manual that host-nation governments were to be legitimate rather than stable established a much higher bar for handover.

So the ideas of a group like Rand were welcome, but Petraeus de-formalized the process and discouraged the traditional flow of information. Still, Petraeus could not completely overcome the bureaucracy. Clinton J. Ancker III, who oversaw the production of both the counterinsurgency field manual and the 2008 capstone doctrine, agrees that the Carr Center contributions were unique to the writing of *FM 3-24*. However, Ancker says, “the process by which it was edited, reviewed by the Army and finally published was the same as other manuals.”100 Crane acknowledges these normal channels were still in play: “We did vet our work with the field, getting back over 4000 comments, and through general officers within TRADOC.”101 As well, there was some interference from above through the editing process. For instance, Crane created a section in Chapter 1 titled “Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency Operations,” one of which stated, “Most Important Decisions Are Not Made by Generals.” This accorded with one of the key discursive shifts that shaped the new paradigm, the importance of subordinate officers. But after the chapter went through the internal review process, and senior officers weighed in, the paradox changed to “Many Important Decisions Are Not Made by Generals.”102

---

99 For example, Department of the Army, *FM 90-8, Counterguerrilla Operations* (1986), 3-6.
100 Clinton J. Ancker III, email interview with author, 26 April 2012.
101 Crane, interview, 27 April 2012.
102 Crane explains this in “United States,” 63. The paradox appears in Army, *FM 3-24*, 1-28; emphasis added.
While the bureaucratic process remained, such interference appears to have been more exception than rule. Petraeus, Crane says, “was willing to intercede to make sure his colleagues did not meddle too much.” As well, his opening the institution to outside voices, which were coalescing around a new paradigm, influenced that internal process. Ancker says that the writing and publication of *FM 3-24* profoundly affected how his team of doctrine developers approached the 2008 revision of *FM 3-0, Operations*, the capstone manual that fully consolidated the new approach to war. 

*Disseminating the New Discourse Outside the Army*

Consolidating this new way of war required the assent of civilian elites and elected officials. This is where the breadth of the network fostered by the Carr Center and other groups of experts, and extended by Petraeus’s wealth of contacts, proved so crucial. Liberal-leaning journalists spread the word that the Army was changing, that it could and should take more responsibility for rebuilding Iraq; experts and officers with ties to the administration helped convince Bush to accept a new strategy.

After the February 2006 doctrine-revision workshop, reporters who had castigated the government and the Army for failing to stabilize Iraq began to call attention to both the unofficial and official changes occurring within the institution. In April, Packer penned a lengthy *New Yorker* profile on McMaster and his effort to pacify Tal Afar, Iraq, employing many of the themes from the workshop he attended. He noted the attempt to change the institution and to develop the counterinsurgency field manual, and he

---

103 Crane, interview, 27 April 2012.
questioned whether the Bush administration would provide the support necessary for a change in strategy. “A good-enough counterinsurgency is really none at all,” Packer wrote. “There is no substitute for the investment of time, effort, and risk that was so evident in Tal Afar. The retreat to the enduring FOBs [forward operating bases, enormous compounds far removed from population centers] seems like an acknowledgment that counterinsurgency is just too hard.”

Ricks, in *The Washington Post* and later in his book *Fiasco*, similarly praised Petraeus’s effort. That summer of 2006, Ricks wrote a 2,500-word story titled, “In Iraq, Military Forgot the Lessons of Vietnam.” This headline echoed a sentiment long held by Petraeus, Crane, and other reformers, that the institution had turned its back on the principles of fighting small wars. Ricks hailed Petraeus for institutionalizing the study of counterinsurgency warfare and noted that officers on the ground were slowly beginning to see population protection, not the destruction of the enemy, as central to success.

For his part, Fallows, like Packer and Ricks, shared some of the themes of the Carr Center network even though he had harshly criticized the U.S. war effort. A few weeks after attending the 2006 conference, Fallows helped to popularize the work of the Army reformers. As guest host of *The Charlie Rose Show*, he interviewed Nagl and Crane, as well as counterinsurgency advocate Lewis Sorley. Fallows engaged the three guests on issues surrounding the field manual, and he echoed reformers in stating that the “lessons learned in Vietnam are essential” to the process of changing the Army. Perhaps

---

107 See James Fallows, “Why Iraq Has No Army,” *The Atlantic* 296, no. 5 (December 2005), 60, 76.
most important, Fallows let Nagl have the last word, and the Army colonel stressed not just the operational necessity of public support but also the strategic necessity of winning the war:

I wish the American people really knew how important this war was. That victory in this war really matters to the future of this country, to the future of their children, to our way of life. Iraq is not Vietnam, in that we could lose in Vietnam and not be threatened as a people. If we lose in Iraq, we absolutely will be less secure as a country here. The stakes are very high. We have to win this war. And we can win if we keep the American people with us.108

Fallows did not challenge this assertion – which Nagl made twice – perhaps as a courtesy to his source, or because, as his 2005 article indicates, he mostly shared this view. But Fallows could have drawn on his command of history to press Nagl to provide specific information about how leaving Iraq would compromise U.S. national security. For example, six years after this interview, Fallows wrote a blog post in which he recalled the questions that a young reporter posed to Eugene Rostow in 1970 about U.S. interests in Southeast Asia. Fallows said of William Whitworth’s interview of the influential foreign-policy hawk,

Each time Rostow would say that national prestige or the international balance of power was involved, Whitworth would ask, “Why, exactly?” The result, eventually published as the book Naive Questions About War and Peace, illustrated the power of slogan and shibboleth. For instance, when Whitworth pushed him for specifics, Rostow – a sophisticated and erudite person – said, “I should be willing to bet that in the event of a pullout in South Vietnam one of the first things you’d see would be a big blowup in Korea.” (For the record: of course that didn’t happen.)109

Fallows could have asked similar questions of Nagl. But he did not, despite his grasp of history. The audience was left with the impression that population-centered counterinsurgency was the only rational response to problems in Iraq.

_Conservative Scholars Lobby Bush_

While journalists were telling a mainstream – likely liberal and elite – audience that the Army was developing the doctrine, knowledge, and skills necessary to win in Iraq, other participants in the Carr Center conferences were teaming up with scholars and experts with ties to conservatives in order to lobby the president.

Throughout 2006, as the Army writers were finishing _FM 3-24_, conservative military experts with ties to Petraeus, the Carr Center, and the White House worked to convince Bush to change course in Iraq. That June, for instance, a small group of experts – including Carr Center participants Eliot Cohen and Michael Vickers – recommended a change of course in Iraq.\(^\text{110}\) Frederick W. Kagan, a participant at this meeting who, like Cohen, was associated with the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Project for the New American Century, lobbied for a change of approach based on an article he had just published.\(^\text{111}\) He cited McMaster’s counterinsurgency operations and laid out a three-phase process to clear and hold key areas, then leave enough troops in place to build institutions. The key, Kagan said, was that American ground troops had to assume

---

\(^{110}\) Thomas E. Ricks, _The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq_ (New York: Penguin, 2009), 44.

more risk. To the dismay of the attendees, including some from the State Department, Bush not only held firm but actually became more committed to his own strategy.

A second important meeting involving members of this extended network was organized by Kagan and held at AEI in December 2006. The participants aimed to formulate a strategy to increase U.S. forces and secure the Iraqi population—especially in Baghdad—to give Iraqis more time to make political and economic gains. Aside from Kagan, the key attendees were Thomas Donnelly of AEI and the Project for the New American Century, and retired Army General Jack Keane, who had been very close to Petraeus for decades and had served on the Pentagon’s Defense Policy Board with Cohen. Keane, Ricks says, had come to believe that the U.S. failure in Vietnam stemmed from the Army’s bias against counterinsurgency warfare—a position long championed by Krepinevich, Petraeus, Cohen, and Nagl. Ricks does not indicate how Keane came to this opinion, but insiders increasingly believed that the Army could have, indeed would have, won the war in Vietnam had it fully committed to a counterinsurgency strategy.

In addition to these conservative scholars, active-duty officers who had served under McMaster in Iraq attended the AEI conference. The participants spent a weekend in Washington trying to figure out how many troops would be required to protect the population, the main goal laid out in the counterinsurgency field manual that the Army was about to publish. These experts were also able to determine with some precision

---

114 Ricks, The Gamble, 82.
115 Gentile, interview. He contends that a “narrative has been constructed” suggesting that the United States could have won the Vietnam War if only it had done a better job of counterinsurgency warfare. See also Gian P. Gentile, “Counterinsurgency American Style Doesn’t Work,” presentation at Counterinsurgency: History, Theory and Practice symposium.
how quickly the additional forces could be deployed.\textsuperscript{116} As a retired colonel noted to Ricks, this ad-hoc group had “come up with a war-winning strategy.”\textsuperscript{117} Given their ties to the broader network of reformers as well as to the White House, the participants had a chance to sell it to Bush. As well, with changes afoot in the Army, the institution was likely to accept the plan.

One day after the AEI meetings, Keane and Cohen met with the president and his closest advisers, along with two retired generals and Stephen Biddle, a military expert. Keane pressed Bush to increase troop levels and to use them differently.\textsuperscript{118} Keane warned that U.S. forces would, at least in the short term, assume more risk, and that there would be a higher casualty rate. Cohen and Biddle said they agreed with Keane’s approach. Cohen went a step further by calling for Bush to replace the ground-force commander, General George Casey. Most of the participants recommended that Bush name Petraeus to lead the new effort.\textsuperscript{119} Keane would spend the next month keeping up the pressure on the White House and on Army commanders to come up with a realistic plan to surge a significant number of forces into Iraq to protect the population.\textsuperscript{120}

Bush soon announced the surge, and in doing so adopted the Army’s new discourse. Like the Carr Center network and Army reformers, Bush stressed the need for U.S. civilians and soldiers alike to play major roles in the crucial nonmilitary aspects of nation building. “We will give our commanders and civilians greater flexibility to spend

\textsuperscript{117} Ricks, \textit{The Gamble}, 104.
\textsuperscript{118} Keane, Frontline interview.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
funds for economic assistance,” the president said, pledging to double the number of
civil-military teams tasked with helping “local Iraqi communities pursue reconciliation,
strengthen the moderates and speed the transition to Iraqi self-reliance.”121 By naming
Petraeus to lead the surge and adopting the discourse of reformers, Bush – like
Weinberger two decades earlier – completed the consolidation of the Army paradigm.

**Conclusion**

The process I lay out in this paper was crucial to the overhaul of the institution’s paradigm, not just to the development of counterinsurgency doctrine. The Army had, in previous decades, published manuals on counterinsurgency and low-intensity conflict. But those publications had fit within the post-Vietnam paradigm emphasizing the military as responsibly only for battlefield victory and as wielding only destructive force. Those manuals also charged civilians with stabilizing host nations and with ensuring public support throughout the conflict.

The 2006 counterinsurgency field manual not only challenged those tenets, it helped to overturn them in the Army’s highest-level statement of how it fights, the 2008 version of capstone doctrine. The overall paradigm changed due to the cross-boundary interactions of junior officers, experts, officials, NGOs, and journalists that created and disseminated new discourses, and built momentum for change. Petraeus marshaled these networks, adopting much of their intellectual output and taking advantage of the web of contacts. In so doing, he opened the institution to voices from below and outside. Crane told the audience at the Carr Center’s doctrine-revision workshop in February 2006 that –

---

121 George W. Bush, televised address, 10 January 2007.
in a reversal of the typical flow – he hoped the counterinsurgency field manual would
“set the standard for doctrinal revisions to follow.”\textsuperscript{122} Petraeus was more blunt, telling
the informal advisers gathered at Leavenworth, “This group = a catalyst … a boost for the
Engine of Change!”\textsuperscript{123}

As a result, the Army adopted much more sweeping changes than we might have
expected. The reform effort built momentum within the institution when it successfully
overthrew the post-Vietnam paradigm in order to envision a new approach to small wars.
It helped change the public discourse. And it influenced the president to follow these
new ideas and change the strategy in Iraq. All of these factors made it far more likely the
2008 version of \textit{FM 3-0} would follow the reformers’ discourse. The openness of
Petraeus’s approach also affected the process of writing that capstone operations manual.
The developers of that high-level doctrine both followed the contours of the paradigm
enumerated in the counterinsurgency field manual and looked outside of the institution to
create a new approach to civil-military operations.\textsuperscript{124}

This process is similar to the one that overthrew the Army paradigm in the early
1980s. In the mid-1970s, the Army released Active Defense, a doctrine that, critics said,
focused too heavily on destroying enemy forces at the front and did not properly
emphasize the importance of national will in any war effort. At first, Donn A. Starry, the

\textsuperscript{122} Conrad C. Crane, “Chapter 1: Insurgency and Counterinsurgency,” PowerPoint presentation prepared
\textsuperscript{123} Petraeus, “Welcoming Remarks,” slide 27; ellipsis in original.
\textsuperscript{124} Clinton J. Ancker III, email interview with author, 26 September 2011; and Ancker, “Army Doctrine.”
Ancker told me that in addition to consulting \textit{FM 3-24}, his writers gained insights into stability operations
through a matrix created by a think tank and endorsed by the State Department. See Robert C. Orr ed.,
\textit{Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction} (Washington: Center for
Strategic and International Studies, 2004); and Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and
Stabilization, United States Department of State, “Post-Conflict Reconstruction Essential Tasks,” April
2005. The State Department Document included the CSIS matrix, which had been developed outside
regular government channels.
general overseeing doctrine development, argued in favor of Active Defense (indeed, he had helped to write it). But a backlash among officers and experts led to an informal network similar to that of the Carr Center. These agents shared ideas about maneuver warfare and pressed Starry to open the institution to outside voices. Over time, he did so, and the result was a new paradigm that shaped the Weinberger doctrine.\textsuperscript{125}

The question now is whether the changes wrought during the 2000s will endure. The recent evidence is mixed. The Army’s transformation of capstone doctrine suggests there will not be a full reversion to the post-Vietnam paradigm, as does the success of top generals in convincing Obama to surge troops into Afghanistan. Of course, since 2010 or so, the administration has worked assiduously to limit the Army’s ability to perform counterinsurgency. But we should be clear about what this means. It seems that the administration is taking a page out of Peter Feaver’s playbook by monitoring the Army and punishing generals for not following its preferences.\textsuperscript{126} Obama has shaped his own security policy, and this has blunted the Army’s input into security policy. But this does not necessarily mean that the Army will revert to its post-Vietnam paradigm.

For example, compare the statements of two generals as they looked to the future after pulling out of the Gulf region. In 1992, as the United States debated the structure of its military in the wake of the cold war, General Colin L. Powell argued against reductions of manpower despite the fall of the Soviet Union and the victory over Iraq.\textsuperscript{127} The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff echoed the Army’s post-Vietnam discourse in

\begin{footnotes}


\textsuperscript{126} Feaver, \textit{Armed Servants}.

\end{footnotes}
his appeal for a military that could fight a major regional war while maintaining enough
of a capacity to hold off another major conflict in the Pacific. Acknowledging critics
who did not believe in the doctrine that bore his name, Powell said,

This is not to argue that the use of force is restricted to only
those occasions where the victory of American arms will be
resounding, swift and overwhelming. It is simply to argue
that the use of force should be restricted to occasions where
it can do some good and where the good will outweigh the
loss of lives and other costs that will surely ensue. Wars kill
people. That is what makes them different from all other
forms of human enterprise.128

Powell’s appeal signaled that the post-Vietnam paradigm would endure.

The Army’s current chief of staff, General Raymond T. Odierno acknowledges
the Obama administration’s “pivot” toward Asia, but he does not forsake the new
paradigm that Petraeus helped to consolidate.129 While the Army after Vietnam sought to
move away from a small-wars mindset, Odierno appears to embrace it. The Army, he
says, will

need to preserve the intellectual and organizational
knowledge it has gained about counterinsurgency, stability
operations, and advise-and-assist missions. This expertise
has come at a very high price that is etched into the hearts
and minds of all of us who have worn the army uniform
over the last ten years, and we will not dishonor our fallen
comrades by allowing it to atrophy.130

To do so, he argues, the institution must train and equip itself for “hybrid” warfare,
conflicts likely to feature both conventional and irregular elements.131 Note that this
reflects the Army’s elevation, in FM 3-0, of stability operations to the same level as

128 Ibid.
Affairs 91, no. 3 (May/June 2012).
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
offense and defense. While we will have to look more closely at the words and actions of the Army’s leaders, as well as its junior officers, in order to understand the strength of the paradigm, it will likely endure far longer than did Active Defense. And when a new administration takes office in 2017, it could undo some of Obama’s cost-cutting measures and implement a far more aggressive foreign and security policy. If so, the new paradigm could rival the tenure of AirLand Battle.