INNOVATION IN CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY:

SPECIAL FORCES AND COUNTERINSURGENCY IN IRAQ

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INTRODUCTION

The war that followed the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 was characterized by contradictions, discontinuities, and reversals. Pre-invasion estimates and assumptions about timelines, troop levels, and budgets were quickly derailed, while more complex issues surrounding local partners and allies, feasible end goals, and even the identity of the enemy proved opaque throughout the war. From this confusion, one can see an emerging outline of a new approach to warfighting built around capabilities normally associated with special operations forces (SOF), and often centered on SOF themselves. Surprise and failure in the months following the invasion provided a strong stimulus for change, and in response, the confluence of political and ideological support from senior civilian authorities, a newly (re)discovered understanding of the nature of the conflict and its possible solutions, and the existing capabilities of SOF led to a more prominent and central role for SOF.

This paper addresses the theories of military change that are pertinent to the experience and evolution of SOF in Iraq during these years. It then discusses how SOF's role in Iraq began, and changed as a result both of the unfolding of the war and of institutional and political factors. Finally, it explains how various actors within the political and military spheres served to drive the changes that took place, and how this supports some elements of existing theory on military change, and considers the implications of this example for wartime institutional change.

THEORIES OF CHANGE

Military innovation is generally considered to have three components: organizational change, significant scope and impact, and increased military effectiveness.[1] ***Tactical change*** in wartime can involve either adaptive adjustments to existing war-fighting tactics, techniques and/or procedures (TTPs), or more innovative changes in which new TTPs are developed in response to operational challenges. ***Organizational innovation***, by contrast, involves the creation of new ways of fighting, involving development of new doctrine, new structures, and/or new technologies. ***Strategic innovation*** goes even further, manifesting in changes to the strategy of warfighting and the composition and/or disposition of forces, often building upon tactical and organizational change.[2] Strategic innovation, further, cannot be considered in isolation from the strategic, social, and political milieu in which the military operates, a frame which implicitly includes not only the direct actors in a conflict but also the structures, processes, cultures, and norms that influence actions and reactions.

Military institutions are widely considered to be explicitly and consciously resistant to change.[3] While tactical adaptation is likely to occur in wartime,[4] a fundamental change in a military's warfighting strate-

gy or orientation in the midst of a conflict is much more uncommon, and the mechanisms behind such change are only partially understood. A number of theories developed to explain military change in general are not entirely relevant to the American experience in the Iraq War.

Interservice rivalry has frequently been a driver of tactical, doctrinal, and strategic change. Yet the services have generally learned "to collude rather than compete" in the post-Cold War period.[5] Given the prominence of ground forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and the fact that general officers in the Army and Marine Corps consistently called for increased troop commitments and voiced concerns about their capacity for longer or more frequent deployments, the relationship between these two services seems to be not one of competition for a particular role but rather a struggle to meet their share of the demand.

Technology is another source of military innovation.[6] In Iraq, new technologies were tested, developed, and implemented, but these changes led to incremental improvements to existing tactics and operations rather than a transformation. A good case in point, SOF counterterrorism operations relied upon information technology to accomplish what it had not in any prior conflict.[7] While this technology was a catalyst, it was salient only due to the context in which it was deployed.

Neo-realism has also been suggested as a driver of change: if planners, military or civilian, come to see that their strategy or capabilities are insufficient to achieve the goal of a given strategy – if they realize they are likely to lose in a probable conflict, in other words – they will push for change. The literature on military change has not accorded this possibility much weight.[8] Further, since the misgivings of a number of military and civilian analysts and planners about the post-invasion and occupation phases of the Iraq war went unaddressed until they were borne out by the reality,[9] it seems clear that the expectation of failure was not adequate to prompt timely adaptation in Iraq (or indeed Afghanistan.)

Clearly, it was the experience of failure, rather than simply the expectation of failure, that constitutes one of the most powerful drivers of change in Iraq. In this case, a military force designed to defeat other armies and gain ground rapidly and with minimal losses found itself unable to respond adequately to the insurgency that followed the initial invasion. Yet, despite this powerful goal, military-wide adaptation was slow and incomplete. To shed further light on how military adaptation in this case unfolded, explanations rooted in the notion of militaries as institutions seem to be most applicable.

The civil-military model for military change, most prominently developed by Barry Posen and subsequently Deborah Avant,[10] argues that direction from the civilian bureaucracy is the *sine qua non* of change in doctrine. Posen suggests that the involvement of a military 'maverick' is also important to the success of the process. A maverick is a military officer open to unconventional or minority ideas and

opinions, with the credibility to be taken seriously by military and civilian authorities, and the willingness to work within both worlds to advance change. When a maverick of this model works in tandem with civilian authorities open to military change as a means to advance political goals, doctrinal change occurs.

The organizational culture model, first applied by Elizabeth Kier, Theo Farrell, and Terry Terriff,[11] studies militaries as learning organizations. The idea that militaries possess a culture distinct from the state, and more than a simple aggregation of their members, has been well defended with respect to the American services.[12] One major route by which militaries change is through the emulation of another military; when a military's culture perceives another organization as professional and effective, whether in general or with respect to a specific circumstance, it will strive to replicate at least some elements of that other organization.[13]

Culture can also inhibit change; for instance, the Army's long-standing vision of itself as the conventional warfighter meant that its post-Cold War doctrinal commitment to operations other than war and peace-keeping was never translated into practice.[14] This is one reason why so much expertise in asymmetric warfare, counterinsurgency, and liaison and training was segregated in the SOF community, and not seeded throughout the military more broadly. The link between culture and learning, which is a pre-requisite for adaptation, is also emphasized in the work of John Nagl, who identifies a dissemination of authority to the local level, contact between senior officers and those with experience on the front lines of recent and current conflict, and a degree of openness to change as necessary preconditions for armies to be described as learning organizations, although he cautions that "organizational learning, when it does occur, tends to happen only in the wake of a particularly unpleasant or unproductive event."[15]

These two models of military change summarized above suggest where to look for adaptation in the case of the US experience in Iraq. The civil-military model indicates that both a theoretical and political basis for the change should exist, and should have a champion, if not unanimous support, at the highest levels of civilian authority. It should also have a "maverick," perhaps better understood as a "policy entrepreneur," to borrow from civilian public administration theory: a senior practitioner – a member of the military – with the social and institutional capital to advocate for change in both the military and civilian worlds, and standing in each from which to translate the concerns of policy-makers to practitioners and vice versa. Change is most likely to be found where there is an earlier example of excellence to be emulated; whether historical or apocryphal, the important dimension is that the desired outcome be seen as positive and possible. Those organizations most likely to change are those with the most communication up and down the chain of command, with thick organizational trust, a tradition of delegating decision-making downward, and an identity that is anchored more strongly in performance than in any particular doctrine or skillset. And, all those factors being present, the broader literature strongly sug-

gests that innovation or substantial change will still most likely occur in the wake of a failure, shock, or setback.

SOF IN IRAQ

US SOF carried out functions that had historically been among their strengths during the initial invasion. Some SOF teams had been established, alongside CIA personnel, in the north among the Kurdish population to organize the support there, and to prepare for the ultimately unrealized possibility of an allied attack launched from Turkey. Fifty other A-teams were positioned in advance to demolish Iraqi observation posts on the country's western and southern borders, and to determine the locations of Scud missiles.[16] American SOF, along with their Australian and British counterparts, also secured and defended Iraqi oil infrastructure, in order to prevent scorched earth tactics and facilitate the eventual reconstruction of an Iraqi state.[17] Their presence in the area was also in part a consequence of a decision by Washington to make Anbar an "economy of force" region, concentrating military forces around Baghdad once the invasion began.[18]

In the early days of the invasion, these forces moved throughout the northwestern regions of Iraq, working alongside local leaders whenever possible, and laying the groundwork for coordinated efforts and beginning irregular warfare against Iraqi army forces. They secured airfields for the use of follow-on forces, and called in fire on Iraqi ballistic missile launch sites. They also carried out successful attacks on terrorist training camps, primarily Al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Islam. Perhaps the most publicly prominent SOF accomplishment in this period was the rescue of Private First Class Jesicca Lynch.[19] As a force multiplier for conventional troops during the initial invasion phase, SOF "undoubtedly improved the tactical and operational performance of forces involved, especially in northern and western sections of Iraq, including Kurdish *peshmerga* partisans and conventional mechanized units."[20]

While the scale of their involvement in the initial weeks of Operation *Iraqi Freedom* exceeded even their role in Vietnam,[21] their activities in this span – preparing the way for follow-on conventional forces, securing and destroying key installations in advance, and partnering with indigenous forces – were well within the traditional domain for SOF. In the years ahead, the evolution of SOF in Iraq would take three major forms. The first was the development of a new approach to counter-terrorism, which sought neither the decapitation of insurgent groups nor solely the apprehension and interruption of tactical activities, but rather the evisceration of the organizations themselves.[22] The second was in their training of local forces and their cultivation of an Iraqi SOF capability, which underpinned the Sons of Iraq movement and proved a model for the capacity-building component of the Surge. The third was in demonstrating the validity of a new approach to fighting a counterinsurgency that located legitimacy at

the core of all efforts, serving as a template for the subsequent conduct of the war.

The SOF role in the invasion phase was concerned with attenuating risks around the overall goal of establishing a democratic post-Saddam government, by eliminating military threats to coalition forces but also by securing infrastructure and preventing neighbouring countries from being drawn into the war.[23] These efforts were successful, as was the invasion on purely military terms.[24] Just as the invasion and its success rapidly were replaced by something murkier and more complex, so were the roles filled by SOF in the invasion's aftermath.

Among the more renowned was the expanding role of SOF in direct action, particularly after the capture(s) of Fallujah in 2004 and the failure to capture or kill Abu Musab al-Zarkawi, the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq.[25] The highest profile SOF success in Iraq, the eventual killing of Zarkawi, arose from a counterterrorism program accelerated in ways unthinkable even a generation earlier, due to the rapid processing of human intelligence and intelligence gleaned from earlier captures. Technology played a vital role, both in mining the devices used by captured terrorists and in visual and electronic surveillance.[26] Ultimately, however, technology proved transformational only because it was permitted to do so by the greater organization. For instance, unlike their regular force counterparts, Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) units were not required to seek authorization for follow-on raids based on newly collected intelligence. Instead, they could analyze their own intelligence, draw conclusions, and then act on those conclusions, creating an ever faster loop that disrupted insurgent group planning.[27] The forces under then Lieutenant-General Stanley McChrystal's command went from carrying out 18 raids per month in 2004 to 300 per month two years later, a quantitative increase with qualitative implications. This was possible only because of SOF empowerment, according to McChrystal, who was given an unprecedented degree of freedom and extended the same to his subordinates.

The way in which this massively expanded role developed also provides insight into the networked nature of the enemy and its grasp of a different kind of warfare, in which decapitation is chimerical. McChrystal sought, rather, in the midst of the campaign to capture Zarkawi, to go after the substance of the network. "'The aim was to go after the middle of their network,' McChrystal would later reveal, 'in a regular army, their senior non-commissioned officers. We tried to cause the network to collapse.'"[28]

This change in focus, coupled with the use of information technology (IT) to accelerate the speed with which information from one capture led to the identification and apprehension of other insurgents, has been described as industrialized counterterrorism.[29] It dovetailed well with the boosted conventional army presence, especially in urban areas, and their growing use of counterterrorism tactics more broadly. The greater the visibility of American forces in Iraqi cities, the more insurgents were forced to communi-

cate electronically, which made them more vulnerable to being detected and captured. As regular forces focused on avoiding the missteps that generated support for any form of opposition to the occupation, SOF focused on rapidly destroying the networks themselves.[30]

The Surge was made up of additional US forces (five brigades, totaling roughly 30,000 troops) and a new formal joint doctrine published in Field Manual 3-24, meant to crystallize some of the best practices from earlier years in Iraq and standardize counterinsurgency in the country. Among the central elements of the manual were the importance of culture, to inform interactions with the local population as well as to shape effective influence and information operations; living in small groups as close as possible to the local population, both to strengthen relationships and improve understanding of the situation at the local level; and the devolution of decision-making to lower levels, in part as a function of organizing the force into smaller, distributed groups. All of these elements have been mainstays of SOF irregular warfare, foreign internal defence (FID), and information operations. The Surge was in a real sense an attempt to diffuse SOF tactics and philosophies, albeit at a simplified level, throughout the Iraqi theatre.

The role of the Anbar Awakening in the admittedly short-lived success in Iraq is often overlooked. "The war was over in Anbar, in 2006, before the surge ever began," according to Bing West, because the momentum of the Sunni population of the province and the rise of the Sons of Iraq changed the political atmosphere there, and to a lesser extent elsewhere in Iraq.[31] The initial attempts to build influence with local sheikhs in 2004 were SOF endeavors. Rather than simply distribute resources to senior leaders, they structured their efforts such that smaller tribal units asked their leader to seek out meetings from SOF. While accepting that some sheikhs would enrich themselves, this approach kept traditional social structures (and lines of authority) intact.[32]

Training Iraqi police and armed forces was a key goal of the Surge, on the assumption that a sustainable government with the ability to ensure both domestic and national security would permit a Coalition withdrawal. These training and mentoring projects, particularly after the Surge, were primarily conducted by regular US Army and Marine Corps troops, building on and expanding the initial work done by SOF units. A growing Iraqi security sector helped to enable a scaling back of the American presence, and a key element of that was the development of Iraqi SOF, which was built from scratch to two SOF battalions before the surge, and six by its conclusion. This force allowed the Iraqi government to assume direct responsibility for counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, rather than relying wholly (as in the earliest days of the war) or primarily (as before the surge) upon American efforts.[33]

A key sign that the broader military institution places a high value on the SOF understanding of warfare, and the role it played in Iraq, is the diffusion of SOF tactics and models of operation among conven-

tional forces. Both military and civilian analysts place a growing emphasis on the "small, the fast, and the many" in future conflict, and explicitly compare the ability of the US Army and Marine Corps to function in this way by adopting a more SOFish approach.[34] The degree to which SOF work jointly – and even integrate other agencies into their operations – is also seen as a model for the rest of the military. The integration of precision weapons, intelligence, and small, self-contained units is arguably the key to success in the fight against terrorism and the regimes that facilitate it, to the extent that both the Army and Marine Corps have consciously sought to emulate aspects of SOF.[35]

Senior military leaders have also advocated for expanding the capability of conventional military units to take on a range of traditionally SOF functions in future operations. With appropriate training, regular army units can – and according to some, should – take on limited direct action and counterterrorism capabilities.[36] Strengthening irregular warfare and foreign internal defence capabilities, so as to work better with indigenous forces, should also be priorities within the regular forces, according to senior army leadership, in part so that overtaxed SOF units can more readily hand off such missions and thereby free them for other activities.[37] This runs parallel with the prediction of Rear Admiral Winters, head of the Naval Special Warfare Command, that "white SOF will become grey, grey SOF will become black and black SOF will become blacker."[38]

The strategic push for greater security force assistance (SFA) as a way to obviate future threats – prevention, rather than reaction – also echoes both the perceived success of SOF and its traditional strengths. SFA represents an attempt of the US Army to carry out the training, equipping, and direction of forces inside partner or host nations. The 'gray zone,' a currently popular concept for describing conflicts that fall short of conventional war, is a particularly appropriate milieu for SFA.[39] Since the 2006 establishment of the Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance, the Army has explicitly looked for ways to incorporate SOF lessons into this domain, and to act as a force multiplier.[40] While there are concerns about the feasibility of conventional (or "general purpose") forces to carry out missions traditionally considered SOF specialties, attempts to enhance selection and training to bridge the gap continue.[41]

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

A useful approach to categorizing war, and understanding military innovation in the Iraq War is provided by Antoine Bousquet in *The Scientific Way of Warfare*.[42] He argues that each era of warfare was defined by a paradigmatic non-military technology, which shaped not only the weapons available and the way in which they were used but the very conception of conflict and victory. The clock is the icon of the mechanistic age, in which order, synchronization, linearity, and central control were the organizing principles of militaries and warfare. The engine is the icon of the thermodynamic age, in which explosions became

more important than trajectories, tonnage of ammunition became a more prevalent measure than infantry or cavalry numbers, and probability, velocity, and a measure of autonomy replaced linearity and central control. The cybernetic age is represented by the computer, in which feedback enables ever closer control of operations at the lowest level, abundant data corrects for uncertainty, and central control allows integration at unprecedented levels.

Bousquet's approach to the next iteration of warfare, which arose in the Iraq war, is the chaoplexic age, based around the network. Significant about this metaphor is that, unlike the three previous models, western forces have thus far only fought against chaoplexic enemies, and never fought in that manner themselves. Chaoplexic wars are distributed, with minimal central decision-making; therefore resilient, adaptive, and emergent; non-linear, and dependent upon both order (agreed upon broad principles and goals, knowledge of their own capabilities) and disorder (friction and chaos of conflict, tremendous ambiguity about near-term goals) in which to thrive. Networks (and perhaps, were Bousquet first writing in 2015, he would use the concept of a cloud) are very difficult to defeat. The two paths to the destruction of a network are either the destruction of each node, or the vast majority of them, or else the corruption of the means by which the nodes communicate, and the introduction of sufficient alien nodes, as to permanently alter the nature of the network.[43]

Legitimacy has long been proposed to be the center of gravity in counterinsurgent, and now chaoplexic, warfare. Wresting legitimacy from the enemy network is effectively the corruption of communication between nodes, in which the function of the network can be altered without destroying the nodes themselves. A quantitative model of counterinsurgency, which sought to identify determinative factors for success or failure, was developed by John Fishel and Max Manwaring, working for the US Army's Small Wars Operational Research Division (SWORD), and published in 1992. Based upon 43 conflicts that met their criteria, the study examined the influence of 71 independent variables upon the single dependent variable – victory or loss. Among the findings most relevant for this discussion was that the legitimacy of the counterinsurgent force and the host government, as well as deep cultural knowledge of the region and population in which the insurgency was being fought, were key factors in the ultimate success of the counterinsurgency.[44]

Taken together, then, a picture is emerging of how to fight *and* win this new form of warfare. It requires a military able to grapple, physically and morally with non-state actors and asymmetrical warfare, in which cultural understanding and an ability to relate individual interactions to the broader goal are paramount. It requires a military comfortable with ambiguity, in which authority is delegated to the lowest possible level, and hierarchies are flattened. And it requires a military in which any action can be aligned not only with immediate tactical success but also with the establishment and maintenance of a narrative

that enhances the legitimacy of the intervening power and diminishes that of the opponent. This was the environment in which SOF adapted its traditional strengths to an unprecedented challenge, and diffused many of its tools and mindsets throughout the wider US military.

The FID mission in Iraq was not dissimilar to previous missions of that nature except in its scope, which was to create an Iraqi SOF and counterterrorism capability, including a command structure that would support and work for the still-nascent Iraqi government. This task required not only linguistic skills but also sensitivity to cultural, religious, and ethnic dimensions, and above all the political complexities of training an elite Iraqi military on the rubble of a state built on domestic terror and factional hatred. By many indications it succeeded, producing 7,000 Iraqi Special Operations Forces personnel by the time the US-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement was signed in late 2008.[45]

SOF also played roles in two crucial functions related to legitimacy: information operations and advising and training local security forces. As FM 3-24 described it, this meant convincing uncommitted locals that cooperating with the occupying force, and the emerging government, was in their best interests, and that they would be protected from insurgent retaliation if they did so. Developing local police and security forces was both a functional goal, as part of creating durable Iraqi governance, and also part of the narrative of establishing legitimacy. The scale of the Iraq counterinsurgency necessitated the involvement of regular forces in both of these missions, but these initiatives were spearheaded by SOF.[46]

Resonant with Posen's argument about the intraservice, rather than external, sources of innovation is the fact that throughout much of the 1990s, and under Rumsfeld, SOF were seen as a smaller, cheaper replacement for large conventional forces, which would leverage technological advantages and carry out brief, very specific tasks, rather than engage in prolonged fighting.[47] Reinventing a role for SOF as a core component of a sustained effort alongside a substantial conventional military presence has served to make these capabilities crucial to warfighting in Iraq, without making SOF either an alternative to regular forces or a force solely focused on counterterrorism.

All SOF capabilities exist only within institutional constraints, which can be arbitrary and profoundly counterproductive. The need for SOF operators to function as diplomats, spies, anthropologists, and sources of many kinds of assistance presents a tremendous challenge, even without taking into account the culture of the wider military, which frequently misunderstands both the mission and the culture of SOF. Drawing from another war, Hy Rothstein illustrates the shortsightedness that can hamper SOF with a brief but biting anecdote based on their role in Afghanistan:

> "An Irish guy with a beard is still an Irish guy," proclaimed the conventional base commander in Kandahar when questioned about the order for special forces to shave and get into standard mili-

tary uniforms. "I don't know what they are trying to achieve." He was absolutely correct on both counts.[48]

The beard and non-standard garb were a very superficial manifestation of the mindset that made SOF so useful in Afghanistan, much as it does in Iraq. Support for insurgency is linked with beliefs that the community is vulnerable to an external threat; that it is suffering an injustice; that it cannot trust outsiders; that it is helpless; and that it is superior.[49] When SOF are carrying out both indirect actions involved in FID and direct raids on insurgents with a strikingly low rate of civilian casualties, and particularly when they do so in a manner that reflects cultural, social and political awareness, it works to counter every one of those beliefs.

Common to theorists who argue that civilian intervention and support is crucial for innovation, is a belief that a specific type of change is necessary. In Iraq, the experience of failure provided the necessary context and evidence needed for this sort of belief. Yet, as Posen explains, the role of a maverick in facilitating doctrinal change at such a crucial juncture must not be discounted. As both his memoir and other accounts of Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) in Iraq make clear, General McChrystal can easily fill that function. The conclusion of the general's military career aside, he was until that point sufficiently well-regarded in both civilian and military circles to earn the trust of his superiors and extend trust to those with whom he worked.

Still, it is oversimplifying things to suggest that there was only a single Posen-style maverick in the case of military innovation in Iraq, any more than the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) under the Bush administration depended solely on strength of Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld's personality. Rumsfeld may have been an unapologetic and long-standing champion, well before 9/11, of RMA, believing that it would capitalize on creativity and intelligence, use IT and information to dissolve the fog of war, and allow a greater tooth-to-tail ratio within a smaller and more effective total force.[50] But there were far more supporters of the cybernetic style RMA than just Rumsfeld, even if this fact alone does not negate his importance. The same can undoubtedly be said about the chaoplexic style innovations advocated by McChrystal.

While SOF were used in new and innovative ways in Iraq, the capabilities on which this innovation was built were long established. There existed already within SOF units and the JSOC a culture that embodied many of the traits of learning organizations, including less rigid hierarchies, the ability to work with other agencies and bodies, and ingrained flexibility. Perhaps most important is the tradition of mission command,[51] to which all modern militaries pay lip service but which few embody, and almost none as much as SOF.

The last ingredient for military change, based on the literature, is prior failure, innovation being uncommon in the absence of an impetus. Criticisms abound of the mindset and assumptions that led from triumph in April 2003 to insurgency mere months later. According to Richard Lock-Pullan, the flaw is in nothing less than the American way of war, which took to heart the defeat in Vietnam and the victory in Desert Storm and subsequently failed to develop any "philosophy and leadership within the army and toward war that cannot be seen simply as a technical issue of deploying technology correctly."[52] Whether the failure resulted from something so deep-seated, or arises from a particular vision of the war that disregarded its critics, is not the issue here.

One of the tests of innovation is whether the changes and lessons are institutionalized.[53] When institutional structures and resources are modified to promote new capabilities, senior management is sending a powerful signal that it has adopted and committed to both the new capabilities and the models of fighting they permit.[54] There is some evidence that the military as an organization has rewarded the SOF community with the increased and improved career paths, replacing the previous climate in which SOF was seen as career-limiting,[55] and signaling an actual, not nominal, acceptance of SOF.[56] Indeed, since 2001, SOF have been rewarded with the greatest rewards any bureaucracy can bestow: funds, personnel, and senior officials, in this case flag officers and general officers (FOGOs). Since 9/11, USSOCOM's total staffing has doubled, its budget has quintupled, and the number of FOGOs has grown eightfold. While still much smaller by any measure than any service, this rate of growth, unmatched proportionally by the rest of the military, both denotes and reinforces the institutionalization of SOF within the US security establishment.[57]

CONCLUSION

While the functions carried out by SOF in Iraq are not incongruous with their activities in prior conflicts, they represent nonetheless an instance of military innovation, in that these activities were carried out on an unprecedented scale, with greater rapidity and more tightly interconnected with other services and agencies than in the past, and through the exploitation of new technology. They also provided the foundation upon which a war built on reconstruction and rehabilitation, not conquest and surrender, could be won. These changes were possible because of the understanding at the most senior levels that their role was crucial to the new form of war in which the US found itself embroiled; sometimes SOF successes took place despite pressures from the very top, and entrenched institutional culture. No monocausal explanation of military innovation explains how SOF innovated and performed in this war, but an eclectic approach that draws upon existing theories about civil-military involvement, organizational culture, and institutional learning shows that there were many necessary, if not sufficient, contributors to this change, including a new form of warfare in which legitimacy was paramount to victory, and external and internal advocates of using SOF in the ways required by this environment.

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