In terms of its doctrine and training, the United States military has been transformed by the war in Iraq. The army, which is carrying the principal load among the military services, has embraced counter-insurgency as one of its primary missions.

The army’s Brigade Combat Teams that go to the National Training Center no longer prepare for major conventional war. Rather, the training is geared to its ongoing mission of fighting insurgents, working with newly established foreign security forces and winning over a wary population. At the army’s schools and war colleges, counter-insurgency has become a major area of study. Together with the Marine Corps, the US Army has prepared a new counter-insurgency field manual, one that embodies many of the hard-learned lessons from Iraq. The manual makes the welfare and security of the civilian population the cornerstone of a counter-insurgency strategy.

These changes are all to the good and reflect the military’s ability to adapt to the changing battlefield. They are intended not only to guide the ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which can be expected to require a substantial number of American troops for some time, but also future operations in what General John Abizaid, the head of the United States Central Command, has dubbed a ‘long war’ against violent Islamic extremists. But the new emphasis on counter-insurgency has been largely disconnected from the Defense Department’s personnel policies and budget submissions. Nor are they easily reconciled with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s version of military ‘transformation’, an effort to leverage high technology to make the armed forces lighter, easier to deploy and more lethal.

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The result is that American defence is in a state of strategic confusion. There is a tension between the military’s effort to improve its counter-insurgency capability and the Pentagon’s spending and programmatic priorities. To provide adequate resources for the new doctrine on counter-insurgency, maintain sufficient forces for dealing with unanticipated contingencies and bring coherence to American defence strategy, the Pentagon needs to increase the United States’ ground forces.

**Transformation**

The Bush administration began with a very different paradigm. Its concept of military transformation was outlined by President George W. Bush in a major speech he delivered as a candidate in 1999, at the Citadel, the military college in South Carolina. The speech was entitled ‘A Period of Consequences’, recalling Winston Churchill’s admonition in the 1930s to prepare for the new fascist threats that were haunting Europe.

In outlining the programme, Bush endorsed the notion, long promoted in conservative defence circles, that the United States faced a historic possibility to take advantage of a revolution in military technology. As Bush put it,

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\text{power is increasingly defined, not by mass or size, but by mobility and swiftness. Influence is measured in information, safety is gained in stealth, and force is projected on the long arc of precision-guided weapons. This revolution perfectly matches the strengths of our country – the skill of our people and the superiority of our technology. The best way to keep the peace is to redefine war on our terms.}^{1}
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To fulfil this vision, Bush promised to substantially increase the budget for military research and development, and to restructure the forces so they would be lighter, more readily deployed and require a minimum of logistical support.

At the same time, the candidate signalled that he intended to reduce some of the strain on the armed forces by reducing and ultimately ending the participation of American troops in Bosnia and Kosovo. In general, he expressed scepticism toward the entire project of nation-building, particularly if it was to be carried out by American forces. As he put it, ‘we will not be permanent peacekeepers, dividing warring parties. This is not our strength or our calling.’ When it came to peacekeeping or stability operations, his adviser Condoleezza Rice later explained, the United States’ military role would largely be one of enabling, that is, providing transportation, intelligence and other forms of support for the efforts of others.
The logic of the programme was clear. The weight of the effort would be put on programmes to develop precision weapons, reconnaissance systems and sophisticated command-and-control technologies that offered the greatest promise of extending American military dominance into the next century. Savings would be achieved by reducing the operating tempo of American forces through the avoidance of stability operations and skipping the modernisation of some prosaic weapons systems in what Bush projected would be a period of ‘relative peace’. It was future war as the United States would like to imagine it: one in which the adversary played to American’s strengths and where victory was quick and conclusive.

The principal themes in this programme were implemented in Rumsfeld’s Pentagon. In the summer of 2002, the Joint Staff concluded that the rapid pace of military operations could reduce the requirements for a large number of troops. Speed, in effect, could substitute for mass. Reflecting the disdain for Clinton-era peacekeeping, the Pentagon’s office of ‘Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Affairs’ was renamed the office of ‘Stability Operations’.

In March 2003, the concepts were given a field test in the invasion of Iraq. Baghdad was deemed to be the ‘center of gravity’. The war would end quickly with the capture of the capital, the overthrow of the regime that was based there and the defeat of the regime’s most loyal divisions, the Republican Guard – or so the Bush administration calculated. There would be ‘off-ramps’, or decision points, to ensure that the United States did not deploy more troops than were actually needed. A lengthy and substantial deployment to secure the peace was not foreseen. Post-war operations were seen as primarily humanitarian in nature. The emphasis was on the short-term task of feeding and sheltering refugees, not stability operations and political engineering to rebuild a nation.

General Tommy Franks, the head of Central Command, saw the strategy as embodying the spirit of offensive operations. But some commanders grumbled privately that it was something of a businessmen’s model applied to war. Military forces would be used in the most efficient way possible. The United States would send the requisite number of troops, but not a division more. There would be no excess inventory.

The strategy was applied during the first weeks of the invasion. It offered some advantages. Beginning the war with an attack that was considerably smaller than the overwhelming force Colin Powell had marshalled for the 1991 Persian Gulf War, when he was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, enabled the American-led coalition to achieve tactical surprise. Saddam Hussein, it is now known from interviews with captured aides, was late in identifying the assault from the south as the main attack. It also helped the Bush administration mini-
mise diplomatic pressure from the Arab world that might have emerged had the United States staged a much larger invasion force in the Gulf region.

Franks and Rumsfeld, however, were so attached to their strategy that they failed to take note of early signs that the conflict in Iraq would evolve into an irregular war. The attacks by Fedayeen Saddam on the road to Baghdad, which forced the Americans to pause their march to the capital to deal with the threat to their rear, were dismissed by Franks as little more than a speed bump on the path to a decisive victory.

Reports by some intelligence officers in the field that this pointed to a difficult occupation after the capital was captured were discounted or ignored. After Saddam’s regime was toppled the Bush administration hoped to execute a speedy withdrawal of most of the American forces, in keeping with its plan to avoid lengthy and entangling stability operations. The initial plan, which Franks outlined for his commanders just a week after the fall of the capital, was to reduce the American force to little more than a division by September 2003, leaving the international community to fill the gap with stability forces. The assumption was that the Iraqi military would also be available.2

In fact, the strategy helped foster the very quagmire that the Bush administration had hoped to avoid. The deficit of American forces and the ill-advised decision to formally disband the Iraqi Army put the American-led coalition in a poor position to seal Iraq’s porous borders, no small concern since former regime officials and an incipient insurgency were drawing foreign recruits. It hampered efforts to ensure law and order, and thwarted attempts to provide a secure environment for reconstruction. That, in turn, contributed to the alienation of the occupied population and provided the insurgents with a window of opportunity. The deteriorating security situation also discouraged foreign countries from sending substantial forces to help out. The American-led forces in Iraq were a coalition more in name than in fact.

The long hot summer of 2003 taught a painful strategic lesson. High-tempo offensive operations were useful in toppling a regime, but once the regime had been overturned, securing a newly occupied nation and squelching a brewing insurgency was a labour-intensive task. Mass was more important than speed, and patience was more important than audacity. That did not mean that the Pentagon’s transformation programme was ill conceived, but that it addressed only a portion of the combat spectrum and was a poor guide for how to fill the security vacuum that followed regime change.
As the insurgency grew, the United States was slow to respond. There had been no serious thinking by civilian policymakers on how to deal with an insurgency because they had not anticipated one – despite the Bush administration’s frequent assertions that Saddam had made common cause with terrorists. Rumsfeld, for his part, appears to have drawn no overarching lessons from the outcome. Almost three years after the war, he was still preaching that the invasion of Iraq taught the virtues of speed, agility and precision weaponry, as if the insurgency had never happened.³

The military drew a number of lessons from the war. The US Army’s difficulties in conducting deep helicopter attacks against the Medina division – one Apache helicopter was shot down and 30 damaged – led to a major revision in tactics. Seeking to develop a weapon that could be used with less collateral damage against fighters hiding in urban areas, the air force developed the ‘small diameter’ bomb. But these lessons were in the realm of tactics.⁴

As the insurgency grew and it became clear that the so-called post-conflict phase of the operation was becoming the toughest and deadliest stage, the military began to develop a new paradigm for how to proceed, one that was born of necessity and painful experience and which has implications for many years to come.

**Back to the future**

The new principles of counter-insurgency are identified in FM 3-24, a joint army and marines manual intended to update the military’s understanding of how best to do battle with insurgents and fill a doctrinal gap.

There was, indeed, a gap to fill. The army’s counter-insurgency skills had atrophied. The American military had been heavily engaged in counter-insurgency during the Vietnam War, but following that conflict, the army had been consumed with planning for a large clash with the Soviet Union. The marines had more of an expeditionary focus, as they were more oriented on potential operations in the Third World and had codified the lessons of their long interventions in their ‘Small Wars’ manual. But the marines have much to relearn as well. Neither service has issued a comprehensive manual on the subject for two decades.

A common assumption was that if the military trained for major combat operations, it would be able to easily handle less violent operations like peacekeeping and counter-insurgency. But that assumption proved to be wrong in Iraq; in effect, the military was without an up-to-date doctrine. Different units improvised different approaches. Some units, like the 101st Airborne Division, which was based in northern Iraq, and the marines, who were initially deployed...
in southern Iraq, worked well with the population and emphasised the need to be restrained in using force. Others, like the 82\textsuperscript{nd} Airborne Division and the 4\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division, emphasised raids. The failure by civilian policymakers to prepare for the reconstruction of Iraq compounded the problem.

The manual codified several well-known principles for conducting counter-insurgency operations, or what the acronym-happy military dubs ‘COIN’. The local population, not the regime’s capital, was deemed to be the ‘center of gravity’. This change had enormous implications. The challenge was not merely to conquer and secure the adversary’s administrative headquarters – the prime objective of the Iraq invasion – but to provide security for the nation’s entire population. Only thus could the United States help physically reconstruct the country and help extend the rule of law. Protecting the population was also vital for isolating the insurgents and preventing them finding a sanctuary among the people.

Reflecting this imperative of protecting and winning over the people, the manual asserted that force was to be applied in a discriminate manner so as to minimise the risk to civilians. The new manual also challenged another article of faith the military had previously embraced: force protection. Troops were not to be concentrated at large Forward Operation Bases but to live in smaller bases among the population. Though such deployment subjected them to the risk of greater attack, it was vital for gaining intelligence.

The notion of conducting rapid offensive operations to decisively defeat the foe so that American troops could swiftly withdraw was cast aside. Countering an insurgency was a long-term proposition, one that required perseverance and patience.

The precepts of the new doctrine were captured by several paradoxes that are identified in the manual:

- ‘The more you protect your force, the more vulnerable you are.’
- ‘The more force used, the less effective it is.’
- ‘The best weapons for COIN do not shoot.’
- ‘The host nation doing something tolerably is better than us doing it well.’
- ‘Tactical success guarantees nothing.’
- ‘Most of the important decisions are not made by generals.’

In fashioning the new doctrine, the writers drew on experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the long history of counter-insurgency operations as articulated by experts such as David Galula.
The Iraq case study featuring prominently in the manual involved the 2005 operations in Tal Afar by the army’s Third Armored Cavalry Regiment. With the aid of Iraqi security forces, the unit surrounded the city with sand berms to prevent insurgents from filtering in and out and progressively cleared it of enemy fighters. Iraqi security forces were inserted in the vacuum while American forces stayed in the city to provide an added measure of security and ensure it did not revert to enemy control. Reconstruction funds followed to build popular support. It was a programme to ‘clear, hold and build’, one that Bush would later hail as a model of how the United States could gain ground in Iraq.

In short, the manual was a guide to how to change the service culture in the army. The manual was just part of the change. The old ‘heavy metal’ tank-on-tank engagements that were rehearsed at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin were replaced by mission rehearsals in which combat brigades simulated counter-insurgency operations against forces playing the roles of guerrilla fighters, suicide bombers, sectarian militias and innocent civilians.

In the old war games, the emphasis was on force-on-force attacks. There was no focus on dealing with a foreign society or tradition. The landscape did not replicate an alien culture; it was mere terrain. According to the army, only 29 non-military personnel and a limited number of soldiers played the role of civilians on the battlefield.

With the emphasis on counter-insurgency scenarios, brigade-on-brigade combined arms training at the National Training Center was essentially supplanted by the new training. As training is currently conducted, the centre includes six major towns, seven cave complexes, simulated arms caches and seven temporary bases. A small city is being constructed. Up to 250 foreign-language speakers and up to 1,400 troops play the roles of insurgents, militias, tribal leaders and civilians. Troops that rehearse there, and at similar training centres at Fort Polk in Louisiana and at Hohenfels in Germany, deal with suicide car bombs and practice escalation-of-force procedures intended to reduce the risk of harming innocents. American commanders are empowered to spend funds for reconstruction projects as well as bullets in the training scenarios.

There are some constraints on realism. US forces do not train with the Iraqi forces many will be partnered with in Iraq, or with American military advisers who will work with those Iraqi forces. They are needed so urgently in Iraq they cannot be spared for exercises. But there is a focused effort to prepare for counter-insurgency situations.
At the army’s Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, counter-insurgency has become a major element of a new instruction programme. Arrangements have also been made to insert ‘Red Teams’ in military units to challenge orthodox or complacent thinking. The transformation has been somewhat less sweeping for the Marine Corps, given its long history of colonial wars and expeditionary operations, reflected in its ‘Small Wars’ manual. But it is still significant and has led to vastly overhauled training at its Mojave Viper exercises.

Another important change was the mission of training foreign security forces, army and police. That had long been a special-forces mission, one that drew on the cultural, linguistic and military expertise of ’A teams’. But with the demands of training large numbers of Iraqi forces, the mission was shifted to the army and marines. The Army’s 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley was given the task of training the Military Transition Teams and the Police Transition Teams, as the advisers were called. The Marine Corps also provided advisers.

Nor was counter-insurgency seen as a mission that would necessarily end with the reduction of American forces in Iraq. The military’s leaders were projecting a ‘long war’ against violent Islamic extremists, which was likely to draw on the same skills. The American military, after all, was not the only force that was updating its strategy and tactics. The militants, who carry out asymmetric warfare, were employing increasingly sophisticated weapons and tactics. Hizbullah had equipped itself with modern anti-tank and anti-ship missiles. Insurgents in Iraq had fashioned bombs from shaped charges supplied by Iran, the better to attack American armour. As the Americans developed countermeasures the insurgents sought to swamp the American defences by laying more than 2,600 bombs a month. Improvised explosive devices accounted for most of the American casualties. Soon the use of these devices and suicide-bomb tactics began to migrate to Afghanistan. Counter-insurgency promised to be a long, difficult mission against foes that are resilient and adaptable.

**Doctrine–reality mismatch**

For all the talk of waging a long war and the efforts to develop a new manual to help wage it, resources have lagged behind doctrine. Counter-insurgency is by definition a labour-intensive mission, especially since the cornerstone of the doctrine entailed protection of the populace from insurgent threats and intimidation. That requires a substantial number of troops, be they American, allied or forces supplied by the host nation.

Nor is counter-insurgency the only mission that the United States faces. North Korea and the Persian Gulf remain potential flashpoints, as the Pentagon’s Quadrennial Defense Review of 2005 makes clear. Dubbed 1–4–2–1, the plan-
ning model specifies that American forces should be capable of defending the American homeland against threats and deter aggression in four critical areas: northeast Asia, the East Asia littoral, the Middle East and southwest Asia, and Europe. American forces must also be capable of halting aggression by adversaries in two overlapping major conflicts while preserving the option to achieve a decisive victory in one.

Faced with such a demanding array of potential missions, the Bush administration’s calculation was that rapid success in stabilising Iraq would enable the United States to reduce its troops there, alleviating the strain on the ground forces. Franks’s guidance to reduce the American combat presence in Iraq to a ‘division-plus’ by September 2003 never came to pass. Nonetheless, even as the insurgency developed, American commanders repeatedly projected withdrawals. The concept seemed to be not that the United States would adjust its force structure and military end strength to better deal with an increasingly difficult situation in Iraq, but that Iraq would conform to the Pentagon’s pre-determined programmes and plans.

General Peter Pace, the current chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, viewed the troop burden in Iraq as a manageable one. In a February 2004 appearance, Pace noted that the number of troops had declined from some 150,000 to 120,000 and was projected to shrink further. Increasing ground forces, he asserted, would yield additional troops when they were no longer required. ‘If we were to decide to build more forces, as some have said should be done, it would take two years to build a new division from scratch’, Pace observed. ‘That’s not, in my opinion, the right way to go.’ Instead, Pace hailed efforts to restructure the army, a programme of modularisation in which 42 smaller, but supposedly more effective, active-duty combat brigades, are being created from 33 old combat brigades.

Two years later, however, the troop requirements were still onerous. In June 2006, military commanders once again projected troop cuts in Iraq. General George Casey presented a classified plan in Washington that anticipated that the number of American combat brigades would decrease to five or six from 14 by December 2007. Under the plan, the reductions involved two combat brigades that were to rotate out of Iraq by September 2006 without being replaced. A combat brigade would be kept on alert in Kuwait or elsewhere in case American commanders needed to augment their forces to deal with a crisis. Another brigade would be kept on a lesser state of alert elsewhere in the world, but still be prepared to deploy quickly. As a result of these arrangements, the plan to bring the number of combat brigades in Iraq down to 12 was dubbed 12–1–1.

The troop-reduction plan assumed that Iraqi security forces could fill the gap, an assumption that turned out at the very least to be premature. Instead of
reducing forces, the United States was compelled to add to them as it sought to contain sectarian tensions in Baghdad and avert a full-fledged civil war. Abizaid projected that the increased troop levels of more than 140,000 would be required through the spring of 2007.

By late 2006, the military was in a quandary. Its force requirements in Iraq and Afghanistan were considerable. No effort had been made to expand the ground forces. An opportunity to expand the force so that the United States could more effectively pursue counter-insurgency operations had been lost.

To ensure that it had sufficient personnel, the army hired 1,000 new recruiters, raising the number to 6,500. The army also offered significant signing bonuses, up to $40,000, to fill the ranks of dangerous military specialties, including convoy drivers and military police. The army also raised the limit on the number of those admitted into the service from a lower aptitude ranking, increasing the percentage from 2% of recruits to the Defense Department limit of 4%.

Army officials insisted that their force was not broken, but acknowledged that it was under enormous strain. An internal army document notes that the demand for troops in Iraq and Afghanistan has greatly exceeded past projections that predicted earlier troop reductions. According to the document, the army needs $66.1 billion to make up for all of its equipment shortfalls. Referring to the units that are to deploy next to Iraq and Afghanistan, or are in training, the document shows a large question mark to indicate their limited readiness.

The stress of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has prompted senior army officers to pass a colourful hand card around Capitol Hill explaining that it will take $17.1bn in extra spending over the next year to repair and replace tanks, trucks, radios and other equipment for the total force. The card indicates that another $13bn is needed each year for the following five years to fix and replace equipment. The marines are also asking for billions to repair equipment. Faced with a potentially politically explosive issue during an election year, Rumsfeld allowed the army to approach White House budget officials to argue for substantial increases in resources, a significant divergence from initial plans by Rumsfeld and his inner circle to hold the line on army costs to pay for new technology and a new way of war.

**Levels of availability**

A greater worry has been the operational availability of American ground forces. The army has a system for deploying the 42 new Brigade Combat Teams it is establishing as part of an ongoing programme to restructure its units. The goal
is for an active brigade to spend two years at home for each year it is deployed overseas.

So many units are needed for the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, however, that combat brigades are generally spending only a year at home for each year they are deployed. As one general put it, the brigades are either deployed, have just got back or are preparing to rotate back to Iraq and Afghanistan again. As a consequence, no more than a handful – perhaps as few as two or three Brigade Combat Teams – are immediately available for contingencies elsewhere.

The shortage of forces has also constrained training. Since the focus is on Iraq and Afghanistan and combat troops generally spend only a year in the United States before rotating back, the army has essentially abandoned brigade-level heavy mechanized training at the National Training Center. Concerns have grown within the military establishment that the army may be raising a new group of young lieutenants and captains with little experience in high-intensity warfare against heavily equipped armies like North Korea’s.

An unexpected crisis on the Korean Peninsula or another trouble-spot would likely force the army to take extraordinary measures. It could respond to the crisis by dispatching troops that had been earmarked for duty in Iraq and by simultaneously extending the deployment of troops already in Iraq well beyond the normal year-long tour of duty. Surging forces in Iraq would likely involve a similar extension of deployment tours. Such a move, however, would risk future difficulties in retaining officers in an all-volunteer force and might stretch the army to the breaking point.

The Marine Corps is encountering similar strains. Of the 24 infantry battalions in the active force, nine are deployed, including three Marine Expeditionary Units. Seventy percent of the marine battalions that are deployed are located in the Central Command’s area of responsibility, meaning the Middle East and southwest Asia.

The marines generally deploy for seven months instead of a year, but the strain has been similar. Marine units have generally been home only eight or nine months for each seven months they are deployed. Much of their training is geared to counter-insurgency. The marines are not training for high-intensity warfare at the battalion or higher level as much as in the past.

To cope with the demands, both services anticipate greater use of the reserves. Army officials have already told Rumsfeld aides that they may be forced to make greater use of the National Guard. Following extensive use in Iraq, the National Guard set a goal of allowing five years at home between foreign deployments so as not to disrupt the family life and careers of its citizen soldiers. Greater use of the Guard would require that this goal be sacrificed.
As for the marines, of the six reserve battalions, one has been deployed for almost two years and is currently off-limits. The remaining five have been deployed for about a year, and the marines sought and received authority from Rumsfeld to use them for one more year. In addition, the marines said in August 2006 that they will call back as many as 2,500 members of its Individual Ready Reserve, a pool of manpower that the marines had not tapped since 2003 and which is used to fill military specialties in times of national emergency.

Such moves, however, are merely expedient measures. It is not simply a matter of enduring strain on the force. The limited number of ground troops has already had deleterious consequences. In Iraq, the limited numbers of forces have hampered American operations, delaying progress and prolonging the day when American forces might be able to go home.

The 2005 operations by the Army’s Third Armored Cavalry Regiment in Tal Afar demonstrated what can be accomplished by an astute commander who is sensitive to the needs of the local population and has the necessary forces to establish control. The regiment worked with Iraqi security forces to clear Tal Afar of insurgents, to hold the town with Iraqi and American troops, then to encourage reconstruction there, an approach known as ‘clear, hold, build’.

The new counter-insurgency manual hailed the operation, as did Bush. But the reality is that such operations are troop intensive. ‘The units that have sufficient forces are applying the doctrine with good effect’, said one military officer who recently returned from Iraq. ‘Those units without sufficient forces can only conduct raids to disrupt the enemy while protecting themselves. They can’t do enough to protect the population effectively and partner with Iraqi forces.’

Indeed, an instructive case history that is not included in the new counter-insurgency manual shows how efforts can be set back due to insufficient forces. To mass enough troops to retake Fallujah in the autumn of 2004 the marines drew forces from Haditha, essentially leaving the town at the mercy of the insurgents. What followed was a devastating setback for the American effort to carry out counter-insurgency operations in the violent al-Anbar province. While the Americans were securing Fallujah the Iraqi police in Haditha were accosted by insurgents and executed. The episode left the town without a police force that could check the operations of the insurgents and taught the Iraqis there that the Americans could not be counted on to protect their nascent institutions, whatever their good intentions.

It also made the task of recruiting a new police force all but impossible. When follow-on marine units were deployed to Haditha their efforts to mount a police recruitment drive failed, forcing the marines to think about seeking police recruits from other parts of the country. Without adequate force levels,
operations in al-Anbar became a strategic version of the Whac-a-Mole arcade game in which a target is struck only to appear elsewhere. When American forces massed troops to clear one area they left another area poorly protected, creating a vacuum that the insurgents eagerly filled.\(^9\)

The consequences were summed up in an intelligence report that was prepared by Multinational Forces-West, the American command for the western area. Outside of islands of relative stability like Fallujah and al-Qaim, cleared in large-scale combat operations by American troops, the dominant force was not the American military or the new Iraqi government, but al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia. The report estimated that the deployment of a coalition division and a massive infusion of aid, neither of which were in the offing, were required to reverse the deteriorating security conditions.\(^10\)

The risks presented by a constrained number of ground forces extend beyond Iraq. They raise the possibility that an adversary might miscalculate, projecting that it can undertake provocative actions that the United States would find difficult to respond to. The Iraq War was intended by the Bush administration as a demonstration of American power and resolve that would serve as a cautionary lesson to nations like Iran, which is pursuing a nuclear-weapons capability, or Syria, which has supported Hizbullah. With the difficulties of the United States in Iraq, the lesson has backfired. But the limited number of forces may add to the perception that the United States is bogged down in Iraq and unable to respond adequately to other contingencies.

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The Bush administration’s original vision of a high-tech military that could strike forces with precision weapons at vast distances and conduct rapid ground offensives was presented as a recipe for victory and a means of achieving dramatic results without a massive number of troops. To be sure, the ability to rapidly fix and destroy targets enabled the United States to kill Abu Masab Zarqawi in a bombing raid in June 2006. The CIA killed an al-Qaeda operative in Yemen in November 2002 using a Predator drone operated from Djibouti.

But the high-tech revolution in military affairs is not the answer for stifling insurgencies and certainly cannot compensate for shortages of manpower when borders need to be secured, law and order established in towns and cities, and a population protected. The quality of the force is vital, but a sufficient number
of troops is also essential. If the host nation or allies are not in a position to supply them the United States must. To paraphrase an aphorism from a different context, quantity has a quality all its own. The key is not to ignore the advantages of military technology but to enlarge the military’s repertoire with counter-insurgency knowledge and skills.

That, however, requires substantial adjustment in funding and personnel levels. Congress authorised a 30,000-troop increase in the active duty army, which would bring troop strength to 512,000 by 2007. That increase was intended to be temporary, but army officials are now treating it as a permanent floor. The marines have taken the position that the force should be fixed at 180,000, 5,000 more than the number set by Rumsfeld’s Quadrennial Defense Review.

Increasing the military further would not be a short-term fix. It would take years to recruit the additional forces. Given the difficulties the army has had in meeting its current recruiting targets, expanding the force would need a high-level boost from the White House. But if the administration does not start now the American military may have little flexibility on troop levels if they are required several years from now.

Nor would it be cheap. Army officials project that it would cost between $1bn and $1.2bn annually to increase the army by 10,000 soldiers. The FY2007 appropriation includes $43bn for military personnel, including for the active army, reserve and guard, which is approximately 39% of the army’s overall budget. Still, senior army officials have said that their service needs to grow not just by 30,000 soldiers, but by 60,000 to 80,000.11

If the overall military budget cannot be increased, personnel growth could be funded by delaying or cancelling weapons-modernisation programmes of little immediate relevance to the ‘long war’. That is a trade-off the military services are reluctant to make but one that might be necessary. The United States has indeed entered a ‘period of consequences’, but one very different from the one candidate Bush imagined.

Notes

4 Two F-15s, flying from Royal Air Base Lakenheath, carried the small diameter to Iraq on 5 October 2006. It was the first time that the muni-
tion was used in combat operations. ‘Today, we added an extraordinary capability to our warfighter’s arsenal’, Lieutenant-General Gary North, the combined forces air component commander, said in a statement. ‘This new air-to-ground munition gives our warfighters the explosive power of a conventional bomb without the fragmentation and blast area of other weapons in our inventory.’ See ‘F-15s Begin Dropping Small Diameter Bombs’, InsideDefense.com, Marcus Weisgerber, 6 October 2006.


7 See Michael R. Gordon, ‘Top U.S. General in Iraq Outlines Sharp Troop Cut’, New York Times, 25 June 2006. Under the plan, the number of bases in Iraq would decline as American forces consolidated. By the end of the year the number of bases would shrink to 57 from the current 69. By June 2007, there would be 30 bases, and by December 2007 there would be only 11. By the end of 2007, the United States would have three principal regional military commands: in Baghdad and the surrounding area, in al-Anbar Province and the west, and in northern Iraq.


9 Marine Lieutenant Colonel Glen G. Butler noted in a July 2006 article in Marine Corps Gazette that ‘the lack of sufficient manpower along the Euphrates River corridor in mid-2004 through early 2005’ allowed insurgents to take over several towns, including Haditha, Haqlaniya and Rawa. That ‘led to a repeated cycle of “clear, clear, clear” (with no forces to hold or build) … Ultimately, this situation resulted in a bitter and frustrated local populace.’ See also Michael R. Gordon, ‘Wary Iraqis are Recruited as Policemen’, New York Times, 24 July 2006; Michael R. Gordon, ‘An Army of Some’, New York Times, 20 August 2006.

