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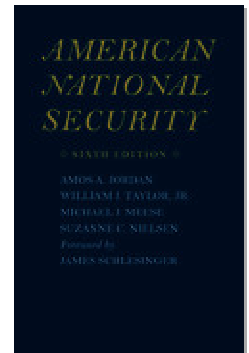

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Irregular Challenges, Military Intervention, and Counterinsurgency

In explaining the position and role of the United States in the world, the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy argues that "America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones. We are menaced less by fleets and armies than by catastrophic technologies in the hands of the embittered few."[1] At root, this statement is about the decreasing relative importance of conventional, state-based military-on-military threats to U.S. national security, such as those discussed in the preceding chapter, and the rise of nontraditional challenges, such as the problem of terrorism discussed in Chapter 14. This chapter concentrates on what defense planners have termed *irregular challenges* (see the upper left box in Figure 13.1 in Chapter 13).

The increasing importance of irregular threats to U.S. national security is best seen as the product of broad trends in the international environment and deliberate choices by current or future potential U.S. adversaries. Characteristics of the current strategic environment that have contributed to an increase in the importance of irregular threats include the lack of a rival superpower facing the United States as well as a general condition of peace among the world's most developed, democratic states; the problem of failing and failed states around the world and the resulting lack of governance; evolving norms in the international system that are supportive of state intervention in large-scale human rights catastrophes; the forces of globalization that are increasing the interconnectedness of states and peoples around the world; and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) that can make the existence of hostile groups and individuals too costly to ignore.

In addition to these broad forces, the rising importance of irregular challenges to U.S. national security interests is also the result of deliberate choices by strategic

actors seeking to oppose the United States. As discussed in Chapter 13, U.S. armed forces may be the most capable in the world, but they enjoy this advantage more in some contexts than others. American strengths in conventional warfare and traditional forms of military competition, although still highly valuable, provide incentives for hostile actors to challenge the United States in asymmetric and nontraditional ways.

Of course, these various dynamics are often intimately related. As just one example, the existence of mostly ungoverned territory in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan provides hostile groups with a potential sanctuary within which they can organize, train, and plan. These groups can then take advantage of modern communication, transportation, and weapon technologies to strike at U.S. interests around the world.

Defining Irregular Challenges

The 2005 National Defense Strategy describes irregular challenges as coming "from those employing 'unconventional' methods to counter the *traditional* advantages of stronger opponents."[2] These challenges are strategically important:

> Increasingly sophisticated *irregular* methods—e.g., terrorism and insurgency—challenge U.S. security interests. Adversaries employing irregular methods aim to erode U.S. influence, patience, and political will. Irregular opponents often take a long term approach, attempting to impose prohibitive human, material, financial, and political costs on the United States to compel strategic retreat from a key region or course of action.[3]

The dangers posed by irregular challenges have intensified because of the problems of governance in many states around the world, as well as the continued force of "political, religious, and ethnic extremism."[4]

There are several possible ways to distinguish irregular challenges from traditional threats. One is by the legal and political status of the belligerents. In this view, an irregular war is waged between state and nonstate adversaries.[5] Although this distinction has some utility, it is not universally helpful. As the example of state-sponsored terrorism makes clear, states may still be the main players in some irregular challenges to U.S. national security.

A second method to distinguish irregular challenges, and the one favored in the government document cited above, is by the means or methods of conflict. Irregular methods range from piracy to terrorism to insurgency. In theory, the specific form of an irregular challenge could vary greatly as long as it responded asymmetrically to U.S. strengths in conventional forms of combat. In this sense, the possible use of WMDs by nonstate adversaries constitutes an irregular and a catastrophic challenge.

To some extent, the category of irregular challenges is a residual grouping comprised of all uses of force other than traditional state-on-state, relatively symmetric armed conflicts. Although its breadth may limit its analytic utility in some respects, the category is nevertheless useful to defense policy makers and analysts

who argue that the U.S. military has yet to adequately transform its Cold War structure—which was optimized toward deterrence and high-intensity combat against a peer adversary—to one that is also capable of meeting U.S. needs in the current strategic environment.

Military Intervention

Irregular challenges also are distinctive, because they lend themselves to military intervention as a possible U.S. preventive measure or response. Richard Haass usefully describes "armed intervention" as entailing "the introduction or deployment of new or additional combat forces to an area for specific purposes that go beyond ordinary training or scheduled expressions of support for national interests."[6] For a variety of reasons, the period immediately following the Cold War saw an increase in the "internationalization" of internal crises and conflicts as states intervened within the territory of other countries in response to these events. Military interventions to meet various irregular challenges are discussed below.

Support to Insurgency and Counterinsurgency. Political scientists James Fearon and David Laitin define *insurgency* as a conflict between an "incumbent" (a government or occupying power) and its external patrons versus organized, nonstate groups and their patrons who either seek political power within the country or seek to secede.[7] In an important sense, an insurgency is fundamentally the result of a "political legitimacy crisis of some kind."[8] American military doctrine recognizes that "insurgency has taken many forms over time," including "struggles for independence against colonial powers, the rising up of ethnic or religious groups against their rivals, and resistance to foreign invaders."[9]

The United States has played a variety of roles in these conflicts, intervening in some cases in support of insurgents and in others in support of the incumbent. With regard to the former, during the Cold War, the United States sometimes supported insurgent uprisings against communist regimes. A good example is the training and logistical support the United States provided to rebels in Afghanistan during the 1980s against the Afghan government and its Soviet patron. Since the end of the Cold War, U.S. indirect or direct support to insurgents is more likely to stem from a determination that a regime is despotic and a potential threat to international peace and security.[10] An example is U.S. support to separatist insurgents in the conflict between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Serbia over Kosovo in 1999.

In other cases, U.S. national interests have led policy makers to intervene on behalf of an incumbent government and to support or conduct counterinsurgency operations. According to U.S. military doctrine, *counterinsurgency* consists of "those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency."[11] Examples of U.S. counterinsurgency operations date back to the nineteenth century. The American army fought more than one thousand separate engagements against hostile Native Americans between 1866 and 1890. Perhaps the most broadly known U.S. counterinsurgency

campaign occurred in Vietnam beginning in the early 1960s and was the source of much of Chapter 15's discussion of limited war. The intervention in Iraq that began in 2003 may eventually displace the Vietnam experience as the most significant example of counterinsurgency for the American public.[12] Counterinsurgency operations are discussed in greater depth below.

Stability Operations. The Department of Defense (DoD) *defines stability operations* as "encompassing various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief."[13] In a discussion of major operations and campaigns, the U.S. military's capstone doctrinal manual argues that the re-establishment of conditions favorable to U.S. interests "often requires conducting stability operations in support of broader stability, security, transition, and reconstruction (efforts)." It goes on to argue that stability operations constitute a core U.S. military mission in that they help to:

> establish order that advances U.S. interests and values. The immediate goal often is to provide the local populace with security, restore essential services, and meet humanitarian needs. The long-term goal is to help develop indigenous capacity for securing essential services, a viable market economy, rule of law, democratic institutions, and a robust civil society.[14]

Oft-mentioned examples of U.S. success in postconflict stability operations include the U.S. occupations of Germany and Japan after World War II. As of early 2009, the United States was again involved in stability (as well as counterinsurgency) operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.[15]

Nation Assistance. A *nation assistance* type of operation involves civil or military assistance provided by U.S. forces to another state while on that foreign state's soil according to an agreement between the U.S. government and the host government. It is distinguished from foreign humanitarian assistance, discussed below, in that its purpose is to promote "sustainable development and responsive institutions" with a long-term goal of fostering regional stability. An example is Operation Promote Liberty—a nation assistance operation to rebuild Panama in 1990—that followed Operation Just Cause, in which U.S. forces toppled the regime of Panamanian dictator Manuel Noreiga.[16]

Enforcement of Sanctions and of Exclusion Zones. *Sanctions and exclusion zones* may be established by the United Nations (UN) or a treaty or armistice, or they may be imposed by a state (with sufficient power) unilaterally. Enforcement of sanctions involves operations "that employ coercive measures to interdict the movement of certain types of designated items into or out of a nation or specified area." A recent example is the multinational effort to enforce UN sanctions after

the 1991 Gulf War.[17] The purpose of exclusion zones is to prevent certain types of activities in certain areas (e.g., no-fly or no-drive zones). "Exclusion zones usually are imposed due to breaches of international standards of human rights or flagrant violations of international law by states."[18] After the 1991 Gulf War, the United States also participated in the enforcement of exclusion zones in northern and southern Iraq.

Peace Operations. U.S. military doctrine defines *peace operations* as encompassing "multiagency and multinational crisis response and limited contingency operations involving all instruments of national power with military missions to contain conflict, redress the peace, and shape the environment to support reconciliation and rebuilding and facilitate the transition to legitimate governance."[19] Two elements of this definition are especially noteworthy. First, just as with the definition of stability operations, it suggests that military forces have a role to play, but alone they will be insufficient. Military operations must complement and support diplomatic and other efforts designed to facilitate a political settlement, looking to the re-establishment of legitimate governance.

Traditionally, there have been two major categories of peace operations:

- Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs). *Peacekeeping operations* are "military operations undertaken with the consent of all major parties to a dispute, and are designed to monitor and facilitate implementation of an agreement and support diplomatic efforts to reach a long term political settlement."[20] Traditional PKO are authorized under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, which covers the "Pacific Settlement of Disputes."
- Peace Enforcement Operations (PEO): Peace enforcement operations "are generally coercive in nature and rely on the threat or use of force . . . PEO may include the enforcement of sanctions and exclusion zones, protection of personnel conducting humanitarian assistance missions, restoration of order, and forcible separation of belligerent parties to a dispute. However, the impartiality with which the [peace operations] force treats all parties and the nature of its objectives separates PEO from major combat operations."[21] PEO may be authorized under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which authorizes the Security Council to call on member states to respond with force to actions that threaten international peace and security.

In recent revisions to U.S. doctrine, three additional categories of peace operations have been added: *conflict prevention*, *peace making*, and *peace building*. In the first two of these, the military plays a subordinate and supporting role to U.S. diplomatic efforts. Operations in the last category, peace building, begin while PKO or PEO are underway, are expected to be of relatively long duration, and include measures "aimed at strengthening political settlements and legitimate governance and rebuilding governmental infrastructure and institutions."[22] Peace building operations are a special case of stability operations.

The United States could participate in peace operations as part of an international organization, such as the UN, or a regional organization, such as

NATO. The United States could even conduct them unilaterally, though the legitimacy that multilateral action provides may be especially important in the conduct of a peace operation. The United States participated in a few peace operations during the Cold War; one example is the Multinational Force and Observers Mission in the Sinai, which resulted from the 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. However, U.S. involvement in peace operations accelerated during the 1990s and in that decade included sizeable deployments to Somalia, Haiti, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. These missions were the subject of controversy concerning whether the U.S. national interests and values at stake were sufficient to justify the commitment of national resources and whether the wear and tear on the U.S. military overly degraded its readiness to accomplish more critical functions. However, the path of nonintervention was also not without controversy. The most important example of a devastating humanitarian catastrophe to which the United States—as well as the rest of the international community—was slow to respond was the Rwandan genocide in 1994.[23]

In addition to provoking a broad debate relating to national security strategy, the peace operations of the 1990s were met with some ambivalence within the military. U.S. military doctrine in the 1990s, which officially labeled such deployments "operations other than war," reinforced the idea that in conducting peace operations the military services were performing tasks that were peripheral to their core mission of war fighting.[24] In addition, this label may have led many to see an unrealistic distinction between peace operations and combat. In reality, actual fighting—or the ability to prevail if fighting were to break out—may be necessary to create the conditions under which peace can exist. Peace-building operations are then a natural and perhaps inevitable successor to more active hostilities if an enduring solution is sought. Conceptually, then, peace and combat operations may be critical to achieving the political purposes of the United States, even if they demand somewhat different skills.

UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold once said, "Peacekeeping is not a soldier's job, but only a soldier can do it."[25] Current U.S. military doctrine differs by acknowledging that peacekeeping is a sometimes soldier's job; military missions are an important component of peace operations.

Foreign Humanitarian Assistance. U.S. military humanitarian assistance operations abroad are conducted to relieve or reduce the consequences of natural or man-made disasters or to alleviate the effects of endemic conditions, such as disease, hunger, or other forms of privation, in countries outside the United States. Foreign humanitarian assistance operations are generally limited in scope and duration and are intended to supplement or complement efforts of host-nation civil authorities or agencies.[26] Examples include U.S. operations focused on the provision of foodstuffs and shelter to Iraqi Kurds in northern Iraq in 1991 and the initial Somalia intervention of 1992.[27] An example of a foreign humanitarian assistance effort that could also be viewed as a major operation was the U.S. participation in 2005 tsunami relief efforts.[28]

Rescue and Evacuation. Noncombatant evacuation operations (NEO) are narrowly focused and sharply limited in scale. Their sole purpose is to relocate threatened noncombatants from hostile and threatening environments to environments of relative stability and peace.[29] Most memorable in the U.S. experience is the unfortunate failed rescue attempt of U.S. hostages from captivity in 1980 after they were seized from the U.S. Embassy several months earlier. A second example is the U.S. dispatch of Naval and Marine forces that evacuated 2,690 people, including 330 Americans, from Liberia in 1990 to protect them from threats and violence that accompanied Liberia's civil war.[30]

A Brief History of Insurgency. Most military historians look to the activities of Spanish irregulars against occupying French forces between 1808 and 1814 as constituting the birth of the modern concept of insurgency. The United States ended the nineteenth century embroiled in a counterinsurgency campaign of its own in the Philippines. In this operation, which began as part of the larger Spanish-American War, U.S. forces fought for fifteen years before the insurrection was finally defeated. As exemplified by these cases, prior to the twentieth century, insurgencies or guerrilla wars were most often efforts by indigenous populations to preserve pre-existing political, social, or cultural arrangements in the face of foreign conquest or intervention.

During the twentieth century, insurgencies began to take on a more revolutionary or ideological character. Prior to World War II, insurgencies were often motivated by a desire to end foreign rule. Even while embracing national self-determination in some contexts, the western imperial powers simultaneously engaged in regular and irregular warfare in the defense of their empires. During the Cold War, and particularly after extensive European decolonization during the 1950s, insurgencies often took on a more ideological character.[31] The United States and the Soviet Union selectively supported either insurgent forces or the incumbent government, depending on the nature of the struggle.

Mao Zedong led a successful communist insurgency against the Chinese Nationalist government during the 1930s and 1940s, culminating in the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Building on that success, for more than twenty years, Mao sponsored and supported communist insurgencies in a number of Asian nations. These were successful in former French Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos) but unsuccessful in a number of others (Malaya, Burma, Indonesia, and the Philippines). In the Philippines, a small communist insurgency sputters on but is overshadowed by a larger, more virulent Islamic insurgency, largely in the southern part of the country.

Insurgencies in the first decade after the Cold War and into the early twenty-first century have much in common with insurgencies in previous periods but also manifest some potentially significant differences. In terms of continuity, as discussed above, insurgencies occur in contexts of contested political legitimacy. They are also more likely to occur in situations in which the perceived relative deprivation of particular groups in society is particularly high.[32] The uneven effects of globalization could aggravate perceptions of relative deprivation, as those

facing persistent poverty and underdevelopment are increasingly aware of the living conditions of those who are better off.

Although they share elements of continuity with those of the past, insurgencies in the current era often exhibit new characteristics.[33] A first new characteristic relates to the *underlying circumstances* out of which insurgencies grow. U.S. military doctrine argues that post–Cold War insurgencies "typically emerged from civil wars or the collapse of states no longer propped up by Cold War rivalries. . . . Similar conditions exist when regimes are changed by force or circumstances."[34] When insurgencies flow from conditions of state collapse, state failure, or forcible regime change, a counterinsurgency must build "political order and legitimacy where these conditions may no longer exist."[35]

A second new characteristic relates to the *goals of insurgent forces*. Since the end of the Cold War,

> ideologies based on extremist forms of religious or ethnic identities have replaced ideologies based on secular revolutionary ideals. These new forms of old, strongly held beliefs define the identities of the most dangerous combatants in these new internal wars. These conflicts resemble the wars of religion in Europe before and after the Reformation of the 16th century. People have replaced nonfunctioning national identities with traditional sources of unity and identity.[36]

To the extent that insurgent groups are organized around fundamental aspects of identity and religion, compromise and ultimate political reconciliation will be more difficult.[37]

A third noteworthy characteristic of contemporary insurgencies is their *transnational nature*. As discussed above, during the Cold War the international dimension of insurgencies often consisted of the external involvement of the superpowers or their allies in internal conflicts that had an ideological dimension. These transnational connections have become more complex and extensive over time, enabled by communication technologies and driven by many of the same processes that constitute globalization. For example, through "the internet, insurgents can now link virtually with allied groups throughout a state, a region, and even the entire world."[38] In a prime example, al-Qa'ida draws on local grievances and may either support or participate in internal conflicts as a means of furthering a worldwide, revolutionary agenda. This situation has led some policy makers and analysts to highlight the existence of a new "global insurgency."[39] According to U.S. military doctrine, combating "such enemies requires a global, strategic response—one that addresses the array of linked resources and conflicts that sustain these movements while tactically addressing the local grievances that feed them."[40]

Insurgencies around the world can affect U.S. national security in at least two basic ways. First, as discussed in the opening of this chapter, given modern technology, it is increasingly the case that challenges of governance in any region of the world can have direct implications for the security of the U.S. homeland. Second, as the world's only remaining superpower, the United States has global interests as well as the capability—and some would say responsibility—to play a

leading role in fostering peace and stability in the international system. The internal and external instability that flow from insurgency constitute an important challenge to international security.

Counterinsurgency and U.S. National Security

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, counterinsurgency operations are of great significance to U.S. national security in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Iraq War alone has entailed an enormous commitment of U.S. resources, and the outcome has potentially weighty consequences. The bipartisan and independent Iraq Study Group pointed out the potential repercussions of a U.S. failure in Iraq:

> A slide toward chaos could trigger the collapse of Iraq's government and a humanitarian catastrophe. Neighboring countries could intervene. Sunni-Shia clashes could spread. Al-Qa'ida could win a propaganda victory and expand its base of operations. The global standing of the United States could be diminished. Americans could become more polarized.[41]

Developments within Iraq have significance for Afghanistan as well as the region as a whole, because a collapse in Iraq could possibly trigger a broader war or the spread of sectarian strife across state borders. In addition to grave consequences in human terms, increased instability could impinge upon the flow of oil from the region, with serious consequences for the global economy.[42] Arguing that "Iraq is a centerpiece of American foreign policy," the Iraq Study Group found that in Iraq "the United States is facing one of its most difficult and significant international challenges in decades."[43]

In addition to the importance of contemporary counterinsurgency campaigns, it is also useful to look at this type of operation in depth because of what the U.S. experience in Iraq illuminates about general difficulties the United States faces in meeting irregular challenges to American national security. Relevant issues include the appropriateness and the adequacy of the capabilities and capacities of individual U.S. government organizations and agencies; the need for effective, extensive interagency cooperation; the costs of the operations; the requirement for domestic support; and the need for conflict termination planning.

Counterinsurgency Principles. Every insurgency is likely to have unique characteristics, with their character at least partially "determined by specific historical and cultural circumstances."[44] Nevertheless, U.S. military doctrine argues that basic counterinsurgency principles of general utility can be drawn from historical experience:[45]

- *Legitimacy Is the Main Objective.* What constitutes political legitimacy will vary to some degree according to social, political, and historical context. Nevertheless, the primary purpose of counterinsurgency operations is to buttress the legitimacy of the supported government, and all actions must be informed by this aim.

- *Unity of Effort Is Essential*. As discussed above, a counterinsurgency is not solely a military operation. Where possible, civilian and military counterinsurgency resources should be under a common authority. Military commanders at all levels must coordinate extensively with other government agencies, host-nation forces and agencies, intergovernmental organizations, and even nongovernmental organizations to integrate and synchronize counterinsurgency efforts.
- *Political Factors Are Primary.* Keeping in mind that the main goal of counterinsurgent forces is to establish or buttress the legitimacy of the supported government, political factors must receive foremost consideration in the conduct of operations: "military actions conducted without proper analysis of their political effects will at best be ineffective and at worst aid the enemy."[46]
- *Counterinsurgents Must Understand the Environment.* The goal of counterinsurgency operations and the complex environment in which they take place make it necessary for counterinsurgent forces to have an in-depth understanding of the cultural, social, and political characteristics of their environment, as well as an understanding of important actors and groups and who exercises power and how.
- *Intelligence Drives Operations.* To have the proper effects, the actions of counterinsurgents operating at all levels must be informed by reliable, timely, and detailed intelligence reporting: "With good intelligence, a counterinsurgent is like a surgeon cutting out the cancers while keeping the vital organs intact."[47]
- *Insurgents Must Be Isolated from Their Cause and Support.* Although killing insurgents may be important in a specific situation, to succeed over the long term, counterinsurgent forces must isolate insurgents from material or ideological sources of support from local and international sources. To do this, counterinsurgents may use physical, informational, diplomatic, or legal means.
- *Security under the Rule of Law Is Essential.* The security of the population is essential to the legitimacy of the supported government. Bringing security to the population will require "clear and hold" operations much more frequently than "search and destroy" operations. Counterinsurgent forces should seek to transition from combat operations to police enforcement as rapidly as possible, ensuring that the actions of forces supporting the government are consistent with the rule of law.
- *Counterinsurgents Should Prepare for Long-Term Commitment.* Insurgencies have typically been protracted forms of conflict. Because the population is more likely to give its allegiance to the government when it has a high estimation of the determination and staying power of counterinsurgent forces and their prospects for success, a long-term commitment may be needed.

In addition to these principles, U.S. military doctrine recognizes a number of imperatives for U.S. forces. These include managing information and expectations, using the appropriate level of force, learning and adapting, empowering the lowest levels, and supporting the host nation.[48] These principles and imperatives

contain significant lessons for military forces participating in counterinsurgency operations, demanding restraint, intellectual agility, and good judgment at all levels of leadership.

Counterinsurgency Challenges. Historical as well as contemporary examples of U.S. involvement in counterinsurgency efforts, including those in "Southeast Asia, Latin America, Africa, and now in Southwest Asia and the Middle East," reveal a number of challenges. Many of these are not just characteristic of counterinsurgency operations but are likely to be evident in other forms of military intervention in response to irregular challenges. Because of the intensive ground force requirements of counterinsurgency operations, this section focuses more on the Army and to some extent the Marine Corps than the other military services. However, all the U.S. military services face challenges in reorienting from a Cold War focus toward capabilities needed against irregular challenges.[49]

Military Doctrine and Training. The preface to the 2006 Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual argues, "Counterinsurgency operations have been neglected in broader American military doctrine and national security policies since the end of the Vietnam War over 30 years ago."[50] One reason is that consensus has rarely existed in the United States regarding strategy, doctrine, and operational concepts for effectively dealing with what many have long regarded as low-level conflicts.

At the level of the military services, reasons for neglect may include institutional interest and organizational culture, and the two are intertwined in a complex fashion. Capturing both of these dynamics to some extent, Carl Builder argues that the Army's traditional self-concept as the nation's obedient handyman ready to serve whatever purposes the country's political leaders gave to it was skewed by World War II. Having experienced during that war a form of warfare in which it excelled, the Army ran the risk of overoptimizing against the challenge of high-intensity, conventional combat. This would serve institutional needs and cultural preferences but also entail risk: "[I]f the Army . . . cannot successfully intervene against third-world forces to preserve American interests, many will be surprised and quick to remonstrate with the Army for the inadequacies in its planning, training, doctrine, and equipment."[51] Even during the Vietnam War itself, some see evidence of insufficient adaptation. Andrew Krepinevich argues that an overly strict adherence to the "Army Concept," a belief that the U.S. Army should focus on midintensity, conventional war and rely heavily on firepower to keep casualties down, prevented the Army from adopting appropriate counterinsurgency tactics in Vietnam.[52]

The experience of U.S. ground forces in Iraq after the spectacular initial success of the 2003 invasion suggests that, in addition to being there in adequate numbers, they again faced a situation for which they were not entirely prepared in terms of doctrine or training. Influential critic Nigel Aylwin-Foster, given voice in one of the military's own professional journals, argues that although the U.S. "Army is

indisputably the master of conventional warfighting, it is notably less proficient in . . . Operations Other Than War."[53] Recognizing that U.S. challenges immediately following the invasion stemmed from a variety of sources, Aylwin-Foster argues that the actions of U.S. ground forces were also partly to blame for the growth of an Iraqi insurgency in 2004. Citing the statistic that only 6% of U.S. pacification operations in Iraq from May 2003 to May 2005 were focused specifically on providing security to the population, he claims that the U.S. Army was culturally insensitive, overly focused on killing insurgents, and too slow to adapt.[54]

Since that time, as evidenced by the publication of the new counterinsurgency manual, there have been vigorous and broad efforts to respond to the requirements of contemporary insurgency in terms of doctrine and training.[55] However, concerns remain over the extent to which such learning will endure beyond the end of U.S. involvement in its campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. To be enduring, change will need to be supported over an extended period of time by key leaders within the organization who ensure that it is institutionalized in doctrine, training, organizational structures, equipment acquisition, and personnel incentive systems.[56]

The Ground Force Capacity of the U.S. All-Volunteer Military. According to the 2006 counterinsurgency manual, "maintaining security in an unstable environment requires vast resources, whether host nation, U.S., or multinational."[57] This requirement applies not only to counterinsurgency but also to other forms of U.S. military operations against irregular challenges in which stability is a desired goal. Depending on the contributions of allies or coalition partners and the status of a supported country's security institutions, the required U.S. contribution may be significant. In the absence of a U.S. national police force, this requirement falls primarily on U.S. ground forces.

The U.S. armed forces that have to meet this requirement have, until very recently, been shrinking for the past thirty-five years. Since the Vietnam War, the overall number of American men and women on active duty has fallen from 3.5 million to 1.4 million. The U.S. Army, the country's primary force for protracted land campaigns, declined from 1.6 million troops in 1968 to just over four hundred eighty thousand at the time of the September 11, 2001, attacks. These cuts in the U.S. armed forces have been a nonpartisan affair, with the Army shrinking from eighteen divisions to twelve under President George H. W. Bush and then to ten under President Bill Clinton.

Although the end of the Cold War made these force reductions understandable, U.S. military operations abroad accelerated in the 1990s, with commensurate strain on a smaller force. As discussed in Chapter 3, this strain and resulting military readiness problems became an issue in the 2000 presidential campaign. Questions about the adequacy of ground forces to support the U.S. national security strategy became even more frequent after the U.S.-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. In January 2007, newly confirmed Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced a recommended increase of ninety-two thousand ground forces—a number that would bring the Army and Marine Corps to end strengths of "547,000 and 202,000, respectively, by 2012."[58]

Although these additions will help the Army and Marine Corps manage future requirements, U.S. national security commitments have currently placed major strains on U.S. ground forces. Most of the Army's forty-four combat brigades have seen two or more combat tours between late 2001 and 2008, with many units having four combat tours. This strain was exacerbated when tours were lengthened to fifteen months and the "dwell time" between combat tours was reduced to only twelve months.[59] The standard had previously been that a soldier should have at least twenty-four months at home between twelve-month deployments.

Due to these on-going requirements, the Army and Marine Corps have enormous challenges in the retaining of junior officers (especially at the rank of captain), recruitment, training, readiness, and equipment maintenance.[60] The United States also faces strategic risk because, as many have observed, "[a]ll 'fully combat ready' active-duty and reserve combat units are now deployed or deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan. No fully-trained national strategic reserve brigades are now prepared to deploy to new combat operations."[61]

Existing constraints on ground forces have accelerated the use of civilian contractors, with problematic repercussions:

> The Defense Department estimates that roughly 20,000 security contractors operate in Iraq alone, the equivalent of over three Army combat brigades. . . . Unlike our soldiers and marines, these contractors are subjected to little in the way of oversight, despite the fact that counterinsurgency operations demand the highest levels of restraint on the part of counterinsurgent forces.[62]

Contractor security forces are more likely to focus on their specific purposes, such as providing security to a particular dignitary, than on the broad requirements of the overall mission, which requires that the legitimacy of the supported government and the political effects of all actions must remain foremost considerations. A heated controversy caused by the killing of nine Iraqi civilians by Blackwater contractors in Baghdad in September 2007 is representative of the problematic effect that these contractors can have on an overall U.S. counterinsurgency effort.[63]

Though the U.S. Army and Marine Corps are still among the most capable ground force organizations in the world, some analysts have begun to ask the question: "What is the maximum force utilization rate we can sustain before degrading a first rate military?"[64] According to Major General (retired) Robert Scales, "No one from the Vietnam generation would ever have foreseen that America's ground forces would be so stretched for so long without breaking."[65]

An increase in force size is one possible response to this situation, though this option is very expensive, takes time to implement, and will be a challenge to execute without unacceptably lowering recruiting standards. Further, some argue that merely increasing existing force structure constitutes an inadequate response to the requirements of today's complex contingency operations. These analysts argue that the United States should invest instead in capabilities, such

as advisor units, optimized to help the Army succeed in irregular warfare operations.[66]

As an alternative, the country's political leaders could recognize the constraints posed by the size of U.S. ground forces and adjust the goals of U.S. national security strategy and policy to better reconcile ends, ways, and means. However, the nature of the current strategic environment could make that difficult. In the words of one review of alternative futures:

> One of the major problems affecting global security—failed or failing states that could or do nurture terrorist organizations—is unlikely to disappear in the future. Although chastened by the Iraq experience, U.S. policymakers may nonetheless feel compelled to engage in stability operations or counterinsurgency, just as Bush, who promised in 2000 to get U.S. military forces out of the "nation-building" business, felt compelled to send forces into Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.[67]

Without a renewal of conscription, which will not occur absent a major catastrophe, American policy makers will need to keep limitations in available ground forces in mind as they make decisions regarding future large-scale or long-term military interventions.

U.S. Government Agency Capability and Capacity and the Interagency Process. A recurring theme in current U.S. military doctrine is that military force may be necessary, but will alone be insufficient, in planning and executing successful U.S. responses to many irregular challenges to American national security. Instead, the United States must also bring diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of power to bear to be successful in interventions, such as peace operations, stability operations, and counterinsurgency. In an apparent affirmation of this perspective, the 2006 Iraq Study Group's "most important recommendations" were for "enhanced diplomatic and political efforts in Iraq and the region."[68]

To play their needed role, organizations and agencies across the U.S. government must have the *capability* to operationally deploy and the *capacity* to perform these functions at the required scale. As one study states: "While the U.S. military is unmatched in terms of its effectiveness, capabilities, and reach, the U.S. government lacks a standing, deployable capacity for stability operations in non-DoD agencies."[69] The study goes on to note that "recent changes in U.S. interventions—increased operational tempo, rapid success on the battlefield, and an ever-expanding list of post-conflict objectives—have dramatically increased the need for rapid civilian deployments."[70] In the absence of civilian agency capability, military units are often put in charge of performing a broad array of tasks, relating to economic, social, and political development, for which they may not have the requisite expertise and which further stretches military resources.[71]

This dynamic helps explain why emphasis on the need to develop civilian capabilities and capacity in these areas often comes from the U.S. military and

defense analysts.[72] Gates made this a personal priority. In a November 2007 speech, he said:

> My message is that if we are to meet the myriad challenges around the world in the coming decades, the country must strengthen other important elements of national power both institutionally and financially, and create the capability to integrate all the elements of national power to problems and challenges abroad. . . . One of the most important lessons of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is that military success is not sufficient to win: economic development, institution-building and the rule of law, promoting internal reconciliation, good governance, providing basic services to the people, training and equipping indigenous military and police forces, strategic communications, and more—these, along with security, are essential ingredients for long-term success.[73]

Gates went on to note that the U.S. military had sought to meet many of these needs in the absence of civilian partners and argued that much of the resulting organizational learning on the part of the military would need to be retained and institutionalized. Nevertheless, these efforts were "no replacement for the real thing—civilian involvement and expertise."[74] Though the State Department responded positively to Gates's ideas and increased the number of diplomats assigned to partner with military commanders, significant needs remain unmet.[75]

Beyond organizational capability and capacity, the effectiveness of the interagency process is also essential. Interagency coordination in response to crises or even in the management of ongoing operations still largely takes place on an ad hoc basis. As discussed in Chapter 9, there is no single, unified national security apparatus with the capability to plan, manage, and control all national security-related spending. Also, as discussed in Chapter 10, the interagency process has continued to expand and grow more complex over time as new functions and entities have been added to the U.S. government to respond to new national security needs. Recommendations to improve U.S. government effectiveness in interagency cooperation have included proposals to further institutionalize strategic planning, to clarify presidential national security guidance, to define interagency roles and responsibilities, and to develop more robust mechanisms to strengthen connections among "policy, resource allocation, and execution."[76]

Costs of Operations. As discussed above, counterinsurgency operations may require the devotion of enormous resources. Through Fiscal Year 2008, funding for the Iraq War alone reached $608 billion.[77] As of 2009, U.S. military casualties included over four thousand two hundred dead and over thirty thousand wounded.[78] Among the wounded are many who have suffered life-changing injuries and face long-term disability. These numbers do not include the much smaller number of U.S. civilian or contractor personnel casualties.

As important as these budgetary and casualty figures are, they do not capture the full range of costs that are associated with a large-scale American military intervention. Additional important costs include: diplomatic costs in the event that an American military intervention lacks strong multilateral support; the time and focus required of U.S. national security policy makers, which may come at the

expense of other national security priorities; domestic costs relating to public trust in political leaders and government institutions if interventions do not succeed; possible stresses on the Constitutional balance between government institutions created by a long war; the effect of a U.S. intervention on international or regional peace and stability; the impact on lives or government finances of U.S. coalition partners; and the impact on lives and property in the target country. These costs will vary in every conflict. For example, successful interventions could have beneficial effects on the reputation and influence of the U.S. government abroad or the domestic political standing of the country's leaders. Nevertheless, the potential importance of such costs is worthy of evaluation as national security policy makers seek to choose between various courses of action.

Public Support. One of the principles of counterinsurgency operations, discussed above, is the need for a long-term commitment. Regarding the U.S. intervention in Iraq, Ryan Crocker, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, reaffirmed this general principle in his September 2007 testimony to Congress, stating that, although it would be possible for the United States to achieve its goal of a "secure, stable democratic Iraq at peace with its neighbors," the "process will not be quick, it will be uneven, punctuated by setbacks as well as achievements, and it will require substantial U.S. resolve and commitment."[79] Although the link between domestic public opinion and government policy is not simple or direct, a major challenge for policy makers is sustaining U.S. commitment over the long term as a majority of Americans oppose the Iraq War.[80]

In Chapter 2, it was suggested that Americans have traditionally approached national security affairs with a degree of impatience and that protracted limited wars do not fit this temper. The U.S. historical experience provides some interesting precedents for sustaining protracted military interventions abroad. Declining U.S. public support was a driving factor in the U.S. military withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973 and the U.S. withdrawal from Somalia in 1994. On the other hand, even after policy makers claimed that the operation would last for only one year, the United States sustained a military commitment in Bosnia for ten years beginning in 1995 with little public attention or opposition. Similarly, an extended U.S. intervention in Afghanistan that began in 2001 still received approval from a majority of Americans near the end of 2007.[81] Of course, in a prime example of patience, the American public stood fast in the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union for more than forty years. This brief survey suggests that, although sustained U.S. public support should not be taken for granted, it may be achievable, depending on the circumstances.

Conflict Termination. A final challenge, related to many of those above, is *conflict termination.* Successful conflict termination is necessary because, to paraphrase Carl von Clausewitz, the best way to judge military operations is by the success of the whole. Tactical and operational victories may not be adequate to the achievement of the country's political purposes; planning for and resourcing those actions necessary to bring a particular intervention to a successful close are also critical.[82]

U.S. military doctrine published in 2006 makes it clear that the supported commander "must work closely with the civilian leadership to ensure a clearly defined national end state is established." This end state should be "the broadly expressed diplomatic, informational, military, and economic conditions that should exist after the conclusion of a campaign or operation." With regard to the effect of this end state on military planning, "[t]ermination of operations must be considered from the outset of planning and should be a coordinated OGA [Other Government Agency], IGO [intergovernmental organization], NGO [nongovernmental organization], and multinational effort that is refined as operations move toward advantageous termination." Finally, with regard to setting expectations, U.S. military doctrine argues that "military operations will normally continue after the conclusion of sustained combat operations. Stability operations will be required to enable legitimate civil authority and attain the national strategic end state. These stability operations historically have required an extended presence by U.S. military forces."[83]

Though U.S. military doctrine seems closely attuned to the requirements of conflict termination, doctrine itself may be more or less meaningful according to the extent to which it is embodied in the actual practices of the organizations it is meant to guide. Realization of this doctrinal vision will also require cooperative involvement by the country's political leaders and other agencies within the U.S. government, as well as compliance by the DoD and the military services.

The Beginnings of Reform

Since 2004, the U.S. government has made deliberate efforts toward reorganizing U.S. intervention capacity and capabilities, particularly within the State Department and DoD. One of the major efforts has been a collaborative effort between the State Department and DoD to develop common tasks and objectives for stability and reconstruction operations. In 2004, the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) was formed in the Department of State with the mission to "lead, coordinate and institutionalize U.S. Government civilian capacity to prevent or prepare for post-conflict situations, and to help stabilize and reconstruct societies in transition from conflict or civil strife, so that they can reach a sustainable path toward peace, democracy and a market economy."[84] Despite the potential value of its functions, to date, limited resources have mostly restricted its efforts to improve coordination and planning.[85]

Change within the DoD has been perhaps more significant. In February 2005, President George W. Bush issued an Executive Directive to the DoD that ordered all armed services to improve their stability and reconstruction capabilities and capacities to levels commensurate with their traditional prowess at major combat operations.[86] In response, the DoD developed and issued Directive 3000.05, which states that stability operations are a "core U.S. military mission that the Department of Defense shall be prepared to conduct and support."[87]

In spite of these notable efforts to reform and reorganize for more effective U.S. intervention policy, many challenges remain in seeking to create more effective intervention capabilities within the U.S. government. In particular, anemic

funding and resource allocations to U.S. government agencies other than the DoD have limited the effectiveness of efforts to create expanded civilian capabilities. As a consequence, U.S. intervention policy still largely relies on the military—an approach that seems increasingly unable to respond to the national security challenges of the twenty-first century.

Looking Ahead

In the decades since the end of the Cold War, limitations in U.S. intervention capability have become all too apparent. Failures to secure, stabilize, and reconstruct in the wake of otherwise successful initial combat operations have been matched by failures to adequately perform similar functions at home in the aftermath of such disasters as Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (see Chapter 6). Unfortunately, these challenges seem unlikely to diminish in the future. As the 2005 Council on Foreign Relations task force report notes, "In today's world of failed states, terrorism, proliferation, and civil conflict, the trend is clear: The United States will often be drawn into complex situations when they affect its national security or its conscience."[88] The United States has taken initial steps to create more robust intervention capabilities, but the effectiveness of even these initial steps remains unproven. There is undoubtedly still a long way to go.

Discussion Questions

1. What is an *irregular challenge* to U.S. national security? How is this category of threats useful to defense policy makers?
2. To what extent are irregular challenges to U.S. national security of increasing importance in the early twenty-first century? Why or why not?
3. What types of military operations might the United States employ against irregular challenges? Under what circumstances is each likely to be appropriate?
4. How has the nature of insurgency changed over time? What are some of the important characteristics of contemporary insurgencies?
5. What does historical experience suggest are principles of counterinsurgency operations? Which of these are most important? Under what circumstances do these factors vary?
6. What challenges are the United States likely to continue to face in counterinsurgency operations? Are these challenges relevant to other types of military operations? Why or why not?
7. Does the United States have adequate nonmilitary capabilities to deal with the irregular national security challenges of the twenty-first century? What could be done to improve these capabilities?

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Internet Resources

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U.S. Department of Defense, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, March 2005, www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2005/d20050318nds.pdf