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## Initial Thoughts on the Impact of the Iraq War on U.S. National Security Structures

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Much of the analysis that appeared with the tenth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq was understandably backward-looking, including often heated debates over who did what wrong and when. This paper takes a slightly different tack. We survey the overall impact of the Iraq War on U.S. national security structures by examining the major changes the war wrought in the intellectual and institutional underpinnings of U.S. security and defense policy. We then assess the future implications of these changes and argue that, despite a decade of painful and often acrimonious debates in Washington about what went wrong, the United States is at

best only modestly better prepared to fight a war like Iraq again. Although this suggests depressing conclusions about our national capacity to accomplish far-reaching institutional reforms during wartime, the situation may not be as bad as it seems: The next war the United States fights will not necessarily resemble Iraq any more than Iraq resembled the wars that preceded it.

We begin with some basic data on the war, and then focus on four key, interrelated issues: counterinsurgency operations, civilian state-making, security force assistance, and our capacity for understanding the specific needs of different kinds of interventions, allocating resources and adjusting expectations accordingly.

## KEY POINTS

- The United States rediscovered counterinsurgency through the painful initial years of the Iraq war. This rediscovery will no doubt be one of the major legacies of the war for the U.S. military. Although the Army and Marines will not retain all of the capability developed, the intellectual capital that was built up will endure for many years to come.
- The Iraq war also contributed to the transformation of U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) into a larger, more active command more closely connected with civilian intelligence agencies. SOCOM's pre-eminence in U.S. military affairs appears likely to continue to increase even as the specifics of the experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan fade from memory.
- The impact of the war on U.S. civilian agencies was less than it might have been, despite the contributions agencies such as the State Department and CIA made to the effort. Although it created an office of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, the State Department was never given funding for other important initiatives, such as the creation of a civilian response corps (CRC). Little was done in general to shift funding from military to civilian agencies, despite widespread recognition of a major imbalance that complicated warfighting efforts on all sides.
- The need for better interagency planning for postconflict stabilization efforts was widely recognized after the troubles encountered in the first years of the U.S. occupation, but few lasting improvements have been made to rectify the shortfall for the future. The State Department may be better equipped for planning, but it still lacks the real authority to conduct effective post-conflict planning across the whole of government.
- The greatest impact of the war on U.S. civilian agencies results from the wartime experience of large numbers of civilian staff. This cultural change includes greater understanding of the U.S. military—a positive development—as well as a shift in the values and priorities of the organizations and their future leadership.
- The intelligence community—largely as a result of initial failure to accurately assess the state of Saddam Hussein's WMD programs—also introduced reforms in analytical tradecraft. These reforms were implemented alongside the broad reorganization of the whole intelligence community set in motion after the 9/11 attacks.
- The Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP), which was very popular with U.S. commanders in Iraq and eventually replicated in Afghanistan, is likely to remain a tool in future such operations.
- In general, the United States gained a renewed appreciation for the costs and risks of large-scale military intervention, but is little more capable of estimating with any accuracy what the actual costs and risks of a particular stability operation are liable to be. This problem will continue to plague debate in an environment where intervention will be necessary, but resources and political will limited.

## Countering Insurgency

In the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the most hotly debated military issue of the Iraq war was almost certainly how to conduct counterinsurgency operations. At the outset of the war, the United States had not tackled a large-scale insurgency since Vietnam, and most U.S. soldiers had no training in or experience fighting irregular forces. So while U.S.-led forces quickly trounced Saddam Hussein's conventional military, coalition troops struggled to contain and defeat the insurgency that followed. As Iraq sank deeper into civil war, both U.S. generals and policymakers alike found themselves grasping for a coherent counterinsurgency doctrine.

The debate was wide ranging, and many individuals contributed to developing the approach that was ultimately adopted, but a key tipping point in this movement was perhaps the publication of the *U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual* (FM 3-24), authored by a committee headed by Gen. David Petraeus. Although the United States had developed counterinsurgency doctrines before FM 3-24, these differed in conceptualization, thoroughness, and above all, the reception they received. Published in December 2006, FM 3-24 called implicitly for fundamental changes in how the U.S. military would conduct operations in Iraq. It championed what came to be known as the "population-centric approach," in which the focus of U.S. operations would shift from capturing or killing enemy combatants (and protecting U.S. forces while doing so) to protecting Iraqi civilians. In February 2007, Gen. Petraeus was given the chance to put his and fellow counterinsurgency theorists' ideas into practice as commander of Multinational Forces in Iraq (MNF-I). One may debate the extent to which

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## *Hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers are now steeped in counterinsurgency.*

actual U.S. practice in Iraq aligned strictly with FM 3-24, but from that point forward, the counterinsurgency became the lens through which the U.S. military viewed the conflict. It also decisively influenced U.S. thinking about military operations in other parts of the world, above all Afghanistan.

After years of painful setbacks, the Army and Marine Corps now have the established counterinsurgency doctrine lacking at the outset of the Iraq war. That doctrine—and the knowledge behind it—will not disappear overnight. Hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers are now steeped in counterinsurgency. Its importance was recognized in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), which elevated counterinsurgency from obscurity to prominence if not quite primacy: "Stability operations, large-scale counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism operations are not niche challenges or the responsibility of a single Military Department." (p.20). The 2010 QDR mentions counterinsurgency 16 times, whereas the 2006 QDR mentions it seven times and the 2001 QDR not at all.

Under the Obama Administration's 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG), the institutional emphasis on counterinsurgency and stability operations will endure beyond the drawdown in Afghanistan. Although the 2012 DSG reduced the emphasis on counterinsurgency (COIN) somewhat from the earlier documents, COIN will clearly remain important even in the face of rebalancing to the Asia Pacific region and budget austerity: Although the DSG states that the standing armed forces "will no longer

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*One factor spurring the shift toward the primacy of counterinsurgency was the recognition of the importance of human terrain.*

be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations” on the scale of Iraq or Afghanistan, it does call for (1) maintaining a capacity for small-scale counterinsurgency operations, (2) efforts to retain the institutional knowledge on irregular warfare, (3) improved capacity for training allied and indigenous forces in counterinsurgency and stability operations, and (4) an ability to conduct large-scale counterinsurgency and stability operations for an extended period via the activation of the reserve component. Furthermore, the 2012 DSG recognizes that stability operations, including counterinsurgency when required, will almost inevitably follow any combat operations against a major state adversary. The ability to occupy another country and to conduct stabilization and counterinsurgency operations is, in the extreme, an underpinning of the implicit threat of U.S. coercion. The 2012 DSG therefore echoes the 2010 QDR when it put forward that “there are few cases in which the U.S. Armed Forces would engage in sustained large-scale combat operations without the associated need to assist in the transition to just and stable governance,” while acknowledging that these cases do exist.

One factor spurring the shift toward the primacy of counterinsurgency was the recognition of the importance of human terrain. This became most apparent after the success of the U.S. Marine Corps in al-Anbar and Tal Afar provinces in 2005, which

foreshadowed the doctrines in FM 3-24. After that experience, the way in which the Army and Marine Corps used intelligence began to change fundamentally, including a mounting appreciation for the value of local intelligence. And the role of intelligence officers shifted as well: Instead of merely briefing general officers, they were much more thoroughly integrated into operations in lower-level units, whereby local intelligence about tribes, networks, economic issues, and other elements of the human terrain could be effectively collected and exploited.

The Defense Department has also invested heavily in counterinsurgency equipment and capabilities—at least for use in environments such as Iraq. From 2001 to 2012, approximately \$326 billion was appropriated for acquisitions in support of all overseas contingency operations, funds to replace equipment damaged or destroyed in battle and to purchase new types of equipment such as mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles (MRAPs). From 2005 through mid-2007 alone, Congress provided supplemental funding for nearly 100 helicopters and 48,000 new trucks of all types. The Pentagon has also purchased additional unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and AC-130 gunships. U.S. operations in Iraq also accelerated an existing trend away from brigade combat teams and heavy armor toward infantry brigade combat teams, and served as further evidence of the value of the Stryker brigade combat teams. By 2012, the U.S. Army had formed nine Stryker brigades, though plans as of this writing will demobilize one of these.

Meanwhile, U.S. capabilities for dealing with the nemesis presented by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) improved, in part through the acquisition of many mine-resistant vehicles. Indeed, the IED challenge forced a fundamental rethinking of vehicle design across the U.S. armed forces, promoting a shift toward

V-shaped hull designs (which deflect shrapnel from IEDs) for many combat vehicles. Furthermore, the decision to replace the Bradley infantry fighting vehicle with a new Ground Combat Vehicle or a similarly robust alternative has arisen primarily from the Iraq experience, which saw dozens of Bradleys destroyed by roadside bombs.

The military also established permanent capabilities in other new areas that were needed to rebuild and stabilize the country. These included civil affairs, regional specialization, and strategic communications. A financial mechanism known as the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) that allowed military leaders in the field to channel funds to (for example) repair battle damage, make condolence payments, or start local reconstruction projects was also set up, paid for with funds seized from Saddam. CERP proved so popular with commanders that it was continued with direct funding from U.S. coffers. Commanders used the funds to build public infrastructure, such as roads, schools, sewers, and health clinics, often providing thousands of Iraqi's with jobs in the process.

Over the course of the Iraq war, Congress authorized almost \$4 billion for CERP. While the program's cost was relatively small compared to the overall costs of the war, it put vast amounts of cash directly into the hands of field commanders, who usually had little or no experience managing such projects. In its early years, the program suffered from a lack of oversight and guidance from DoD, and reconstruction projects were frequently found abandoned, destroyed, or never commenced, leaving the program open to accusations of fraud and ineffectiveness, such as in a 2008 Washington Post exposé. The Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR), the Government Accountability Office,

and others also documented problems with management, oversight, and follow-through.

CERP's effectiveness improved in 2006, however, under new leadership at MNF-I, who focused the program on service delivery to the Iraqi population and on finishing "last mile" projects rather than beginning new ones from scratch. Though originally intended to fund small emergency and humanitarian projects, over time, CERP funds increasingly substituted for larger development assistance projects that were not otherwise funded. Even with its problems, commanders still viewed CERP as one of their most effective COIN tools; the insights gained from its trial-and-error roll out will hopefully inform future missions should they arise, and indeed they already have in Afghanistan.

The military also dramatically enlarged its permanent civil affairs forces. Civil affairs units are composed of specialists with linguistic and cultural training appropriate for regional combatant commands and with expertise in stability missions, such as rule of law, economic stabilization, public health, infrastructure, and education. For many years, the U.S. Army had only one active-duty civil affairs battalion and regularly called on reserves for the vast majority of civil affairs needs. The high demand for civil affairs support during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, however, led the Army to increase its civil affairs capability from a single battalion to two full brigades, adding the first in 2007 and the second in 2011. By 2015, the Army plans to have over 2,000 civil affairs soldiers in the active component and about 6,000 in the reserve component.

The experience in Iraq also did much to transform U.S. special operations forces, which now stand to expand in number even as the overall force size declines. The most significant example of this is the rise of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC).

While JSOC, like the Stryker brigades, existed before the war, only in the shadowy struggle for control of Baghdad did the organization become a large-scale, high-tempo military tool.

Many observers worry that the U.S. military will forget the lessons it learned about counterinsurgency in Iraq. This fear stems in part from the experience of Vietnam, after which some parts of the U.S. military actively sought to forget the war, depriving U.S. forces of lessons that may have proven valuable in Iraq. However, the risk of losing gains in the practice of counterinsurgency post-Iraq is not as high as it was in the 1970s, if for no reason other than the inability to retain the lessons learned from Vietnam itself now serves as a lesson learned; in addition, the lesson from Iraq has been amplified by even more-recent experience in Afghanistan. So while the intellectual capital developed over the last decade may dissipate somewhat, it seems unlikely to be lost altogether given the number of soldiers who served in Iraq and the prominence of counterinsurgency in debates over military strategy in that campaign. Counterinsurgency operations are also now thoroughly integrated into the course offerings at U.S. military service academies, especially West Point. Today, the U.S. military today is clearly better poised to conduct counterinsurgency operations—at least in environments similar to Iraq’s—than it was in 2003, when such capabilities were often lacking and sometimes nonexistent.

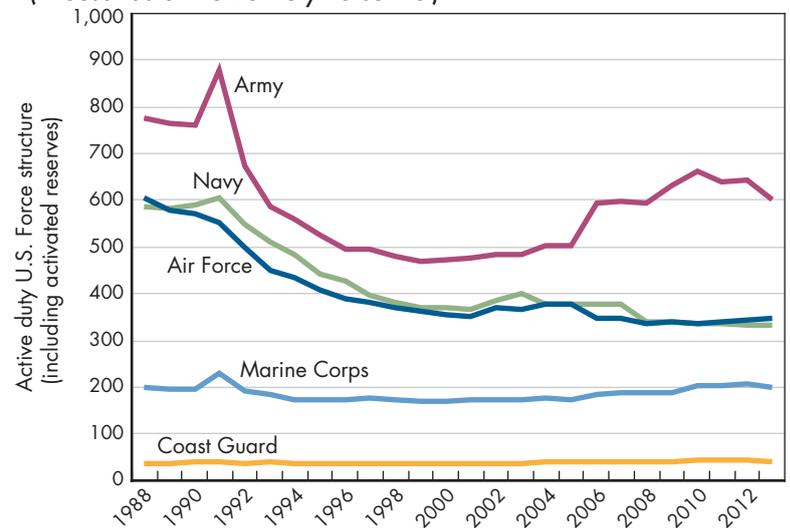
That said, the counterinsurgency capability built up during the Iraq War will not necessarily be retained over the long term, nor will counterinsurgency as practiced in Iraq automatically become the default template for the wars of the future. During the war, the overall size of the U.S. ground forces grew considerably. After a steady decline in force size following the end of the Cold War, the U.S. Army grew significantly beginning with mobilization from the

invasion of Iraq, as shown in Figure 1. The Marine Corps, by contrast, grew at a much more moderate rate, while the Navy and the Air Force shrank slightly. Plans are underway, however, to reduce both the Army and Marines to their prewar force size.

The Marine Corps has recently seen calls to refocus on flexible response operations, including its traditional amphibious remit, and some Marines complain that their role in Iraq and Afghanistan has made them little more than an auxiliary army, without

### Among the services, the Army grew most dramatically during the war.

Figure 1. Total Active U.S. Forces by Service Branch, 1988–2013. (Thousands of Active Duty Personnel)



Source: The Military Balance, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Volumes 88–113 (1988–2013).

a particular focus. Given the success the Marines have had with counterinsurgency operations, such concerns may seem exaggerated and somewhat off the point, but they are indicative of the challenges in retaining the adaptations the Iraq war called for. Similar pressures to readjust back toward a conventional war posture also exist within the U.S. Army. Both services are keen to return to their combined-arms roots. Moreover, the effects of sequestration and the potential for future budget cuts remain unknown. At least some aspects of the force build-up in support of counterinsurgency capabilities are therefore likely to be reversed.

It is also important to point out that the adoption of counterinsurgency-focused doctrine and capabilities was not the only thing that quelled the violence in Iraq. Local changes apart from improved U.S. military tactics—especially the Anbar Awakening, a sui generis movement in which Sunni tribal leaders rose up against Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and unplanned, self-directed evacuations that resulted in Sunni and Shia enclave—particularly in Baghdad—also played a critical role, as did the natural evolution of the civil war. Even if the U.S. military had been ideally prepared for counterinsurgency, this would only have fulfilled part of the necessary preparatory requirements for success in Iraq. The difficulties the United States has encountered in Afghanistan, as well as the continued instability that plagues Iraq, are testimony (if, indeed, any is needed) to the fact that while good counterinsurgency strategy and tactics may be a necessary condition for success, they alone are not enough to guarantee it.

Finally, even if U.S. counterinsurgency capabilities have improved, many wars in the future may require that U.S. capacity for *supporting* insurgents be as effective as our capacity for *counter-*

*ing* them. These capabilities are related but not identical. In Libya, for example, the United States and its allies backed an insurgency against Muammar Qaddafi—and in so doing greatly reduced the costs of the intervention. In Afghanistan in the 1980s, the U.S. similarly aided insurgent groups fighting against Soviet troops. It's worth noting, however, that in each of these cases, the intervention led to unintended consequences; assisting insurgencies may be just as complex and challenging as counterinsurgency, though for different reasons. A similar policy of supporting opposition forces in their insurgency against the Assad regime in Syria is now taking shape in the form of U.S., allied, and regional state support to groups on the ground. It remains to be seen how far the lessons of fighting insurgents will go when it comes to the task of helping them topple their governments.

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## Combat Casualties

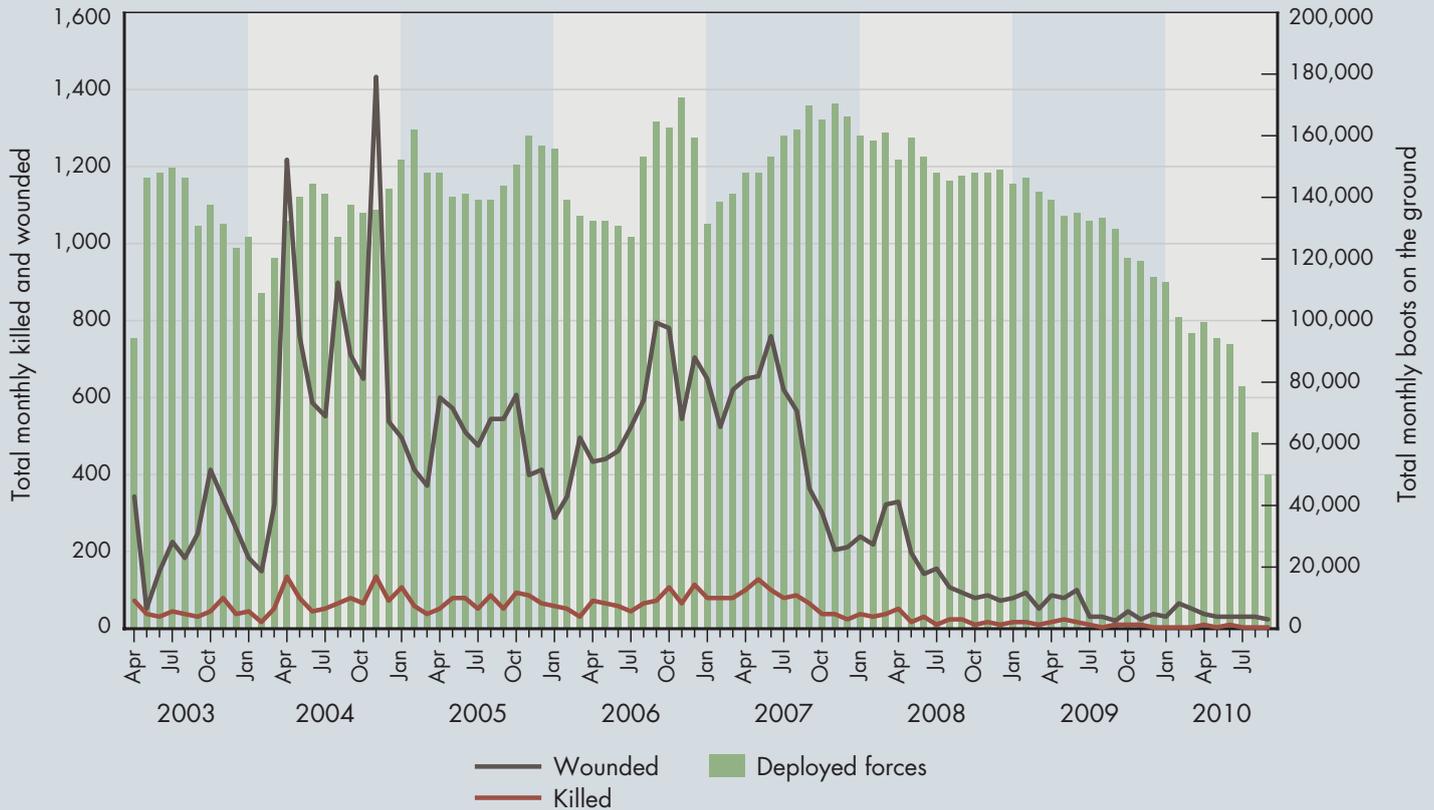
Any reckoning of the many ways in which the Iraq war affected the United States must include recognition of the casualties suffered by U.S. servicemen and women during the war. Although U.S. fatalities were much lower than in Korea and Vietnam, and extremely small in comparison with world wars I and II, they still numbered in the thousands—with each loss carrying inestimable sorrow for the family members and loved ones of the fallen. The number of soldiers wounded in the war, in relation to those killed, was also higher than ever before, largely as a result of advances in battlefield medical treatment that prevented wounded warriors from dying on the scene of an attack. Figure 2 shows the evolution of soldiers wounded and killed in Iraq, alongside the progression of the overall U.S. deployment.

Many human costs are obscured in these numbers. The suicide rate among U.S. servicemen, for example, doubled from 2001 to 2009. In 2012, notably, more servicemen and women died from suicide (349) than combat in Afghani-

stan (295). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) reached epidemic proportions among soldiers and civilians returning from war zones. On the strategic level, these relatively low casualty rates may increase public expectations that future wars can and should be fought without losing large numbers of U.S. troops. In Vietnam, the U.S. lost 58,153 soldiers; 4,475 had died in Iraq as of June 2013 (roughly twice the number killed to date in Afghanistan). Many observers suggest that the American public's tolerance for war casualties has declined since Vietnam, and the relatively low number of war fatalities in Iraq seems likely to reinforce that trend. Whether this will make U.S. leaders more or less inclined to intervene abroad militarily in the future remains to be seen. The expectation that intervention is possible with minimal losses would seem to reduce the political costs of intervention, but it also potentially increases the downside risk to U.S. leaders should they dramatically miscalculate casualty rates in a future conflict.

## Combat casualties peaked in the early years of the war

Figure 2. Total Monthly U.S. Killed and Wounded and Monthly U.S. Boots on the Ground in Iraq, April 2003–August 2010



Source: U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), Defense Casualty Analysis System, (accessed March 20, 2013), and Congressional Research Service, “The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11,” March 29, 2011.

## Retooling for Civilian State-Making

As Iraq's political institutions collapsed and its economy stalled in the wake of the U.S. invasion, the United States struggled to rebuild the Iraqi state anew and create some semblance of national unity in a society cracking violently along sectarian lines. Initially, the Defense Department oversaw the entirety of postwar operations in Iraq through the aegis of the Coalition Provisional Authority. Soon, however, civilian officers from the Department of State, Department of Defense, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of Treasury, the Department of Justice, the Department of Agriculture, and others were called upon to help rebuild the shattered country, plunging into increasingly chaotic and dangerous circumstances. These agencies had to identify staff who were both willing and qualified to do the work on the ground. They also had to coordinate their efforts—both in Washington and in the field—with the far larger military operations under way alongside. Existing interagency structures proved cumbersome and ineffective, and there was a great deal of discourse in Washington about how they needed to change. Unfortunately, despite all of the discussion and the widespread recognition of the limitations U.S. assistance activities faced, the adaptation of civilian structures was limited at best.

There were some formal initiatives intended to improve civilian-military coordination and strengthen civilian reconstruction, including National Security Presidential Directive 44 (NSPD-44) and Department of Defense Directive 3000.05, both dating to late 2005. NSPD-44 was a presidential declaration establishing a framework, guidelines, and broad authorities for interagency coordination on post-conflict reconstruction. Directive 3000.05

explained how the Defense Department would apply NSPD-44 internally. NSPD-44 gave the State Department a lead role in interagency coordination and planning, identifying the recently created office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) as central to the process. S/CRS was to handle the staffing, interagency coordination, training, and planning necessary for civilian reconstruction.

Reporting directly in 2005 to then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, S/CRS grew from a skeleton staff to more than 100 personnel during the war. But although the office made progress in some areas, it also encountered serious roadblocks. Bureaucratic and cultural resistance at State and underfunding from Congress hampered its work. Moreover, while S/CRS would go on to support reconstruction and crisis response in several countries, its influence on Iraq was, in the end, relatively small. This was in part because of the coordinator's resistance to assuming the management of civilian staffing of provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) in Iraq, a key challenge that State faced at the time. In 2011, under then-Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, S/CRS was folded into a full-fledged new State Department bureau, the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO), which continues the old office's core planning, interagency coordination, and crisis response functions but remains relatively small and focused on crisis prevention and small-scale conflict rather than operations on the Iraq scale.

S/CRS, and later CSO, did have some success in building better crisis planning procedures at State and creating a limited civilian-crisis response capacity. In 2008, S/CRS launched the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework—a set of procedures for conducting a more-systematic interagency assessment of conflict

situations, increasing collaboration, and generally improving inter-agency planning for conflict prevention, mitigation, and stabilization. This framework has been deployed or scheduled for more than 20 countries, including crises in Tajikistan, Cambodia, Liberia (twice), the Philippines, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Nepal. The State Department, through CSO, is also using DARPA's Integrated Crisis Early Warning System, which aggregates millions of news stories to identify emergent conflict trends. CSO has also conducted table-top exercises aimed at improving State's responses to crises in Myanmar, Mali, South Sudan, Sudan, and Zimbabwe.

In addition to building bureaucratic structures to support planning for and managing civilian reconstruction efforts, the administration of President George W. Bush also sought to assemble a reserve cadre of civilian experts with the skills and experience for crisis situations. Early in the Iraq war, civilian and military officials were confronted with a serious shortage of deployable civilian experts in such areas as civil engineering, policing, jurisprudence, management, administration, and agronomy. In response, in 2008, the White House requested funding from Congress for a Civilian Response Corps managed by S/CRS consisting of 250 permanent staff, 2,000 billets for a standby component drawn from U.S. government agencies, and 2,000 billets for additional reserve staff drawn from both the public and private sectors. Congress funded the first of these two components but not the third, and the second component was never fully staffed. And under the Obama Administration, CRC staff levels have dwindled. According to the Congressional Research Service, between 2011 and 2012, the standby personnel of the CRC—those trained and ready to deploy with as little as 48 hours' notice—declined by half, from roughly 1,000 to 500 officers. As of 2012, the staffing of the active component of the

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CRC was about 130—also half the personnel originally anticipated—with additional plans to reduce the active component to a mere 53. The CSO has also closed an office and a warehouse and liquidated equipment. Cost concerns will continue the downward pressure on these numbers.

Meanwhile, many potentially useful initiatives were proposed but never adopted at all. One example was a stability police force capable of deploying to combat zones to provide paramilitary policing and training functions that were often lacking in Iraq and had to be filled by military police (MPs) or Army regulars. While neither the United States nor its allies possessed a post-conflict police force large enough to blanket all of Iraq in 2003, a constabulary police force might have straddled the divide between civilian and military tasks in the way that the French Gendarmerie or the Italian Carabinieri have done effectively in other post-conflict zones, such as Kosovo. As public safety collapsed in the summer and fall of 2003, the U.S. lacked a rapid reaction, militarized police force trained in riot and population control, SWAT, facilities protection, and ordinance disposal. Although it would not by itself have

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prevented the ensuing collapse, the lack of such a force was widely recognized to be problematic. Many U.S. policymakers understood even before the invasion how such a force would benefit stability operations, and the war pushed discussions forward, with several proposals emerging. These proposals, however, were never acted upon.

One bright spot was the integration of the U.S. Combatant Commands (COCOMs) into the Washington decision-making process. Originally, COCOMs were excluded from the regular interagency deliberations that drive U.S. national security decision-making, but over the course of the war, combatant commanders were more often present or represented directly in important discussions. Although this development posed some risks—it would be inappropriate, for example, for State Department officials to be (or be seen to be) issuing orders to general officers in combat—on balance, it helped improve the information flow among agencies and the coordination of civilian and military efforts.

Mostly, though, progress was scant when it came to building civilian capacity or improving civilian-military coordination. The problem was often funding and related staffing shortfalls. Despite the Bush Administration's growing recognition that the skills necessary for postwar reconstruction—economic, political, technical, and otherwise—were more often found outside the military than inside it, budgets for military and civilian reconstruction operations remained grossly lopsided: Defense Department funding for reconstruction outstripped funding for civilian agencies by a five-to-one ratio (to be fair, this discrepancy is in part explained by the fact that reported DoD funding for “reconstruction” included the very large sums used for the training and equipping of Iraqi Security Forces). The State Department and other civilian agencies found it hard to identify experts with both the qualifications and the willingness to deploy to war-ravaged Iraq. In November 2007, Secretary Rice threatened to order Foreign Service officers to Iraq, but volunteers eventually came forward and such “directed assignments” were not needed. Of course, such staffing challenges were not unique to the United States: European allies that were once believed to have special aptitudes for civilian reconstruction found it equally difficult to identify staff who could easily be released from domestic duties and convinced to spend a long period of time overseas in the midst of a controversial war.

If changes to formal structures and operating procedures were limited, there were some important less-tangible effects on civilian agencies. The most significant impact of the war on U.S. civilian foreign policy structures was probably cultural, wrought by the experience of personnel serving in combat zones. A generation of U.S. Foreign Service officers has been molded by serving either in Embassy Baghdad or on PRTs throughout Iraq. The State

Department's institutional knowledge of the dynamics of local politics and the intricacies of military doctrine is now much greater than before the war, when contact between Foreign Service and military officials was, in the main, more episodic and less intense. Now, thousands of Foreign Service officers have worked alongside military officers, understood their perspectives, and thus are better prepared to work with them again should the need arise. Likewise, military officers now better understand and appreciate the contributions their State Department and civilian counterparts can make to counterinsurgency and stabilization efforts.

The Iraq war had a similar impact on the U.S. intelligence community, especially its overseas elements. Like the State Department, important segments of the intelligence community also underwent a cultural shift as a result of wartime deployments, with some officers rotating through Iraq several times. War-zone service became a prerequisite for advancement in much of the intelligence community, the most critical measure of value within the clandestine service, and the central substantive and manpower-related challenge of analytic intelligence organizations. Iraq's impact was magnified by similar demands in Afghanistan and, more broadly, global counterterrorism objectives.

Like Foreign Service officers, intelligence officers and their organizations are now far more comfortable working closely with the military in joint operations—for example, with JSOC. Although the Iraq experience did not create that collaboration (which arose out of the broader U.S. counterterrorism effort), the war—and the struggle to stave off disaster—did help cement it.

The dangerous and complicated task of operating in Iraq between 2003–2011 also highlighted the value of close working relationships with a wide array of foreign intelligence services,

both civilian and military. After 9/11, the intelligence community secured an unprecedented degree of cooperation with foreign intelligence services, which helped identify, track, and apprehend Al-Qaeda operatives—a common enemy. At the beginning of the war in Iraq, those relationships proved to be crucial force multipliers, and the intelligence community worked extremely closely with an array of allies, including European, Arab, and other services that enjoyed better access to communities in Iraq and that were more familiar with its human terrain.

But intelligence work in foreign countries in peacetime requires markedly different skills and habits than those necessary for successful intelligence collection in a warzone such as Iraq. The pace of work in a warzone is far faster and may reward a higher tolerance for risk. Some analysts worry that the CIA's National Clandestine Service will find it difficult to readjust to peacetime operations.

Overall, while the United States will be slightly better off the next time it needs to tap U.S. civilians to support postwar reconstruction abroad, the permanent changes to U.S. capabilities in this area were too limited. In addition, unlike the military, the State Department has made no systematic effort to capture the lessons learned from its experience in Iraq. It would be useful to do so sooner rather than later, lest memories of the war fade and the chance for institutional learning be lost. But the central challenge, especially for State, has been underfunding. In today's austere budget environment, the chances that this will change are dim.

## Building Up Foreign Security Forces

During the Iraq war, then-President Bush spoke often of his hopes that Iraq's post-Saddam security forces would stand up so U.S. forces could stand down. But training effective Iraqi security forces proved a massive challenge. Initially, U.S. planners had anticipated that Iraq would have a functioning police capacity to maintain law and order after the invasion. In the event, Iraq had no such thing, and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) that ran postwar Iraq had to undertake a thorough overhaul of Iraq's police, corrections, and justice systems, all while creating military and intelligence organizations; in other words, the CPA had to build the entire security apparatus of a modern state from scratch. A difficult task under any circumstances, it became near impossible as the violence in Iraq mounted. Coalition military forces were primed to help develop a new Iraqi Army, but they soon found themselves doing more and more to help Iraq's police, an eventuality for which they were ill prepared.

The challenges were different for the military and the police. Military training, especially basic training, was less difficult, if only because approaches developed in other contexts could easily be adapted and military personnel with the requisite training experience assigned to the task. A new Iraqi Defense Ministry was built from the ground up. Plans for the military forces shifted considerably over time, from the initial concept of a small, domestic-stability oriented military to a much larger force with air, armor, and other capabilities. Although the deployment of the burgeoning Iraqi military in domestic settings was a politically charged issue, as the insurgency grew, internal missions became a focus, and training and development activities increasingly reflected that reality.

Training police proved harder. Initially, the State Department was tapped to lead the effort, as it had in the Balkans and South America, but State lacked the resources and staff to do so on the scale required. Police advisors were deployed, and the Interior Ministry was restructured, but overall, training lagged. Sectarian militias captured many police units, and discipline was low. This was highly damaging to the overall U.S. effort: Capable local police forces would have been a tremendous boon for restoring civilian confidence.

When the military coalition took on the police development role in May 2004, the overall process sped up, with military personnel placed in the lead training role and buttressed by civilian police advisors. But the U.S. military's suitability for that task was widely questioned by outside observers. Pentagon approaches to training changed repeatedly, and police development remained a secondary priority, far behind building up the Iraqi military.

The State Department's lead role in police training was restored with the final withdrawal of U.S. ground forces in 2011, but many of the staffing and funding challenges remain. In the absence of the U.S. military, the State Department must now provide for the security of its trainers on the ground, which means relying on armed contractors whose presence the Iraqi hosts find deeply problematic. As of this writing, the viability of the State Department's Police Development Program has deteriorated—along with the Iraqis' willingness to participate. There appear to be multiple reasons for the program's ineffectiveness, including poor program design and implementation by the State Department, diminished U.S. political leverage over Iraqi security decisionmakers after the withdrawal of U.S. ground forces, and widely held Iraqi suspicion of the U.S. government's intentions for its 16,000-person embassy. Whatever

the source of the program's challenges, the State Department's 2013 budget statement points to its early and ignominious termination.

As with counterinsurgency, the lasting effects of the training experience, for both the military and police forces, may lie in how the military designs its approach to such efforts in the future. The U.S. armed forces entered Iraq ready to train a military force under conditions of relative security, but they ended up having to pivot to quickly develop indigenous police and military capabilities that needed to be immediately deployed to fight alongside the Iraqi officers they had trained. Systems of embedded advisors serving with fighting units emerged over time, in both the Iraqi and Afghan theaters, with approaches transferred between the two (less because of demonstrated success than because the same people were engaged in both efforts). The Army drafted a field manual (*Security Force Assistance*, Field Manual 3-07.1, published in 2009) that introduced and developed the concept of "leading from behind" in such training missions.

As more and more Iraqi army and police units deployed and assumed operational responsibilities, U.S. forces slowly transitioned to an "advise and assist" posture. After some trial-and-error, the U.S. military settled on the *advise and assist brigade (AAB)* model in 2009, codified in FM 3-07.1; this model was used during the drawdown in U.S. combat forces in Iraq, the training mission under Operation New Dawn, and the final handover of security responsibilities in 2011.

Advise-and-assist brigades are combat brigades augmented with a mix of about 50 field-grade and noncommissioned officers specifically trained as advisors; these specialty personnel are assigned to small teams and embedded with indigenous units. Unlike earlier training programs, these embedded advisors are

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directly supported by their brigade for transportation, equipment, personnel, and protection. The brigades also pair companies and battalions with corresponding indigenous units to conduct training and combat operations. In Iraq, using the existing modular brigade structure allowed the AABs to retain their combat capability, which in turn mitigated risks to the embedded advisory teams and allowed the brigade to undertake other missions, such as joint counterterrorism operations and supporting the State Department's PRTs.. Generally considered a success, the AAB system has since been adopted for the security force assistance mission in Afghanistan. And with its institutionalization in FM 3-07.1, the concept of embedded advisors and partnered forces should have a lasting impact on future U.S. training and assistance.

The various challenges in training local forces led to several proposals from outside policy experts to establish a training and advisory corps within the U.S. Army to improve Army capabilities for training and related missions (some are noted in the bibli-

## The Cost of the War

The financial costs of the Iraq war to the American taxpayer are vast, with estimated totals running into the trillions of dollars. Congress funded the war largely through emergency and supplemental appropriations over and above the “base budgets” of the Defense Department, State Department/USAID, and Department of Veterans Affairs. The most recent numbers from government sources and outside experts attribute to the Iraq war roughly \$830 billion in direct outlays from 2002 through 2013. Annual outlays for the Iraq war peaked in 2008 at \$142 billion. About 93 percent of Iraq war funding went to the Pentagon, and close to 6 percent went to State/USAID.

The Pentagon’s base budget also grew dramatically over the same time period, far beyond any pre-9/11 projections. The base budget included much war-related spending, such as overall increases in military base pay and benefit packages that were necessary to meet personnel recruiting goals for the all-volunteer force during wartime. Looking carefully at the Pentagon’s base budget, some outside experts, such as the Cost of War Project at Brown University, argue that the cumulative, indirect costs of the Iraq war baked into the Pentagon’s base budget total between \$380 billion and \$490 billion. The Department of State and Department of Veterans Affairs did not see such large absolute increases in their base budgets—at least in absolute terms.

In addition, the future fiscal obligations resulting from the Iraq war represent an enormous, unfunded liability to the U.S. treasury. The United States offers generous veterans’ benefits in the form of health care, disability benefits, pensions, and subsidies for higher education. History tells us both that the costs of veterans’ benefits do not peak until

decades after a conflict has ended and that they end up accounting for one-third to one-half of total war costs.

The number of veterans already using their benefits is staggering. Over half of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have used VA healthcare (899,752 veterans through 2012); over half of these veterans have been diagnosed with mental disorders, including depression, anxiety, or PTSD (486,015 veterans through 2012). Although no government agency has conducted budget projections far enough into the future to estimate the total future costs of veterans’ benefits, numbers released by the Cost of War Project suggest perhaps \$450 billion to \$540 billion in liabilities due to the Iraq war.

While the future shape of the U.S. budget, including defense spending, remains politically unsettled, we must conclude that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have resulted in an essentially permanent increase in the U.S. defense budget. The Pentagon’s base budget increased by more than 40 percent, in real terms, from 2001 to 2010, when it peaked at a level higher than at any point since World War II. Defense spending has declined significantly since this peak, but the base budget, as of 2013, still remains at 2007 levels—higher than the peak of defense spending during the Reagan Administration, at least in real dollars.

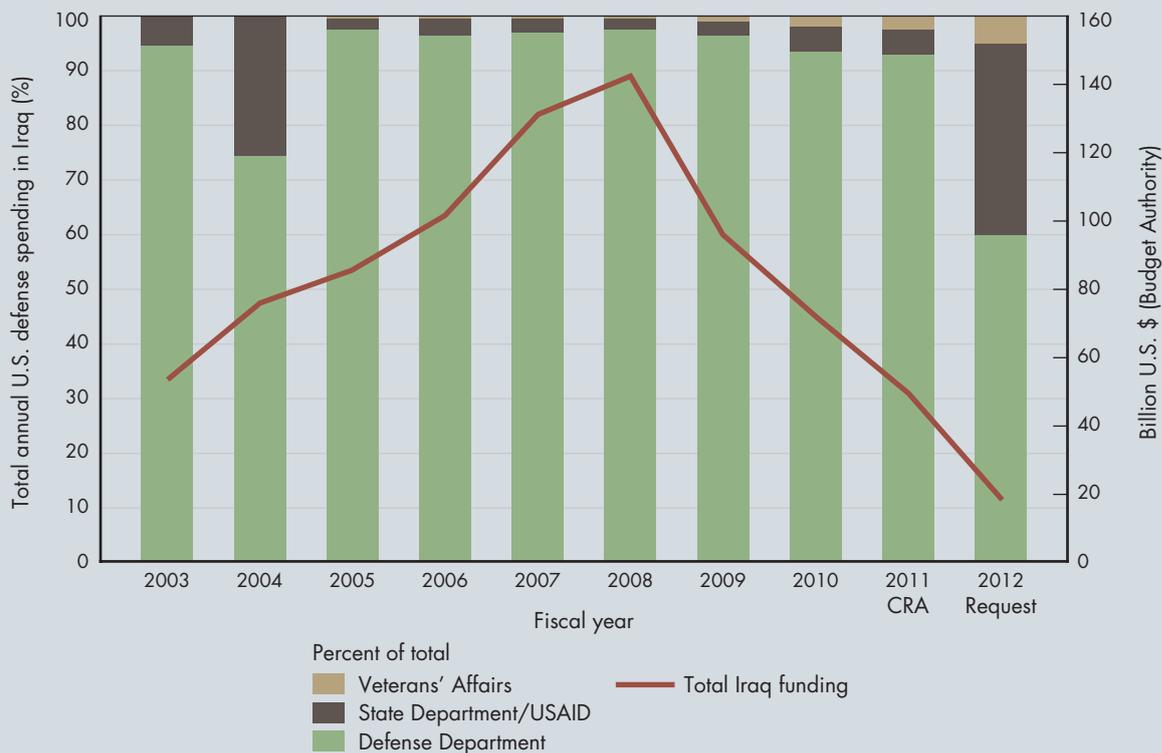
Cuts to the Pentagon’s base budget will likely continue, but even the most draconian proposals will leave spending levels well above those during the Clinton Administration. The most significant proposed cuts are written into existing law: the Budget Control Act of 2011, as amended by the so-called sequester. If current relevant legislation remains in place, the defense budget will return to 2006 levels—

25 percent above funding levels in 2000—and then remain flat through 2020. While some outside experts have proposed replacements for the sequester, no existing serious proposal returns spending to pre-9/11 levels in

real terms. For the moment at least, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have created a permanently higher DoD budget and will, in the future, lead to a permanently higher budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs, as well.

### The vast majority of war funding went to the Defense Department.

Figure 3. Annual Estimated Iraq War Funding by Agency, FY 2001–FY 2012 (as % of Total Iraq War Funding), and Total Annual U.S. Defense Spending in Iraq, FY 2001–FY 2012 (billion US\$ in budget authority)



Source: Congressional Research Service, “The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11,” March 29, 2011.

ography at the end of this paper). One positive outcome of the experience in Iraq has been an increase in the prestige of security force training and assistance work within the U.S. military, and the Army now counts such training as combat experience, thereby increasing the chances that high-quality staff will seek training billets. Many more soldiers now have such experience. As security cooperation becomes more central to U.S. engagement abroad, this may prove a critical capability—one that may affect how and which personnel are promoted and what skills are fostered among the U.S. armed forces.

Even with these important gains, however, the overall impact of Iraq on the U.S. ability to build security forces has been modest at best. The United States was left with better capabilities for training security forces in partner nations in peacetime. But building up a local security force from scratch, especially amid an insurgency, remains a far more difficult task. If the United States attempts to do so again in the future, it will need capabilities far beyond those it has today.

## **Understanding the Challenge**

The United States went to war in Iraq because the President and his senior advisers assessed that doing so was in the U.S. national interest and because they believed that winning the war would be relatively quick and easy. Indeed, the initial phases of the war went almost flawlessly, with the relatively easy overthrow of an Iraqi military already hugely outclassed by the United States during Operation Desert Storm more than a decade earlier. Only after the war shifted from conventional battles against Saddam's standing army to stability operations—and then to struggling with a full-blown insurgency—did the operation falter. The United States (in

the Pentagon and elsewhere) soon began to pay the consequences of inadequate planning for low-intensity conflict and nation building. If the initial campaign to topple Saddam's Ba'athist regime was a evidence of the awesome power of the U.S. military, the next phase of the conflict was a demonstration of the fact that undertaking nation building can incur awesome costs. Had U.S. policymakers recognized beforehand that the war would cost the American taxpayer more than \$1 trillion, claim the lives of thousands of U.S. troops and untold Iraqi civilians, and embroil the United States in the affairs of Iraq for years to come, they may have been less enthusiastic about going to war in the first place. At a minimum, public support would have been weaker.

Has Iraq improved our ability to forecast with any degree of accuracy how costly today's wars will be? The Obama administration's reticence to intervene militarily in Syria could indicate that it has—or it may just be an indication of the weight the Iraq war carries in current thinking as opposed to the lessons of Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda. Indeed, U.S. reticence to intervene in Syria seems to stem as much from overall post-Iraq, post-Afghanistan weariness as it does from a finely honed U.S. understanding of what intervention there might require and what it might accomplish. When, in July 2013, General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, released cost estimates for a range of military alternatives for Syria, many outside experts objected that they were too large. We recognize that intervention in Syria will be costly, but our ability to assess how costly remains limited.

But the last decade has brought some advances in our understanding of the kinds of risk factors that increase the probability that conflicts will drag on and thus make post-conflict stabilization especially hard, although much of this scholarship (more so

even than in other areas examined in this paper) was not directly the result of Iraq. Scholars have identified several factors that tend to make post-conflict reconstruction more difficult under certain specific conditions, including weak governance and civil-society institutions, low levels of economic development, mountainous terrain, extractable natural resources, uncooperative neighbors, and certain kinds of peace settlements. But scholars often disagree over how much each of these factors matter, under what conditions one may matter more than another, or which directions some of these causal arrows point.

The Iraq experience thus seems to have increased U.S. wariness—and perhaps our propensity to overestimate the costs of intervention. Iraq has not, however, made us much more capable of estimating what these costs will be—and hence planning and allocating resources effectively ahead of time. More work in this area is surely needed.

## **Iraq and Future Conflicts**

The Iraq war seems to have had only a modest positive impact on the U.S. ability to win a counterinsurgency campaign, handle the complexities of nation building, build up partner security forces, and anticipate the costs of 21st-century interventions. As such, some of the more noteworthy shifts spurred by this war appear to be cultural and intellectual in nature. This may produce significant long-term dividends since ultimately, capabilities and hardware stem from ideas, not vice versa. Nevertheless, the extent of the adjustment required in many areas—especially building up civilian capacity required for statebuilding, especially during a conflict—is sobering, given how large the war loomed in U.S. debates of recent years. Even though the lack of planning for

dealing with post-invasion Iraq was widely recognized as a serious shortfall after the initial phase of the Iraq war, little has been done to establish a strong interagency planning and coordination capability for future stabilization missions. Similarly, the CRC—which would be useful in so many situations beyond Iraq—was not adequately funded by Congress or by the Bush or Obama administrations.

However, the modest degree of U.S. institutional adaptation should be juxtaposed against this basic reality: A U.S.-led nation-building operation on the same scale as Iraq seems quite unlikely in the near future, precisely because the difficulties encountered in Iraq and Afghanistan will deter the national political leadership from an engagement abroad that involves extended boots-on-the-ground deployments. Indeed, essential as it is for the United States to learn and internalize the intellectual lessons of Iraq, it would be foolish to assume that the next war will look exactly like the last one. So perhaps the silver lining surrounding the absence of major institutional changes is that their very lack avoids remaking the U.S. military in the Iraq War's image, a hedge against the danger of “fighting the last war” in the future.

Nevertheless, if future wars will not look exactly like Iraq, many of them are still likely to resemble Iraq more than they will the great wars of the 20th century. The tendency of some parts of

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the U.S. military—and of the government as a whole—to return to Cold War-era constructs may be driven as much by habit and familiarity as by a sober assessment of probable future requirements. For example, the shortcomings in civil-military coordination and gaps in nation-building capabilities that cost the United States so much blood and treasure in Iraq persist, even in much smaller endeavors. U.S. policymakers may well ultimately decide to address the crisis in Syria in some way. So while the formulas may change, the need for post-conflict stabilization, and sometimes counterinsurgency, will not.

At a minimum, one can hope that the United States will approach future interventions with a broad strategic vision that accounts for the possibility that things will not go as expected. There will never be certainty at the start about how wars like Iraq will unfold, but discomfort with uncertainty should not serve as an excuse for a standing policy of non-intervention. The Iraq experience should, at a minimum, spur an honest reckoning with the war's failures, encourage a full and honest consideration of the directions that future interventions could take, and, we hope, produce rigorous planning that takes even unpalatable possibilities into account.

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## About This Perspective

The U.S. war with Iraq that resulted in the removal of Saddam Hussein will be remembered as one of the most momentous events of the early 21st century—and one of the most contentious. Much has been written about the decision to invade and the difficulties the United States and its allies encountered during and after the 2003 invasion and the resulting occupation. As time passes, however, the focus of analysis will naturally shift toward the war's longer-term impact on U.S. foreign policy. The lasting effect that the Iraq war has had on U.S. security structures and institutions is one important dimension. This paper presents an admittedly early overview of the major ways in which the war has—and has not—shaped U.S. security and foreign policy structures and the implications for the future. It is intended for readers who have a general understanding of the war and of the basic apparatus of U.S. foreign and security policy. Necessarily preliminary, it is intended as an initial contribution to the discussion rather than a definitive review of the subject.

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