

## Counterinsurgency and Military Culture: State Regulars versus Non-State Irregulars

By Robert M. Cassidy\*

*“Any good soldier can handle guerrillas.”*  
Krepinevich, 1986:37

*“Our enemies understand that irregular warfare  
is the bane of regular military traditions.”*  
Cassidy, 2007:44

The first quote is attributed to the U.S. Army Chief of Staff during 1961 when the U.S. Army was on the verge of escalating its commitment to help fight insurgents in the jungles of Vietnam. The officer to whom the first quote is attributed was steeped in the conventions of regular Army forces' organization, training, and education. The second quote is an inference about the difficulties that obtain when big power militaries attempt to fight against irregular adversaries without adapting their methods to meet the exigencies of irregular warfare. U.S. military operations in Somalia from 1992 to 1994 under the aegis of the UN saw the operation evolve from peace enforcement into what was essentially irregular warfare in and around Mogadishu. By June 1993, U.S. Soldiers and Marines were fighting a counter-guerrilla war against Mohammed Farah Aideed's irregulars. The October 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup>, 1993, battle in Mogadishu was the culminating battle which saw U.S. regular and elite infantry battalions, along with special operators, fighting out of the city against swarming irregulars. In fact, the battle in Mogadishu that night represented the most intense light infantry battle experienced by the U.S. Army since Vietnam at that time. Rangers, special operators, and the infantrymen of the 10th Mountain Division acquitted themselves with courage and élan in the most difficult of circumstances. However, the ultimate outcome of Somalia, where the U.S. pulled its military forces out, would seem to refute the veracity of the first quote above and attest to the merit of the second one. In Somalia, American forces possessed a technological advantage and an ostensible numerical advantage in regular military formations. Yet in this first

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experiment with irregular warfare after the end of the Cold War, the big conventional war military cultural orientation of the American military was manifest, as it had for many years almost exclusively focused on regular or, conventional war. The regular military forces of the U.S. faced Somali indigenous forces which employed the irregular methods of the insurgent.

## 1. Military culture

This article postulates that one would observe continuity in American military cultural preferences for big conventional wars for up to a decade after the Cold War ended because not enough time elapsed between the end of the Cold War and the Somalia intervention for military cultural change to occur, it normally takes from five to ten years. Organizational culture is defined as the pattern of assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that prescribe how a group should adapt to its external environment and manage its internal structure. Military culture can therefore generally be defined as the embedded preferences within a military organization that shape that organization's preferences on when and how the military instrument should be used. It is derived or developed as a result of historical experience, geography, and political culture. Core leaders inculcate it and perpetuate but it is most pronounced at the operational level because when armies have met with success in war, it is the operational techniques and the operational histories, by which enemies were defeated, which are consecrated in memory. Because cultural preferences tend to value certain roles and to devalue other roles, military culture can impede innovation in ways of warfare that lie outside that military's preferred core roles. Thus, one would expect to observe continuity in military preferences for the use of force in Somalia, and that these preferences would reflect an emphasis on organizing, training, and equipping for regular war. This paper will show that during the first post-Cold operation that pitted the U.S. military against irregular adversaries, its big war military culture exhibited an almost exclusive preference for regular (conventional) war, a concomitant aversion to irregular warfare, a propensity to use maximum force, and a reliance on technology. This paper initially explores emerging American doctrinal concepts for irregular war, the impetus for which did not emerge until a decade after Somalia, when the growing insurgency in Iraq finally compelled the U.S. military to seriously adapt to counterinsurgency. The second section examines how American military cultural preferences manifested themselves during

operations in Somalia. The final section concludes with some implications for the U.S. military and future irregular wars (Weigley, 1973:vii; Kier, 1995:66; Klein, 1991:5-6, 10, 13; Cassidy, 2004:7-10).

### **1.1 Irregular war**

Irregular warfare is a complex and ambiguous social phenomenon that does not engender neat and precise definition. It is a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. The nature of irregular warfare requires national governments and militaries to achieve levels of unified action that are capable of integrating all available instruments of national power to address irregular threats. Irregular warfare does not rely solely on military prowess, as it also requires a sound foundation and understanding of tribal politics, social networks, religious influences, and cultural mores. People, not platforms and advanced technology, are crucial to success in irregular warfare. Irregular warfare represents a typology of armed conflict that has replaced “low-intensity conflict” (LIC), the previous term used to categorize these types of endeavours within the American military doctrinal lexicon. Irregular warfare is a form of warfare that encompasses insurgency, counterinsurgency, terrorism, and counterterrorism, placing them on an equal footing with regular armed warfare and disabusing the military cultural perception that they are somehow a lesser form of conflict, below the threshold of warfare. What makes irregular warfare distinct from regular warfare is an operational focus on relevant populations and a strategic purpose that seeks to gain influence over and the support of those relevant populations. In other words, irregular warfare focuses on the legitimacy of a political authority to control or influence a relevant population (USSOCOM and USMC, 2007:1, 6-7).

On the one hand, conventional or “regular“ warfare is a form of warfare between states that employs direct military operations to defeat an adversary’s armed forces, destroy an adversary’s war-making capacity, or seize territory in order to compel a change in an adversary’s government or policies. The focus of conventional military operations is normally an adversary’s armed forces with the objective of influencing the adversary’s government. The regular warfare model generally assumes that the indigenous populations within the operational area are non-belligerents and will accept whatever political outcome the belligerent governments impose

or negotiate. A fundamental military imperative in conventional military operations is to minimize civilian interference in those operations. On the other hand, irregular warfare focuses on the control or influence of indigenous populations, and not necessarily on the destruction of an adversary's forces or the seizure of his territory. Irregular warfare is essentially a political struggle with violent and non-violent components. The fundamental imperative for irregular warfare is the centrality of the relevant populations to the nature of the conflict. The belligerents in irregular warfare, whether they are states or non-state armed groups, seek to undermine their adversaries' legitimacy and to physically and psychologically isolate their adversaries from the relevant populations and their external supporters. Simultaneously, they also seek to bolster their own legitimacy and their capacity to exercise authority over that same population (USSOCOM and USMC, 2007:7-8).

U.S. Army doctrine now equally weighs operations such as irregular warfare and stability operations that focus on the population with those related to offensive and defensive operations. This parity reflects a significant paradigm change: it recognizes that twenty-first century conflict comprises more than regular combat between armed opponents. Even though current doctrine still charges land forces to defeat enemies with offensive and defensive operations, U.S. Army forces will have to simultaneously shape the broader situation through non-lethal actions to restore security and normalcy for the local population. "Soldiers operate among populations, not adjacent to them or above them" (U.S. Army, 2008:vii). Army forces will often confront the enemy among non-combatants, with little to distinguish one from the other, until fighting erupts. Winning battles will still remain important but it alone is not sufficient. Winning the support of the indigenous population is just as important for success. Informing and influencing the populace is crucial to successful mission accomplishment. Finally, within the context of the current global security environment, the current U.S. doctrine professes that irregular warfare and stability operations are often "as important as, or more important than," regular combat operations (U.S. Army, 2008:vii). This certainly was not always the case.

The equal emphasis on irregular warfare and stability operations that is currently manifest within the U.S. Government and the U.S. military stemmed from policy and strategy changes between 2005 and 2007. One of

these documents merits some amplification. On November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Department of Defence Directive (DODD) 3000.05, *Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations* mandated stability operations as a core U.S. military mission that the Department of Defence would prepare to conduct and support. It prescribed that stability operations would be given priority comparable to combat operations and be explicitly integrated across all activities to include doctrine, organizations, training, education, exercises, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and planning. The directive also mandated the incorporation of stability operations knowledge skills, such as foreign language capabilities, regional area expertise, and experience with foreign governments and international organizations, into professional military education at all levels. The document essentially dictated that the U.S. Department of Defence and the U.S. Army emphasize stability operations and counterinsurgency doctrine, education, and training, at levels commensurate with conventional combat operations (U.S. DOD, 2005:1-4).

Therefore, U.S. military culture placed an almost exclusive emphasis on doctrine, training, and education for regular wars. The American military cultural aversion to counterinsurgency and irregular warfare before 2004 is illuminated in the next section. As late as 2003, the stability operations and counterinsurgency-phobic U.S. Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, was about to close down the U.S. Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI) at Carlisle Barracks because he did not see the utility of this institute. However, the expanding insurgency in Iraq during late 2003 provided the impetus to compel the U.S. military to take irregular warfare more seriously. DODD 3000.05 was the official catalyst for an increase in intellectual energy and focus on those operations that the U.S. Army previously labelled, with an intention to diminish them it then seemed, low intensity conflict (LIC). The proximate intellectual genesis of the DODD 3000.05 document ostensibly was two conferences in 2003 and 2004.

In the middle of December 2003, the Operation Iraqi Freedom Lesson Learned Conference at Fort Leavenworth convened a Stability Operations Working Group. All the other working groups at the conference had as their foci the conventional operations during the initial invasion of Iraq, before events deteriorated into a burgeoning insurgency. Having just completed a manuscript on American military culture and stability operations, and having just recently returned from Iraq, I was an influential

participant in this group and our findings were essentially those that ultimately informed DODD 3000.05: to compel U.S. military cultural change to embrace and value stability operations/counterinsurgency as central and valued missions, to be reflected in a balance of regular and irregular doctrine, training, and education. The other conference was the fifteenth annual Army War College Strategy conference that convened between April 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004, entitled *Winning the War by Winning the Peace*. As a speaker on a panel there, I underscored again the imperative of better emphasizing counterinsurgency in professional military education, beginning with pre-commissioning curricula through war-college-level curricula. The reasons why the U.S. Department of Defence found it necessary to mandate the changes in DODD 3000.05 are illuminated forthwith (Matthews, 2004:48-50).

## 2. An American military cultural preference for regular warfare

*“War is death and destruction. The American way of war is particularly violent, deadly and dreadful. We believe in using ‘things’ – artillery, bombs, massive firepower – in order to conserve our soldiers’ lives. The enemy, on the other hand, made up for his lack of ‘things’ by expending men instead of machines, and he suffered enormous casualties.”* (Weyand and Summers, 1976:3)

The above quote came from the last Military Assistance Command (MACV) in Vietnam, General Fred Weyand. The principal problem with a predilection for big conventional war was that the U.S. Army would retain the mindset, the organization, and the forces suited to a large-scale regular war that would likely not transpire, while neglecting to properly adapt itself to conduct simultaneous irregular operations of the kind that occur with increasing regularity. The American paradigm for war as it emerged after the world wars focused around a strong strategic and tactical offensive, including full domestic mobilization, and employing use of the full suite of military resources that America can leverage. A RAND study from the 1990s identified five very salient U.S. Army cultural characteristics as impediments to planning and innovation. These characteristics were: a preference for close-combat manoeuvre; the centrality of the division; a big-war predilection, a big-army mindset; and defence against all enemies, preferably foreign. In elaborating even further, this RAND study explained that the big-army mindset was a "relatively recent acquisition, since for much of its history the U.S. Army was both small and generally behind

European armies technologically and doctrinally” (Dewar Presentation, 1994). However, before it even became a large Army it exuded a large army mindset, borrowing technology and doctrine from Europe. It was this predilection that laid the foundation for the development of a big-army mentality during World War II and the Cold War. The U.S. Army became larger and technologically superior to most of its competitors during the Cold War. The Army's training and development base expanded and developed advanced training paradigms techniques and doctrine, such as Air Land Battle, that exploited new technologies at least as effectively as any other army in the world. The Persian Gulf War of 1991 simply validated the big-war mindset (Dewar Presentation, 1994). A culturally embedded big-army mindset, the report presciently concluded, “could represent very expensive impediments to the Army's post-Cold War adjustment” (Dewar Presentation, 1994).

Ultimately, this cogent RAND analysis of Army culture concluded that a continued cultural preference for big wars would possibly undermine the U.S. Army's ability to develop capabilities for: (1) countering insurgencies and terrorism as well as conducting peace operations; (2) suppressing domestic unrest and closing borders effectively; and (3) responding rapidly for small, self-sustaining force elements in crisis situations (Dewar Presentation, 1994). An earlier RAND report, published toward the end of the Vietnam War in 1970, analyzed the U.S. Army's concept of war and explained that the concept had not changed as a result of the U.S. experience in Vietnam: “war is regarded as a series of conventional battles between two armies in which one side will lose and, accepting this loss as decisive, will sue for peace, ... our Army remains enemy-oriented and casualty-oriented” (Jenkins, 1970:4). This earlier study also offered a pellucid description of the difficulty that U.S. Army faced by trying to force fit its paradigm for war to Vietnam: “the Army's doctrine, its tactics, its organization, its weapons - its entire repertoire of warfare was designed for conventional war in Europe. In Vietnam, the Army simply performed its repertoire even though it was frequently irrelevant to the situation” (Jenkins, 1970:v). American military culture regarded Vietnam as an aberration, or, “an exotic interlude between the wars that really count” (Jenkins, 1970:7). However, the U.S. Army's failure to learn and absorb the right lessons from Vietnam was more disquieting, and fateful, than its failure to succeed in the Vietnam War itself (Jenkins, 1970:6-7).

There is ample research work that demonstrates the U.S. Army's preference for the big conventional war paradigm. In 1977, eminent American military historian, Russell Weigley, surveyed the pages of *Military Review*, the U.S. Army's professional journal. For the entire year 1976 worth of issues, he found almost no critical appraisal of irregular warfare (low intensity conflict, at the time). In contrast, in 1976 there appeared a preponderance of articles that examined large-scale conventional wars and World War II. Likewise, in 1981 and 1982, Weigley also discovered that professional military thought, as reflected in *Military Review* and other professional military journals, pointed to the same conclusion, a focus on World War II-style conflicts with very little critical analysis of Indochina and very little hint at the possibility of small irregular wars in the future (Weigley, 1984a:115). Furthermore, a 1989 survey that examined the 1400 articles published by *Military Review* between 1975 and 1989 discovered only 43 articles dedicated to irregular warfare (Brady, 1990:110).

In the late 1970s, the Commandant of the U.S. Army War College arranged for Colonel Harry G. Summers to be assigned there. The Commandant assigned him to write a book on Vietnam and to apply and to incorporate the findings of a previously documented report, a BDM Corporation study which had found that the U.S. Army never learned how to prosecute counterinsurgency and that it learned from Vietnam, only, the notion to avoid such interventions. Instead of applying the BDM report, however, Summers employed for his theoretical framework Karl von Clausewitz's *On War*. Consequently, the argument which Summers put forth in his book, *On Strategy: a Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, proffered conclusions that were absolutely converse to the conclusions of the BDM study. Summers concluded that the Army failed in Vietnam because it had not sufficiently focused on conventional warfare. In other words, the U.S. Army's problems in Vietnam stemmed from its deviation from the big-war approach and its temporary and very incomplete experiment with counterinsurgency. Not surprisingly, Summers' book was readily embraced by the Army culture while the BDM report drifted into obscurity. *On Strategy* was for a very long time on the Command and General Staff College, the Army War College, and the official Army professional reading lists. As an example of which study held more ostensible salience for the U.S. Army culture at the time, a 1990 survey of that U.S. Army Command and General Staff College class revealed that only six of 392 students in the class had read the BDM study (Downie, 1998:73-74; Brady, 1990:250-291).

To further confound an extant, and military-culture-filtered, misinterpretation of Vietnam, just as the end of the Cold War was making a conventional war in Europe more unlikely, the U.S. military and its coalition partners fought the Persian Gulf War. The Gulf War was perceived as a validation of the American paradigm of war, in contrast to Vietnam. The literature on the Gulf War is replete with the notion that Desert Storm was fundamentally different from Vietnam and that it represented a complete validation of the process of applying lessons learned. According to one expert on rhetoric, Vietnam became the central metaphor of American foreign policy. General Colin Powell's words to then outgoing President George H. W. Bush offered testimony to this as well: "Mr. President you have sent us in harm's way when you had to, but never lightly, never hesitantly, never with our hands tied, never without giving us what we needed to do the job" (Powell, 1995:567-568). Reviewing a conversation that he had with General Norman Schwarzkopf before the Persian Gulf War, Powell wrote that he had told Schwarzkopf that the lesson from the invasion of Panama was to "go in big and end it quickly" (Powell, 1995:487). We could not put the United States through another Vietnam, so it seemed at the time. For those who viewed the American way of war as an innate and unalterable manifestation of American strategic culture and national will, Operation Desert Storm served as the current day apotheosis (Dauber, 1998:7, 23; Atkinson, 1993:122-123).

The victory in the Gulf War only served to reinforce an American predilection for big conventional war, ironically, at the very moment when this paradigm was becoming an anachronism. Mohammed Farah Aideed, however, quickly demonstrated that a predilection for the big war paradigm can be an obstacle to success in irregular warfare – a lesson that the American military consistently refused to learn. As a result of Somalia, the 'no-more-Vietnams' mantra rapidly evolved into the 'no-more-Somalias' mantra and almost as soon as the doctrinal cognoscenti at Leavenworth conceived the new moniker of operations other than war (OOTW), this concept of OOTW essentially, and quickly, came to be perceived as things that the U.S. military would rather avoid. The Persian Gulf War, on the other hand, was a stupendous feat, "a thing we would rather do: war by the American definition" (Bolger, 1995:69). The second half of the twentieth century, therefore, pointed to another paradox: the U.S. military had trained and organized for the type of war that it would least likely fight. Arguably, this was necessary during the Cold War to balance and deter the

Soviets. However, the end of the Cold War and the lessons of Somalia should have catalyzed a shift from a regular war focus to an irregular war focus (Record, 1988:81).

## **2.1 An American military cultural aversion to irregular warfare**

As a corollary to the American military's big war preference, this almost exclusive preference had helped marginalize counterinsurgency operations and irregular warfare. According to one expert on counterinsurgency warfare, irregular war lies in the category of indirect strategy and thus differs greatly from the view of war and strategy that had dominated U.S. military thinking and experience during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The direct application of military force dominated U.S. military thinking during and after World War II; and it manifested itself in the services' inability to develop strategy and doctrine for the principal type of irregular warfare that the United States had been involved in prosecuting more consistently, counterinsurgency. The United States military has not been exceedingly forthcoming in the context of developing its doctrine and training for the operations other than the regular war arena, particularly since the end of the Vietnam era. Even though conflicts short of conventional war have become more widespread, the U.S. Army, since the end of the Vietnam War, until the first decade of the twenty-first century, has had difficulty or has resisted developing a solid doctrinal foundation for these missions. It has been argued that the U.S. Army never seriously attempted to genuinely learn how to do counterinsurgency in Vietnam and one work distilled this conspicuous absence of adaptation with a memorable comment attributed, anonymously, to an American general from the Vietnam era: "I will be damned if I will permit the United States Army, its institutions, its doctrine, and its traditions, to be destroyed just to win this lousy war" (Jenkins, 1970:3; Shultz, 1991:119-120 and 127; Beckett and Pimlott, 1985:7).

Unfortunately, as a result of the reorganization of the U.S. Army after Vietnam, its lesson learning was replaced by a realignment of responsibilities and functions and no lesson learning function carried over into the newly established U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). It merits noting that although TRADOC had then encompassed "all the essential ingredients for centralized lesson learning within it, it did not inherit any mission" to process the combat lessons

from Vietnam (Vetock, 1988:119). Also, a doctrinal shift back toward big conventional operations in Europe against the Soviets diminished any residual influence that the Vietnam era's experience-processing system might have exerted. Thus, the U.S. Army, either by default, design, or both, did not institutionalize the lessons from its most recent combat experience in Vietnam. Instead, the Army looked to research and analysis, exercises and field tests, and the historical experiences of World War II to prepare it for what it saw as the next war - a high intensity mechanized war in Europe. Propitiously, the Arab-Israeli War of 1973 served as surrogate laboratory of recent combat experience in the U.S. Army's preferred kind of war. TRADOC studied the lessons of this war very closely and incorporated those lessons into the U.S. Army's doctrine (Vetock, 1988:119-120).

Essentially, the lesson-learning system and lessons of Vietnam had not been simply forgotten: "The Army cast them aside with the revitalized NATO focus, buried them in the organizational reforms, and considered them unnecessary once the war ended" (Vetock, 1988:120). According to one assessment, "the end of American combat in Vietnam by itself would have probably doomed the wartime lesson-learning system, but the Army's post-war organizational and doctrinal changes guaranteed its demise" (Vetock, 1988:120). The war became a concluded event and a matter of history. After January 1973, "whoever sought lessons from the Vietnam War had to look backwards, historically, with the wisdom and burden of hindsight" (Vetock, 1988:120). The Army so diluted the Vietnam experience from its current memory that a 1975 Command and General Staff College version of *Infantry in Battle* included 62 case studies from the three most recent U.S. wars: greater than 50 percent were about World War II, almost 25 percent were on Korea, and less than 10 percent focused on Vietnam. What's more, as the only non-American experience analyzed in this compendium, the 1973 Yom Kippur War received coverage equal to that of the Vietnam War (Vetock, 1988:120-121).

The U.S. Army's first out-sourced examination of the Vietnam War did, however, criticize its doctrine and conduct of counterinsurgency in Vietnam. More importantly, the study reported that the Army had ignored the lessons of Vietnam, had failed to study low-intensity conflict, and needed to correct its inability to conduct counterinsurgency. Published by the BDM Corporation in June 1980 for the Army War College, this report

concluded that the U.S. Army still did not know how to conduct low-intensity conflict because the strategic lesson the U.S. learned from Vietnam was that like interventions were to be avoided. The report also maintained that the U.S. military's traditional separation between the military and political spheres significantly hindered the effective employment of military force in accomplishing objectives established by the political leadership. It reproved of an American paradigm of war aimed at the destruction of enemy forces while ignoring other complex and relevant political factors. The BDM report was essentially an indictment of the U.S. Army's conventional and inappropriate approach to Vietnam. However, this study would ultimately be shunted aside in favour of an assessment more congruous with the U.S. Army's preferred paradigm (Downie, 1998:71-73; BDM Corporation, 1980:EX-1, EX-3, EX-6, EX-8-EX-10).

In 1983, Kupperman and Associates, Inc. completed an analysis for a conceptual framework for the U.S. Army and low intensity conflict (LIC). It also tried to determine whether the Army's organization and doctrine were appropriate for emerging irregular (LIC) operations. The Kupperman Study identified a dilemma confronting the U.S. Army: extended high intensity conventional conflict in Europe dominated the Army's thinking, resource allocation, and doctrine, but it is the conflict least likely to occur. "The low-intensity conflict environment is not one for which the Army is currently prepared" (Kupperman and Associates, 1983:vi). The executive summary of the report asserted that the U.S. Army needed new organization, doctrine, tactics, and equipment "to meet successfully the foreseen challenges at this low end of the violence spectrum" (Kupperman and Associates, 1983:vi). The study found that the U.S. Army was not prepared to conduct LIC [irregular warfare] and the Army would need to develop doctrine and a force structure that would allow it to win in this environment. The Kupperman Study concluded that the Army was least prepared to fight the most likely form conflict (LIC) and best prepared for the least likely form of conflict, conventional war in Europe. Another report from 1985, the Joint Low Intensity Conflict final report arrived at almost identical findings, that the American military continually applied conventional solutions to unconventional challenges. This last report asserted that the tendency to think and apply the same prescriptions for deterring and fighting conventional wars to the various forms of unconventional wars was the greatest impediment to the development of

policy and doctrine for LIC (irregular warfare) (Kupperman and Associates, 1983:iv, vi-vii; Downie, 1998:75-77).

The seminal counterweight to Summers' *On Strategy* was Andy Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam*. In essence, it argued that the U.S. Army failed in Vietnam because it fought the war too conventionally, according to its preferred paradigm for war, and not according to the principles and tenets of counterinsurgency. Not surprisingly, the main stream culture of the U.S. military was not enamoured of this book and its conclusions. A minority of Special Forces officers and other like-minded advocates of irregular warfare (LIC) embraced the findings of Krepinevich's book while the dominant and driving majority of U.S. military culture embraced Summers' findings. *The Army and Vietnam* posited that "the Army's conduct of the war was a failure, primarily because it never realized that insurgency warfare required basic changes in Army methods to meet the exigencies of the new conflict environment" (Krepinevich, 1986:259). In attempting to overlay operational methods that were successful in previous wars, the Army focused on the attrition of enemy forces instead of denying the enemy access to the population. By focusing on perceived civilian failures and contriving criteria like the Weinberger Doctrine, instead of taking a harder look at its own failures, the U.S. Army perpetuated the fiction that its way of war remained valid across the spectrum of war. The real lessons of Vietnam were that overwhelming force does not always work; military operations cannot be divorced from politics; using military force in pursuit of less than vital national interests is feasible; and gaining and maintaining the support of the indigenous population is central to success in irregular war (Krepinevich, 1986:268-275; Mariano, 1995:2).

To be certain, U.S. Army's response to such findings on its failures in Vietnam was a military cultural one: it was to not institutionalize lessons learned there and to not create a better doctrinal approach to counterinsurgency and irregular warfare. Instead, it tried to eschew cogitation of and participation in irregular wars; to, concomitantly, resist seriously developing sound doctrine for irregular warfare; and to focus almost exclusively on the regular, orthodox, and "big war" in Europe after the suboptimal conclusion of the Vietnam War. Its institutional and cultural solution to the Vietnam imbroglio, therefore, was to embrace the notion that "we don't do Vietnams." This is all too evident in its responses

to the previously mentioned series of post-Vietnam studies that tried to answer the question: what went wrong and how can we do these wars better? The U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Creighton Abrams, the first post-Vietnam Chief, directed the Astarita group to conduct a strategic assessment to determine if a conventional strategy was appropriate to the post-Vietnam security environment. The Astarita Report shifted the U.S. Army's institutional attention away from the frustrations of Vietnam and focused the Army on readiness and deterrence issues in Europe. "The Army focused on what it could do well - conventional warfare - as opposed to something the Vietnam War proved that the Army could not do well - counterinsurgency" (Downie, 1998:70).

## **2.2 Somalia and a military cultural propensity for maximum force**

The current preference of the U.S. military is captured in the Powell Corollary to the Weinberger Doctrine: "the fast, overwhelming and decisive application of maximum force in the minimum time. Such an approach may produce effective, short-term results. It is irrelevant, probably even counter-productive, when matched against the very difficult internal problems that form the underlying problems in target countries" (Snow and Drew, 1994:325-326).

When examining the American military culture's preference for maximum force and the decision to send troops to Somalia, one thing stood out. The tenets of the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine underpinned and prescribed how many troops and how much force would be applied to achieve the political aim. One tenet of the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine stipulated that when America decided to commit military forces, that it should only use force in an overwhelming decisive manner and with the intent of winning. The Powell Corollary of "decisive force" was the notion of applying decisive force to over match adversaries and to thereby terminate conflicts swiftly. Somalia was one of the first post-Cold War American deployments under the aegis of a UN Security Council Chapter VII imprimatur that saw significant American military participation in what was not a regular, traditional, combat operation. Combining the U.S. big conventional war paradigm of war with a non-traditional humanitarian effort led to the conception of an "armed humanitarian operation," ostensibly a notion as paradoxical as applying the Weinberger Doctrine with stability operations or irregular warfare. However, the U.S. military was destined to lead the

operation and it went in armed for bear, with overwhelming force and a predetermined exit strategy before the first forces were on the way. Coupling the Weinberger criteria to a failed state's complex humanitarian emergency was analogous to employing a sledgehammer when a screwdriver was actually required (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1992:10; Bolger, 1995:279-281; Weinberger, 1984).

Robert Oakley, a crucial U.S. diplomatic player during UN operations in Somalia, confirmed this propensity pertaining to the use of military force: "the initial operation was an adaptation of the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine for peacekeeping: dominant force; clear, limited mission; exit strategy; and strong public support" (Oakley Lecture, 1999). Oakley also echoed this conviction in a book he co-authored on the subject: "The will and ability to use overwhelming force to back a peacekeeping operation (...) as the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine recommends (...) offers the greatest possibility of successfully completing a peacekeeping mission and minimizing *casualties* on all sides" (Hirsch and Oakley, 1995:162). A senior U.S. staff member intimated, despite the extant American military doctrinal principles for such operations that prescribed otherwise, that the U.S. military was intuitively uncomfortable about participating in missions in which it could not rely on overwhelming force to achieve success: "You've got to maintain some of that old war fighting approach where victory was when you were standing there with your foot on your enemy's chest" (Ellerson, 1993:13).

In 1994, after the U.S. withdrawal from Somalia, and reproving then U.S. Defence Secretary William Perry's demands for a more forceful and punitive NATO response to Bosnian Serb transgressions, the then UN Protection Force Commander, British General Michael Rose offered the argument that "bombing is a last resort because then you cross the Mogadishu Line" (*The Guardian*, 1994:27). General Rose was referring to the October 1993 fighting battle that occurred in Somalia after an expanded Chapter VII mandate induced the U.S.-dominated UN command to essentially prosecute counter-guerrilla war against Aideed's irregulars. General Rose's comment also reflected the then extant disagreement between the British and the Americans over the doctrine for such operations: the Americans were again inclined to apply maximum force while the British were averse to the prospects of such a dangerous

deviation from their traditional approach, which inclined to apply minimum force in the conduct of peace operations and counterinsurgencies. Furthermore, the imprudent and excessive use of force by U.S. forces clearly placed those forces in the middle of an ongoing civil war. Mr. Oakley seemed to concur with this interpretation: “the U.S. and the UN made Aideed the enemy by UN Security Council Resolution 837; after a no-warning helicopter gun ship attack on a peaceful meeting of some 200 senior members of Aideed’s clan on 12 July 1993, the American forces became their enemy” (Oakley Lecture, 1999).

Two experts on the U.S. operation in Somalia considered the July 12<sup>th</sup> attack helicopter raid to be one of the most controversial attacks by the U.S. Quick Reaction Force. “The effect of this raid on the Somalis was electrifying” (Daniel and Hayes, 1999:103). This excessive display of force made Aideed sympathizers out of Somalis who had not previously supported him. Subsequently, Aideed “began to assume mythical proportions to many in the country” (Daniel and Hayes, 1999:103). After examining this raid and the subsequent escalation of force, with concomitant Somali casualties and damage, the notion of exactly how not gain the support of the local population seems to be exceedingly obvious. In other words, this level of force, used in an operation that was not considered to be a regular combat operation, was antithetical to the enduring irregular war imperative to “win hearts and minds.” Just as Arc Light and napalm strikes, had, inadvertently, served rather effective recruiting aids for the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War, so to, it seemed, had the employment of American AH-1F attack helicopter missiles and AC-130 40 millimetre chain guns, fired in the densely populated slums of Mogadishu, made enemies of theretofore neutrals in Somalia (Daniel and Hayes, 1999:102-103).

Mark Bowden’s best-selling narrative on operations in Somalia, *Black Hawk Down*, offered several vignettes that helped illuminate the impact of a maximum-force approach during operations in Somalia. Bowden spent some time in Somalia talking to Somalis who had been in Mogadishu that summer:

He had deep wounds that were still healing from an American helicopter attack three months earlier, on July 12 – months before the Rangers had come Farah and the others in his clan had welcomed the UN intervention the previous December. It promised to bring stability and hope. But the mission had

gradually deteriorated into hatred and bloodshed. Ever since July 12, the Habr Gidr had been at war with America (Bowden, 1999:71).

Women walking the streets would have their colourful robes blown off. Some had infants torn from their arms by the powerful updraft [rotor wash]. On one raid, a mother screamed frantically in flex cuffs for nearly a half hour before a translator arrived to listen and to explain that her infant had been blown down the road by landing helicopters (Bowden, 1999:75).

LTG Montgomery, the U.S. forces commander under UNOSOM II, in essence conceded that the increasingly forceful responses to the Somali National Alliance (SNA) after the 5 June 1993 ambush of the Pakistanis were consistent with American military culture during the period: "It was a normal reaction to the Pakistani ambush – do something – kick some ass" (U.S. Army Peacekeeping Institute, 1994:16). Kicking some ass, however inappropriate to the nature of the operation, is just what the Quick Reaction Force started doing in the summer of 1993. Of the July raid, reporter Marguerite Michaels observed: "Blaming Aideed, the U.S. has led UN forces in an aggressive bid to flush him out, culminating in a daylight attack on a meeting of Aideed's top commanders on Monday. At the end of a 20-minute barrage of missiles and cannon fire from U.S. helicopter gun ships, dozens of bodies lay scattered around the demolished villa" (Michaels, 1993:48). LTG Montgomery also unambiguously reported that after the June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1993, SNA ambush, and subsequent to other attacks against UNOSOM II forces on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1993, the U.S./UN command "basically began a period of counter operations to protect the force and to deny Aideed's militia the opportunity to continue 'guerrilla operations' against the UN" (U.S. Army Peacekeeping Institute, 1994:16). Faintly reminiscent of U.S. military predilections during the Vietnam War, the *Montgomery Report* explained that the counter-guerrilla operations were initially aimed at the weapons cantonment sites, followed by "search and clear" operations to drive the enemy out of their enclave in South Mogadishu, near the UN forces headquarters.

Major General William Garrison, who as the commander of Task Force Ranger special operators was in the thick of the fray, had this to say when asked about the October 1993 raid by the Senate Armed Services Committee: "Speed, surprise, and overwhelming firepower are key to our method of operation." "What's more", he added, "Task Force Ranger was never pinned down. We decided to stay with the helicopter pilots that were pinned inside their aircraft. The Rangers could have fought their way out at

any time, if they had to decided to do that” (U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, 1994:4). Another analysis observed that the excessive force applied by the attack helicopters and special operations forces were conceived solely by the U.S. civilian and military leadership, which was the driving force behind UNOSOM II (Berdal, 1993:73-74). Another quote attributed to Major General Garrison some time before the October 1993 battle proved prescient afterwards, “if we go into the vicinity of the Bakara Market, there is no question we’ll win the gunfight. But we might lose the war” (Atkinson, 1994a:A1).

This overemphasis on force at the tactical level, to the detriment of strategic aims, seemed to hearken back to the U.S. approach to counterinsurgency in Vietnam, where it won many battles but lost the war. In fact, in an interview, Robert Oakley stated candidly: “it was just like Tet” (Oakley Interview, 1999). His reference alluded to the Tet Offensive in 1968 when the Viet Cong launched concerted attacks against the cities of South Vietnam but was decimated in the ensuing battles. However, the scope of the Viet Cong attacks against South Vietnam’s cities so shocked America that Tet emerged as a strategic victory for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong because it undermined the U.S. domestic support for the war. Likewise, although Task Force Ranger accomplished its raid, captured its targeted individuals, and killed hundreds of Somalis in the process, it was a Pyrrhic tactical victory because the shock of American dead, as explained below, unhinged the Somalia policy (Oakley Interview, 1999).

As events in Mogadishu demonstrated, humanitarian operations and counterinsurgency operations cannot succeed when confronted with entrenched and widespread opposition. Moreover, the forcible elimination of one of the principal factions is not a practical or effective method of fulfilling the purpose of stability-related operations. Without the broad cooperation and consent of the majority of the local population and the leadership of the principal ruling entities, success in such a complex environment is simply not a tenable or realistic prospect. The risks involved and the combat forces required for an approach that abandons a broadly legitimate framework, based on legitimacy derived from reasonably prudent application of minimum and discriminate force, render impractical most operations that might be mounted in such a context. Maintaining dialogue and cooperation with the locals and their de facto leadership is essential for any prospect of success. Succinctly stated, maintaining the

operational-level of support and consent of the population is a prerequisite for the successful conduct of operations at the nexus of irregular warfare and stability operations (Dobbie, 1994:125).

### **2.3 Somalia and a military cultural reliance on technology**

This section examines the U.S. military cultural predilection for technology during the operations in Somalia. One article once suggested that the American “national aversion to bloodletting” increases expectations that the costs of war can be borne by technology (Gentry, 1998:184-86). High-tech gizmos, such as robots, sensors, and unmanned aircraft are well suited for high-intensity conventional war but are of less relevance for counterinsurgency and irregular war wherein the support of the population is more important than the number of unmanned platforms. Perhaps this was another lesson not learned in Vietnam by Robert McNamara and his whiz kids, who were also enamoured of technological solutions. It is exceedingly difficult to harness a preponderance of technology to defeat pre-industrial and semi-feudal irregulars. The U.S. forces under UNOSOM II had some of the most lethal and high-tech equipment available to light infantry fighters. One of the oldest systems in their inventory was the AH-1 Cobra attack helicopter. Though a Vietnam vintage machine, this helicopter was very lethal, it was armed with anti-tank missiles, a 20 millimetre Gatling gun, and 2.75 inch rockets. The U.S. Air Force’s AC 130 Spectre was sufficiently lethal to vaporize an entire city block in Mogadishu. What’s more, the OH-58D was another example of advanced technology - the mast-mounted ball on top of the rotor system included thermal sights, a TV camera, and a laser range finder, which could be employed to designate for AC-130 Spectre or artillery fires. This helicopter could detect and identify single humans at ranges up to ten kilometres, at night. Add the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment’s helicopters – MH-60s, MH-6s, and AH-6s, all of which amounted to some serious technology and firepower (Gentry, 1998:184-86; U.S. Army Peacekeeping Institute, 1994:7).

One lesson-learned report amplified the U.S. reliance on technology in Somalia: “during periods of darkness, laser-equipped night vision scopes were used by forward observers and forward air controllers as their primary means of marking targets” (U.S Army Center for Army Lessons Learned, 1994: I-6-6). It concluded that the Forward Observers Ranging and

Marking Scope was a great asset for identifying and marking targets. In addition, the report noted, the OH-58D's lazing capability was an invaluable asset because it enabled "the ground commander the flexibility to employ a wide variety of munitions with surgical precision" (U.S Army Center for Army Lessons Learned, 1994: I-6-6). In a discussion about minimizing danger to friendly troops and limiting "collateral damage" to civilians, the report emphasized the use of the following high-tech weapons: laser-guided munitions or "direct-fire weapons such as the AC-130 105mm, 40mm, 20mm cannons and the AH-1F fired TOW" (U.S Army Center for Army Lessons Learned, 1994:I-6-2). However, as a quintessential example of technological asymmetry, the Centre for Army Lessons Learned stated that the Somalis even used kites and slingshots as air defence weapons: "on one occasion a rock from a slingshot went through the cockpit of a scout aircraft that was travelling at 90 knots" (U.S Army Center for Army Lessons Learned, 1994:I-5-6). The same report explained that units conducting operations against a "low technology force" must not rule out unorthodox methods of air defence (U.S Army Center for Army Lessons Learned, 1994:I-6-6).

There is a problem, however, with a reliance on an overwhelming advantage in technology: a cunning adversary will always seek to find the Achilles heel of the technologically superior force. According to both Rick Atkinson and Mark Bowden, Aideed and some of his commanders had ascertained what was to be a key U.S. vulnerability, "the Americans' greatest technological advantage – the helicopter – had to be neutralized with barrage fire using rocket propelled grenades" (Atkinson, 1994a:A1). According to Bowden's book, "to Aideed's fighters, the Rangers' weakness was apparent. "They were not willing to die' " (Bowden, 1999: 110). What's more, the helicopter pilots of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment whose moniker was "Night Stalkers" had forfeited one of their principal technological advantages, night operations. Task Force Ranger's Delta planners realized that speed was also essential for success. Consequently, each mission was built around a standard set of helicopters, Rangers, and Delta operators performing the same functions that they had for every raid. Despite the fact that the task force varied the times of the missions and conducted bogus "signature flights," or, false insertions, to keep Aideed's forces off balance, by October 1993 the Task Force had established a pattern. The commander of Task Force Ranger himself, Major General William Garrison, captured it very simply: "you can have all

the grand theories about warfare that you want, but ultimately there are only four options: up the middle, up the left, up the right or don't go" (Atkinson, 1994a: A1; Bowden, 1999:109-111).

According to Atkinson's account of it in this one article, Aideed's irregulars had been formulating a plan of their own to counter the combat power and technology exhibited by Task Force Ranger: undreds of rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) had been smuggled into Mogadishu. One Somali commander, Giumale, who oversaw the October 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Battle of Mogadishu claimed that he had "tried to adapt the lessons learned from years of clan warfare and from extensive reading on guerrilla insurgencies, particularly in Latin America" (Atkinson, 1994a: A1). He knew that the American Special Operations Forces were considered elite but he thought they had underestimated the SNA militia, which had the tactical and psychological advantage of fighting in their own backyards. One of Giumale's subalterns, a Colonel Aden, observed "if you use one tactic twice, you should not use it a third time," and the Americans had already essentially employed the same raid construct six times (Atkinson, 1994a, A1). Operations aimed toward snatching Aideed, which culminated in the October battle, also attested to the difficulty presented, even with high-tech equipment, in trying to find a single human target in an urban slum.

## Conclusion

*"A conventional military force, no matter how bent, twisted, malformed or otherwise 'reorganized' is still one hell of a poor instrument with which to engage insurgents"* (Jenkins, 1970:6).

The American dilemma of trying to be prepared simultaneously to counter insurgents and wage large-scale conventional war is as follows: "for one kind of task, rapid and agile movement in reaching the scene and in campaigning after arrival was at a premium; the other kind of war demanded heavier formations with a capacity for sustained fighting under severe casualties" (Weigley, 1984b:589). The U.S. military did not begin to resolve this dilemma conspicuously well until late 2003 because an emphasis on European war in doctrine and planning that was re-doubled after the Vietnam War tended to create an army without the appropriate agility for unconventional wars, from Operation Eagle Claw to Operation Restore Hope. As a consequence of the Civil War and of an adulation of

first the French, then the Prussian model of war, the U.S. Army became focused on conventional war and massive firepower. Moreover, William T. Sherman, Emory Upton, and their disciples, as advocates of the conventional Prussian model, conflated that model with their total-war-of-annihilation approach derived from the U.S. Civil War and permanently inculcated it in the profession through its institutions and published journals. As a result, anything outside of the core paradigm, such as counterinsurgency and irregular warfare, came to be viewed as aberrant and ephemeral (Weigley, 1984b:589).

The history of American military's suboptimal performance in irregular wars [low-intensity conflict] during the 1980s also testified to a litany of military and political failures: the aborted hostage rescue in Iran, the bombing of the Marines in Beirut, and the invasion of Grenada. As one author cogently stated it, the American military had essentially defined the irregular warfare threat "out of existence and tried to forget what it should have learned from the defeat in Vietnam;" as a result, "the Army dropped its focus on counterinsurgency," based on the notion that there should be "no more Vietnams" (Downie, 1998:75). Instead of resisting change to counterinsurgency doctrine, the more influential groups in the U.S. Army opposed participation in irregular warfare entirely and sought to marginalize the supporters and doctrine for irregular war (LIC). This powerful and predominant group looked to Army big war norms and domestic popular support to avoid involvement in irregular warfare. Consequently, the Weinberger Doctrine codified the criteria that, when followed, essentially proscribed the use of the US military in anything other than its preferred paradigm, conventional mid-intensity to high-intensity conflict in which the U.S. military could exert technological prowess and overwhelming combat power to annihilate the enemy (Thompson, 1989:x; Downie, 1998:167-169).

Although the U.S. military had during the Cold War focused its force structure, training, and doctrine on fighting the big battle for Central Europe, the Army had still conducted a diverse array of missions: constabulary forces in Japan and Germany, a UN "police action" in Korea, a contingency operation in the Dominican Republic, the Sinai peacekeeping commitment, Vietnam, Grenada, and so forth. Note, that none of these aforementioned operations of the then recent past or for the then probable future, included the big regular conventional war "toward

which the Army has devoted so much of its energies and equipment designs" (Builder, 1989:186-187). Saddam Hussein then, and thus, provided the U.S. with a war that was perfectly congruous with the U.S. Army's favourite paradigm. The Persian Gulf War gave the U.S. Army what it had longed for since 1945: "it was a war of clear aims, well-defined means, and circumscribed duration, fought in happy concert with many allies" (Bolger, 1991:34). However, soon after the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War, this military scholar and professional soldier rather presciently observed, "strategically, operationally, and tactically, this one was a museum piece - exciting, militarily impressive, and in the long run as sterile and unimportant as Omdurman" (Bolger, 1991:34) (Bolger here is referring to the Battle of Omdurman in the Sudan in 1898 as an analogy for the American-led victory against Iraq in 1991. The Battle of Omdurman witnessed a British Army handily and brutally destroyed their Dervish adversaries because the Dervishes had opted, as imprudently as Saddam Hussein had, to fight a big, conventional, war against the biggest and most capable conventional army of the particular era).

In essence, however, World War II and the Persian Gulf War were actually the aberrations in the American Army's experience. "The American military's artificially narrow definition of war has never matched the real world or its own heritage of small, ambiguous wars" (Bolger, 1995:69). The theretofore preferred American model for war was typically one that was a declared war against a conventionally organized enemy. The U.S. Army had preferred to prepare for wars where its adversaries came to fight division against division, with tanks and jets, the kind of foes that fought fairly, kind of a mirror image. However, the U.S. Army had experienced about 100 hours worth of what it defined as war during the then nearly 50 years since World War II, in contrast to irregular warfare and counterinsurgency (Bolger, 1995:69-70). The influence of the U.S. Army's cultural interpretation of the lessons of Vietnam, coupled with its success in the Persian Gulf War, cannot be overstated. These reaffirmed a propensity for the big-war model in an exceedingly significant way. On the spectre of the Vietnam experience, one expert on American civil-military relations once posited that, "the American armed forces' understanding of the domestic political context of small wars has been shaped, and in fact distorted, by the experience of Vietnam" (Cohen, 1984:167-68). U.S. military officers were shocked by their military's apparent inability to annihilate an enemy

who apparently had less mobility and less combat power (Cohen, 1984:167-68).

The U.S. military's success in the Persian Gulf War, moreover, was viewed as a welcome vindication that it had learned the correct lessons from Vietnam. "The Gulf War, although waged against a Third World country, was a classic conventional war fought along the lines of strategies and tactics developed in World War II, Korea, and the Arab-Israeli wars of the previous four decades, and America's military is very good at conventional combat" (Head and Tilford, 1996:5). Many also thought that the Gulf War had finally expunged the ghosts of Vietnam. As the ground war took shape, in fact, President George Bush claimed, "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all" (Head and Tilford, 1996:11). Professor Dauber, a rhetoric expert at UNC Chapel Hill amplified the significance of the Weinberger Doctrine and the success of the U.S. military in the Gulf War: "Desert Storm is represented by a variety of authors in a variety of venues as being successful precisely because the U.S. military learned ... and applied ... the appropriate lessons of Vietnam" (Dauber, 1998:7-8, 23). Despite the fact that the Army essentially conducted peace operations for a decade after the end of the Cold War, the first Persian Gulf War had so reinforced the culturally preferred, technologically enabled, decisive conventional war paradigm within the U.S. military, that by September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the U.S. military still predominantly viewed its core and essential roles to be grounded in conventional war. Even as late as March of 2002, the National Training Centre (NTC), the U.S. Army's premier desert collective training opportunity, still focused exclusively on conventional battles with linear boundaries and phase lines. Since Operation Iraqi Freedom, however, the Army has significantly altered its training regimen at NTC – that regimen now, and rightly so, comprises an adaptive, very irregular, and asymmetric programme.

### **Implications: learning wrong lessons form wrong wars**

*"Learning from experience is a faculty almost never practiced"* (Tuchman, 1984:383).  
*"Armies are conservative organizations; they adapt themselves slowly to new environments, and especially to new mental surroundings. Today a new epoch of war is dawning and we are surrounded by a veritable fog of new ideas"* (Fuller, 1993:258).

Although these quotes are from two distinct historical eras, the inferences one can easily derive from them remain exceedingly salient. Large armies are often slow to adapt to different kinds of war than the ones with which they are comfortable because they may perceive them as aberrations. Worse still, history has shown that the U.S. military, for most of the twentieth century, did not learn, or simply refused to absorb its past best practices in counterinsurgency and irregular warfare in its institutional culture. It did not seem to incorporate its own experiences dating back to the Indian wars, or the experiences of other national militaries into its training, doctrine, or leader development. So, then, why ponder how this well documented military cultural aversion to irregular war manifested itself during operations in Somalia almost 15 years ago? The answer has serious implications and is twofold. First, this military cultural proclivity has caused the U.S. military, and other militaries, to absorb the wrong lessons from past experiences, but even more gravely still, it has witnessed the American military learn the wrong lessons from the wrong wars, because those wars may have been more congruent with its preferred paradigm for war. Second, after six years of essentially waging an irregular war of global scope, the U.S. military has adapted at great costs in sacrifice and treasure to the exigencies of counterinsurgency. It is absorbing best practices in doctrine, training, and organization. But, incredulously, there are pundits already at work who aim to reverse these hard won changes because they prefer that the U.S. military revert to a big regular warfare focus (Cassidy, 2008:99-100; Gentile, 2008:online).

A small but adamant number of authors argue that we most focus on the big regular war model anew for fear of a peer competitor and because years of prosecuting irregular war have atrophied the big regular war capabilities of the U.S. military. For example, predictably, an armour officer, has argued that the Israelis' experiences fighting against Hezbollah during the Second Lebanon War "should warn Americans against having an Army so focused on irregular war and counterinsurgency warfare that it can no longer fight large battles against a conventional enemy" (Gentile, 2008:online). His argument is founded on two incredulously incorrect premises. The first one is the notion that the Second Lebanon War of 2006 was a regular conventional war. The second is that the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) acquitted itself poorly in this 34-day conflict because it had allowed its conventional war fighting skills to perish during the past 20 or so years while it honed its counterinsurgency skills. The U.S. military's "hyper-

emphasis” on irregular war thus “puts the American Army in a perilous condition,” because “its ability to fight wars consisting of head-on battles using tanks and mechanized infantry is in danger of atrophy” (Gentile, 2008: online). Another better researched and more comprehensive study produced under the auspices of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Centre’s Combat Studies Institute draws similar conclusions, warning that “while the US Army must be proficient in conducting major combat operations around the world, it is possible that years of irregular operations have chipped away at this capability, not unlike the situation encountered by the IDF.” Unsurprisingly, this author was also an armoured cavalryman during the Cold War who had worked for many years with the opposing forces cell that helped perpetuate the preferred paradigm of regular war within the American military right up to, and after the invasion of Iraq (Matthews, 2007:64-65).

The late and sagacious Barbara Tuchman was percipient in noting that the “irony of history is inexorable” (Tuchman, 1984:376). The spectre of Omdurman still haunts militaries’ interpretations of the lessons and history of recent wars. In 1898, the Mahdi and his dervishes taught the British Army that it was sporting fun to annihilate some lesser equipped and poorly trained opponent who was willing to fight according to a paradigm in which the British Army excelled. Two years later the Boers taught the British otherwise when the Boers refuse to fight by traditional European rules. The U.S. military drew a similar conclusion from its splendid victory against the Iraq Army in the 1991 Persian Gulf War where another lesser equipped and poorly trained adversary was willing to fight it according to the American model of war (Bolger, 1991:28-32). Two years later, the consequences of fighting against irregular militias on the mean streets of Mogadishu should have taught the U.S. military some lessons about irregular warfare but instead Somalia simply revalidated the wrong lesson that the U.S. military learned from Vietnam, which was to avoid counterinsurgency and irregular warfare altogether. The history of the U.S. military, however, has proven that the “hope of avoiding counterinsurgency has all too often been confused with an actual ability to do so” (Ucko, 2008:304). The reasons for the poor performance of the IDF during the Second Lebanon War are manifold but they are surely not because it was a regular war and because the IDF tried to fight it like an irregular war or counterinsurgency. Hezbollah used whatever means it could, both orthodox and unorthodox weapons, but what it did was master

a new evolution of irregular war, combining rocket attacks, terrain that favoured lightly armed and dispersed fighters, and the methods of the insurgent to undermine the Israeli's superiority in technology, tank formations, and air power (much of it U.S.) (Storr, 2007:70-71; Exum, 2006:1, 3, 10).

One can surmise from the analysis provided in the previous sections that irregular warfare is very difficult for great powers that have traditionally emphasized the conventional war model. For most of the previous two centuries, the American military philosophically and doctrinally embraced the conventional paradigm and eschewed the unconventional one, notwithstanding the fact that the U.S. Army spent the preponderance of its existence performing stability operations and what it now describes as irregular warfare in the emerging doctrine. The U.S. military is in the process of adapting to irregular warfare and it is in fact cultivating a mindset and doctrine that does not focus exclusively on the big war paradigm. The most current U.S. Army capstone doctrinal manual, *FM 3-0, Operations*, just released in February 2008, for example, explicitly confers an importance to stability operations that equals the importance previously and exclusively afforded only to regular combat operations. The American military has been compelled by the challenges of two ongoing irregular wars to become an institution that can learn, innovate, and adapt in contact. However, the disadvantages that the American military accrued to itself by embarking in 2001 on an unanticipated long irregular war characterized by multiple counterinsurgencies, still encumbered by a deeply embedded regular war military culture, are essentially temporal: military cultural change requires five to ten years; it generally requires a minimum of eight to 12 years to prevail in counterinsurgency; and the U.S. domestic political cycle exhibits a fickleness every four or eight years. Time is everything when a democracy wages protracted irregular warfare. To paraphrase a quote attributed to an anonymous Taliban guerrilla in Afghanistan, the U.S. and the West may have the all the nice wrist watches, but, the insurgents have all the time.

Other national militaries can also learn from the American military's experience in Somalia, as well as from the American-led coalitions' experiences in prosecuting the protracted counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan during the last five to six years. There are best practices and worst practices to study in order to derive applicable lessons from the U.S.

wars against irregular forces in these theatres. For Afghanistan, counterinsurgency in difficult terrain against tribal mountain fighters requires special operations forces and specialized general purpose forces with agility and knowledge of the people and terrain. Thus, irregular war there seems to require the opposite type of military culture, force structure, and doctrine that the American military went to war with in Afghanistan and Iraq at the beginning of this long and irregular war. Finally, there seems to be a contradiction that inheres in irregular wars that see big power conventional forces fighting irregular adversaries: it is a paradox of hubris and humility. Great powers have often underestimated the will, the skill, and the tenacity of their adversaries when prosecuting irregular wars, at least until learning humility in contact revealed otherwise. If the American military can absorb and preserve the lessons and the best practices of its ongoing irregular wars it may sustain the capacity to better prosecute the next wars that pit the sole superpower and its allies against irregulars who embrace the methods of the guerrilla and who operate in some nether region in the future.

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