COUNTERINSURGENCY LESSONS FROM MALAYA AND VIETNAM

Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife

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"To make war upon rebellion is messy and slow,
like eating soup with a knife."
—T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

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has been a personal and professional boon. Colonel Richard Downie is another soldier-scholar whose work has been influential in my own intellectual development; I appreciate his generosity. Dr. Jim Miller gave me a home and an education in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Dr. Jim Smith of the U.S. Air Force Academy's Institute for National Security Studies has been both a friend and a source of research funds, I appreciate all of his contributions. Brigadier (Retired) Michael Addison, Dr. Sam Gregg, and Dr. Nick Redman read drafts and provided many helpful comments, as did Chris Traugott, fifteen-year friend and provider of a permanent patrol base in Washington. Thanks to Dr. Heather Staines and everyone at Greenwood Press who worked so hard to make this book a reality.

Special thanks to my mother and mother-in-law, both of whom found books and provided emotional support and diversions from writing. Like mother, like daughter: Susi has battled insurgents in her pot plants and over the kitchen table as well as on the computer keyboard. Jack Frederick joined the project late but made the final editing process both more challenging and more fun.

With so much assistance, I can claim credit for little that follows except the errors of fact and interpretation that remain despite the best efforts of all of those listed here.

Introduction

Two months to the day after the attacks of 11 September 2001, U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers played a critical role in the defeat of Taliban forces at Mazar-i-Sharif. The victors displayed a remarkable ability to improvise, calling in precision-guided munitions while riding horses into battle. This was not a war the American military had prepared to fight; none of the Special Forces soldiers were trained in horse cavalry tactics. But the circumstances of the war in Afghanistan demanded that the Army adapt its traditional way of fighting and the Special Forces were able to learn on the fly, leading to the collapse of the Taliban regime in a remarkably innovative campaign.[1]

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld uses the horse cavalry charge at Mazar-i-Sharif to make a telling point about the military in the twenty-first century. He writes, "The lesson from the Afghan campaign is not that the U.S. Army should start stockpiling saddles. Rather, it is that preparing for the future will require new ways of thinking, and the development of forces and abilities that can adapt quickly to new challenges and unexpected circumstances."[2] This book explains how to build military organizations that can adapt more quickly and effectively to future changes in warfare.

Otto von Bismarck suggested that fools learn by experience whereas wise men learn from other peoples' experience.[3] This book examines how two armies learned when they were confronted with situations for which they were not prepared by training, organization, and doctrine: the British army in the Malayan Emergency and the American army in the Vietnam War. These cases are of particular interest today because both armies confronted

opponents who chose to fight them asymmetrically, avoiding their strengths while exploiting their weaknesses. Despite the difficulty of the task, the British army adapted itself to meet the demands of defeating a Communist rural insurgency, whereas the United States Army was less successful in learning how to conduct a counterinsurgency campaign. The comparison offers some interesting lessons in how armies can adapt to changed conditions.[4]

The Malayan Emergency and the Vietnam War have been the subject of comparative study before, notably in Richard Clutterbuck's *The Long, Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam*[5] and more recently in Sam Sarkesian's *Unconventional Conflicts in a New Security Era: Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*.[6] This study differs from these earlier works in that it analyzes the performance of the British and American armies, acting as executive agents for a number of government agencies, in learning how to deal with a situation for which they were originally unprepared. It follows the learning process by using the technique of *process tracing*, defined by the political scientist Alexander George as "attempts to assess the possibility of a causal relationship between independent and dependent variables by identifying intervening steps, or cause-and-effect links, between them."[7]

The cases of Malaya and Vietnam were not selected primarily because the two wars are similar in geographical location, colonial history, or time span, although these surface similarities do serve to make more apparent both the differences in the philosophy of counterinsurgency practiced by the British and American armies and the differing abilities of the two armies to learn and change during the course of a conflict.[8] This book does not attempt to provide the definitive answer as to why the United States "lost" the war in Vietnam, nor why the British "won" in Malaya—although the conclusions it will draw about the organizational culture and learning ability of the two armies certainly demonstrate some of the reasons for the differing results of the two conflicts.

The primary argument of the book is that the better performance of the British army in learning and implementing a successful counterinsurgency doctrine in Malaya (as compared to the American army's failure to learn and implement successful counterinsurgency doctrine in Vietnam) is best explained by the differing organizational cultures of the two armies; in short, that the British army was a learning institution and the American army was not. This difference in organizational culture between the two armies is the primary cause for their markedly different performances in learning and applying the lessons of counterinsurgency. The United States Army resisted any true attempt to learn how to fight an insurgency during the course of the Vietnam War, preferring to treat the war as a conventional conflict in the tradition of the Korean War and World War II. The British army, because of its traditional role as a colonial police force and the or-

ganizational culture that its history and the national culture created, was better able to learn quickly and apply the lessons of counterinsurgency during the course of the Malayan Emergency.

The organizational learning approach has not previously been applied to explain cases of military adaptation during the course of a conflict. Efforts to understand adaptive behavior in organizations have their roots in theories of bureaucratic politics, the fledgling field of organizational science, and recent attempts to apply theories of psychology and cognition to international relations. Because of the lack of consensus on the essential attributes of learning organizations and the absence of previous explanations of military adaptation during conflicts using this approach, the author has been forced to develop his own criteria by which to conduct what George describes as a "structured, focused comparison"[9] of British army counterinsurgency learning in Malaya and United States army learning in Vietnam. Literature on learning and cognitive psychology, the histories of successful and unsuccessful military organizations, and the author's own experiences of military organizations were all drawn upon in structuring and focusing the comparison. Particularly helpful was Richard Downie's *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War*. Downie examines United States Army counterinsurgency learning after Vietnam, using a theoretical framework upon which this study is built.[10]

The sheer volume of writing on the Malayan Emergency and (especially) on the Vietnam War can be too much of a good thing. Research for this book began with the use of secondary sources to sketch narratives of the two conflicts and published compilations of primary documentation.[11] This preliminary work allowed a focused research effort on the critical points at which learning happened—or was blocked—during the two conflicts. Documentary evidence, some never before seen, and interviews with both high-level decision makers and their more junior "eyes and ears" provided many answers. Oral histories, the midpoint between documents and interviews, were surprisingly useful in this regard.

The single most important archival source on British army learning during the Malayan Emergency are the papers of Gerald Templer: thirty boxes archived at the National Army Museum in Chelsea to which the author was only the third researcher granted access.[12] Of these, the most important are the thirty-nine letters exchanged between Templer and Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton between 20 February 1952 and 25 May 1954; it would be difficult to overstate their significance. The papers of General Robert Lockhart, also catalogued at the National Army Museum, are open but underutilized in explanations of British army performance in Malaya.

Many of the critical decision makers in both conflicts studied have reached an age and a position in life at which they enjoy recalling their role and are no longer hesitant about placing blame for mistakes made on other participants or, in rare cases, on their own heads. Many were willing

to talk more openly and of different topics with a serving army officer than they would have been with a purely academic researcher. Of the British army participants in the Malayan Emergency, General Sir Frank Kitson, who served at the operational level, and Major General David Lloyd Owen, Templer's Military Assistant and the provider of an invaluable perspective on high-level decision making, were particularly important.

The Colonial Policeman R. J. W. Craig MC was significant not just for revealing his insights into the importance of police forces in defeating the insurgency but also for opening the door to the Imperial War Museum's Department of Sound Records, where the archivist Dr. Conrad X. Wood has painstakingly compiled nearly one hundred interviews with participants in the Malayan Emergency, ranging from private soldiers through to the postwar Malaysian secretary of defence, Sir Robert Thompson. This resource has not been cited in any other work on the subject known to this author; Dr. Wood shares the author's hope that this project will emphasize its value and availability to future researchers.

Archival resources on the Vietnam War are vast. An invaluable road map to those that proved most relevant to this study was provided by Andrew Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam*.[13] It led to the U.S. army Center for Military History, which houses the twenty boxes of the Westmoreland History notes, a diarylike account of the most important United States Army decisions on Vietnam by the most significant American commander there. They were most valuable, as were the Signature Files of both General Westmoreland and of his deputy and successor, General Creighton Abrams. The U.S. Army Military History Institute is the repository of other important archives and of oral history interviews of the army's key decision makers conducted by U.S. Army War College students; like those held at the Imperial War Museum, these are open but underused.

Interviews on Vietnam ranged from the lowest officer ranks through the highest, including the Secretary of Defense. Again, the author's status as a serving army officer and the fact that the research was conducted under U.S. Army sponsorship and auspices both opened many doors and made those inside more willing to talk more openly about their experiences. Of these, the interview with Mr. McNamara was extremely useful despite his insistence that it remain background only. A brief meeting with General and Mrs. Westmoreland also provided important background knowledge, and Westmoreland's operations deputy during the critical year of 1966, Major General John Tillson III, was of great substantive help, as was the deputy MACV commander during the transition from Westmoreland to Abrams, General Andrew J. Goodpaster. Many of these participants will soon be lost to researchers; the author is extremely grateful for the chance to learn from them and for their assistance in providing context for the written record.

Through the selective use of archival sources, interviews, and oral histories, this book attempts to explain the differing performance of the British army in Malaya and the United States Army in Vietnam in "learning" how to defeat two very different Communist insurgencies during the cold war. The two conflicts were very different in scale, geography, and level of external support provided to the insurgents; they were similar in requiring an adaptive response from the Western armies involved. One army adapted successfully; the other did not, with profound effect on the international relations of the postwar era.

Chapter 1 builds on current research into innovation in military organizations, organizational culture, and organizational learning theories to construct a model of a military learning organization and tests with which to evaluate the ability of military organizations to "learn." The second chapter discusses the long history of guerrilla warfare, the changing nature of revolutionary warfare from Napoleon through Mao, and the definition of a successful counterinsurgency strategy, which is necessary to evaluate the performance of the British and American armies in developing their own counterinsurgency doctrines. The third chapter examines the organizational culture of the British and American armies before 1945 and their differing proclivities to reinforce learning behavior.

The book then examines the specific cases of the British in Malaya and the Americans in Vietnam to determine how, why, and how successfully the two armies adapted to the demands of revolutionary warfare. Finally, it draws some conclusions concerning the ability of military organizations to learn from their own experience and from that of other armies, as well as the ability of Western militaries to deal with insurgencies. It concludes with a discussion of ways to ensure that military organizations follow Bismarck's advice to learn, not just from their own experiences, but from those of other militaries as well, in the hope that more armies can prepare to fight the next war rather than the last one.

NOTES

1. Evan Thomas and John Barry, "A Fight over the Next Front," *Newsweek* (October 22, 2001), 43.

2. Donald A. Rumsfeld, "Transforming the Military," *Foreign Affairs* 81: 3 (May/June 2002), 22.

3. Quoted in Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 220.

4. The political scientist Alexander George suggested studying "cases of both success and failure in order to identify the conditions and variables that [seem] to account for this difference in the outcome." Alexander L. George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison," in Paul Gordon Lauren, ed., *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 44.

5. Richard Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1966).

6. Sam Sarkesian, *Unconventional Conflicts in a New Security Era: Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993).

7. George, "Case Studies and Theory Development," in Lauren, *Diplomacy*, 40.

8. Robert Thompson discusses the comparison in his own book, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972). "We have, then, a Malaya in comparison smaller, more prosperous and better administered: all great advantages in counter-insurgency. But perhaps the greatest advantage of all was that Malaya was completely isolated from outside Communist support." He goes on to note several advantages that the Vietnamese enjoyed, including "almost unlimited support from the American government" (19–20). Thompson, who worked on behalf of the American effort in Vietnam as head of the British Advisory Mission, did not always find the support of the American government to be an advantage.

9. George, "Case Studies and Theory Development," in Lauren, *Diplomacy*, 62.

10. Richard Downie, *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998). The author is grateful for Downie's research assistance, especially during a meeting at the Pentagon on 19 September 1996.

11. Primarily A.J. Stockwell, ed., *British Documents on the End of Empire: Malaya*, 3 volumes (London: HMSO, 1995), and *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam*, Senator Gravel Edition, 4 volumes (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

12. The author is grateful to Miles Templer for permission to use his father's papers.

13. Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Krepinevich provided more assistance during a 17 September 1996 interview in Washington, D.C.

List of Abbreviations

AID	Agency for International Development
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
BMD	British Military Doctrine
BRIAM	British Advisory Mission
CAP	U.S. Marine Corps Combined Action Platoon
CEPS	Combined Emergency Planning Staff
CG	Civil Guard
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CINPAC	Commander-in-Chief Pacific
CMH	U.S. Army Center for Military History
CO	Colonial Office
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COMUS-MACV	Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
CPO	Chief Police Officer
CSA	Chief of Staff of the Army
CT	Communist Terrorist
DRV	Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam
DSR	Department for Sound Records, Imperial War Museum

DWEC	District War Executive Committee
FARELF	Far East Land Force
FM	Field Marshal
FWEC	Federal War Executive Committee
GVN	Government of (South) Vietnam
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
ISA	International Security Affairs
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
LIC	Low Intensity Conflict
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MAF	Marine Amphibious Force
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MHI	U.S. Army Military History Institute
MOOTW	Military Operations Other Than War
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
MPAJU	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Union
MRLA	Malayan Races Liberation Army
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NITM	Notes and Information on Training Matters
OCPD	Officer in Charge of the Police District
OOTW	Operations Other Than War
PFF	Police Field Force
PRO	Public Records Office
PROVN	Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RAND	Research and Development Corporation
RD	Revolutionary Development
RF/PF	Regional Forces and Popular Forces
RSA	Royal School of Artillery
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SAS	Special Air Service
SB	Special Branch
SDC	Self-Defense Corps

SEP	Surrendered Enemy Personnel
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SOOHP	U.S. Army Military History Institute Senior Officer Oral History Project
SOV	Special Operations Volunteer
SWEC	State War Executive Committee
TDRC	British Army Tactical Doctrine Retrieval Cell
TRIM	Training Relations and Instruction Mission
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
USA	U.S. Army
USIA	U.S. Information Agency
VA	Voice Aircraft
WO	War Office

How Armies Learn

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL MODELS OF MILITARY INNOVATION

There is substantial disagreement over what spurs military innovation. An early debate in the American academy centered on whether it was possible for military organizations to adapt to changes in their environment without substantial pressure from outside. Barry Posen argued that fundamental change in military organizations occurs as a result of the efforts of external civilian reformers, often with the assistance of individual military officers he called "mavericks." These reformers respond to the emergence of national security threats that current military doctrine is unable to meet. Other writers also focus on pressures outside the military that they feel are the key to doctrinal change.[1] A common feature of their arguments is the belief that military organizations are essentially conservative and reflexively opposed to change; thus, in order to simplify their possible responses to the uncertain environment of future war, they focus on offensive military doctrine, regardless of whether it is appropriate to the nature of the warfare of the time or to the strategic situation of their nation. In this view, civilian leaders intervene to force changes in doctrine only during times of imminent crisis. This has been called the "Cult of the Offensive" explanation.[2]

In 1991, Stephen P. Rosen argued that neither defeat in wartime nor civilian intervention to assist military "mavericks" is a necessary prerequisite for military innovation. Instead, senior military officers who create new military tasks and missions for their service, inspire a generation of young officers to take up this new career path, and are assisted by senior

government civilians can create major changes in military doctrine.[3] This could be described as an internal model of military innovation.

In 1993, Ricky Lynn Waddell compared the usefulness of the theories of Stephen Rosen and Barry Posen to explain developments in U.S. Army Low-Intensity Conflict Doctrine from 1961 to 1993.[4] He found that civilian reformers and members of the army combined to cause changes in military doctrine, but that maverick officers were not necessary for doctrine to change in response to changes in the international system and the requirements of new forms of warfare. Waddell thus combined the internal and external schools of military innovation in an integrative model of doctrinal change. He is joined in this approach by Kimberly Martin Zisk, who believes that military organizations innovate in response to foreign doctrinal shifts that they view as a threat, even in the absence of civilian intervention,[5] and by Deborah Avant, author of *Political Institutions and Military Change*.[6] Avant's book, which compares the performance of the British army in the Boer War and the Malayan Emergency with that of the American army in Vietnam, concludes that the parliamentary British system of government has created a more adaptable army than has the presidential American system.

An integrative perspective is also adopted by Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett in *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, although their explanation of causality differs from Avant's.[7] Murray and Barry Watts conclude, "Without the emergence of bureaucratic acceptance by senior *military* leaders, including adequate funding for new enterprises and viable career paths to attract bright officers, it is difficult, if not impossible, for new ways of fighting to take root within existing military institutions."[8]

Organizational and Strategic Culture

Although these studies provide valuable perspectives on the factors that spur innovation in military organizations, they do not adequately evaluate how different military forces create, assimilate, and disseminate doctrinal change during the course of conflicts, nor why some military forces are more successful at the process than are others. One possible explanation originates in the realm of organizational theory.

Organizational theory suggests that organizations are created in order to accomplish certain missions. Over time certain missions become more important than other missions to the leadership of the organization. According to an early proponent of organizational theory, the essence of an organization is the view of the dominant group in that organization on the best roles and missions for that organization.[9] The essence is "the notion held by members of an organization as to what the main capabilities and primary mission of the organization should be."[10] Morton Halperin lists a number of ways by which organizations demonstrate the importance of

their essence. Organizations favor policies that will increase the importance of the organization, fight for the capabilities that they view as essential to their essence, seek to protect those capabilities viewed as essential, and demonstrate comparative indifference to functions not viewed as essential.[11] Leaders of organizations have substantial influence over their own destinies: "Career officials of an organization believe that they are in a better position than others to determine what capabilities they should have and how they should best fulfill their mission. They attach very high priority to controlling their own resources so that these can be used to support the essence of the organization."[12]

In order to contribute to the concept of the organization as successful, organizations reward those members who contribute to the essence of the organization. Thus, as Halperin observes, "military officers compete for roles in what is seen as the essence of the services' activity rather than other functions where promotion is less likely . . . Army officers compete for roles in combat organizations rather than advisory missions."[13] Maintaining morale in organizations can become even more important than accomplishing the missions of that organization: "Short-run accomplishment of goals and even increases in budgets take second place to the long-run health of the organization." Halperin notes the example of the army's one year tour of duty for officers in Vietnam, which many observers think contributed to the poor performance of the army in that conflict. The army was dedicated to the policy because it gave the greatest possible number of officers the opportunity to experience combat, widely viewed as necessary for promotion.[14]

As thinking about the sources of military innovation evolved, some analysts turned to the idea of strategic culture to explain differing responses from different organizations to similar situations. In the words of James Wilson, "Every organization has a culture, that is, a persistent, patterned way of thinking about the central tasks of and human relationships within an organization."[15] This school of thought believes that, whereas military organizations are alike in many ways, different militaries have different organizational cultures.[16] The British and American armies played very different roles in the international system and in the lives of their nations in the years before they joined in an alliance to defeat Nazi Germany; it is not surprising that their organizational cultures are very different. These differences were magnified in the postwar era, as the American army focused itself on preparing to fight the forces of the Warsaw Pact in Europe. Although the British army also had substantial responsibilities to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), it simultaneously engaged in a series of what have been described as "Brushfire Wars" during the devolution of empire. These modified the British army's own concept of its role in the international system.

In the 1990s Lieutenant General Theodore G. Stroup demonstrated how

pervasive the concept of strategic culture has become: "The Army's culture is its personality. It reflects the Army's values, philosophy, norms, and unwritten rules. Our culture has a powerful effect because our common underlying assumptions guide behavior and the way the Army processes information as an organization."[17] The essence of the American army, in the eyes of its career officers, is ground combat by organized regular divisional units. Although the American army tolerates the existence of subcultures that do not directly contribute to the essence of the organization, these peripheral organizations do not receive the support accorded to the army core constituencies of armor, infantry, and artillery.[18] It is these combat arms that exert most influence on the way the army approaches conflicts.

The varying strategic and organizational cultures of different organizations play a critical role in the organizations' abilities to adapt their structure and functions to the demands placed on them. As Elizabeth Kier notes: "Culture has independent explanatory power.... The organizational culture is the intervening variable between civilian decisions and military doctrine."[19] The U.S. Army's organizational culture, for example, led it only haltingly and grudgingly to implement President John F. Kennedy's instructions to focus on counterinsurgency in the early 1960s. Organizational culture also plays a critical role in determining how effectively organizations can learn from their own experiences.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING THEORIES

An evolving body of organizational learning literature examines how organizations "learn" from their experiences.[20] It suggests a cyclical process through which doctrine and standard operating procedures evolve in all organizations.[21] The institutional learning process begins with the recognition of shortcomings in organizational knowledge or performance. It moves through the critical phase of searching for and achieving consensus on the right solution for the shortcomings to the adoption and dissemination of the modified doctrine. The process then repeats itself endlessly.[22] This study will follow Richard Downie in defining learning as "a process by which an organization uses new knowledge or understanding gained from experience or study to adjust institutional norms, doctrine and procedures in ways designed to minimize previous gaps in performance and maximize future successes."[23]

Essential to any examination of organizational learning, but especially to learning in military organizations, is the concept of institutional memory. The institutional memory of an organization is the conventional wisdom of an organization about how to perform its tasks and missions. Although organizations are admittedly collections of individuals, individual learning is not sufficient for the organization to change its practices; a more com-

plicated process involving the institutional memory is required. As Bo Hedberg puts it, "Members come and go, and leadership changes, but organizations' memories preserve certain behaviors, mental maps, norms, and values over time."[24]

An army codifies its institutional memory in doctrine. According to the most recent edition of Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, the capstone of the American army's thinking about war, doctrine is the "concise expression of how Army forces contribute to unified action in campaigns, major operations, battles, and engagements.... Army doctrine provides a common language and a common understanding of how Army forces conduct operations."[25]

Although the British army definition of doctrine echoes the American as a result of NATO standardization agreements, published doctrine is a relatively recent phenomenon in the British Army.[26] In fact, General Sir Nigel Bagnall was the first Chief of the General Staff to insist that it be written in the British army; his successor, Sir John Chapple, found it necessary in 1989 to reply to "some who say that laying down doctrine like this is not the British way" by stating: "The modern battlefield is not a place where we could hope to succeed by muddling through. Doctrine is not in itself a prescription for success as a set of rules.... What it does provide is the basis for thought, further selective study and reading which is the personal responsibility of all of us."[27] A British doctrine writer concurs: "The first safe assumption is that war will occur where it is little expected and that warfare will assume at least a partly unforeseen form." As a result, in wartime the services "must be able to react positively to the unexpected, adjusting their methods of operation rapidly to the circumstances actually prevailing."[28]

Doctrinal changes are not the only way in which military organizations demonstrate learning, although the published nature of formalized doctrine makes it convincing evidence of change. Learning is also demonstrated in the curricula of military schools and training institutions, in the structure of military organizations, in the creation of new organizations to deal with new or changed situations, and in myriad other institutional responses to change. As a result of the long process required to revise or rewrite published doctrine and ensure its approval through all of the levels of military bureaucracy through which it must pass prior to publication, doctrinal change is in many ways a trailing indicator of institutional learning. Responsive, flexible military institutions often publish "Lessons Learned" notes, incorporating information gained locally during the course of a conflict, and pull forces out of a conflict for periodic retraining in new techniques or new weaponry. Such cases should be accepted as indicators of the flexibility of the organization and its willingness to learn; however, the changes are generally incorporated into published doctrine at the first opportunity.

Figure 1-1
The Institutional Learning Cycle: The Process of Doctrinal Change
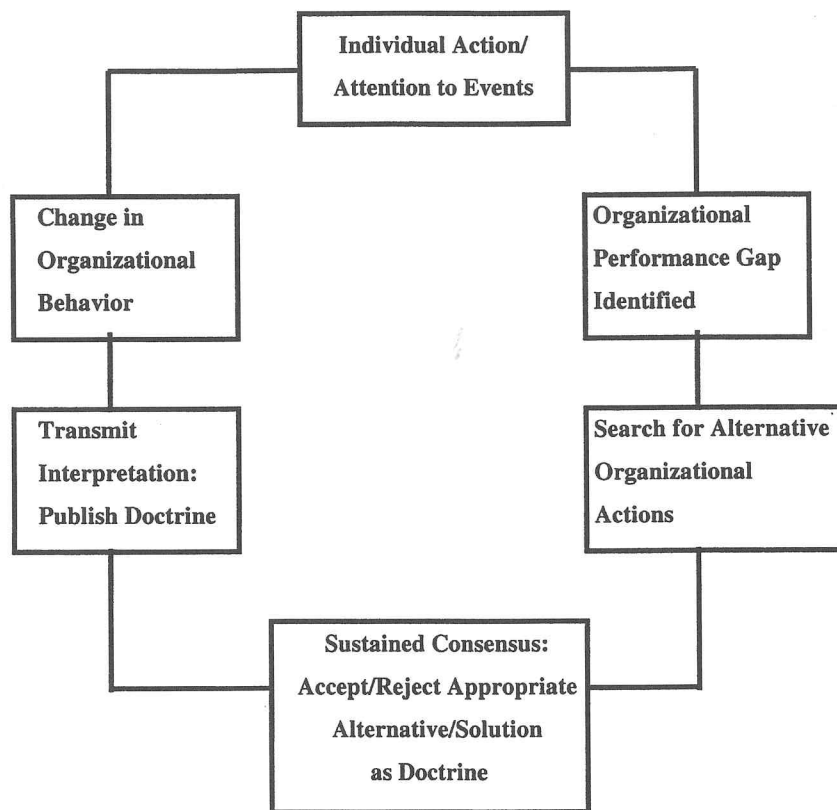
Doctrine is thus an efficient way to track the development of learning in military organizations; changes in doctrine are prima facie evidence of military learning. Figure 1-1 depicts Richard Downie's application of the complete learning cycle to military institutions, with the learning process demonstrated through published and disseminated changes in doctrine.[29]

Resistance to Learning

Military organizations often demonstrate remarkable resistance to doctrinal change as a result of their organizational cultures. Organizational learning, when it does occur, tends to happen only in the wake of a particularly unpleasant or unproductive event. The British army finally scrapped the "Purchase System" as a means of selecting its officers as a result of the spectacularly poor performance of many of its officers during the Crimean War, though there was a substantial time lag—the system was not reformed until Edward Cardwell, the secretary of state for war, introduced the Regulation of Forces Act of 1871.[30] Even spectacular failures do not necessarily promote adaptation, however; Richard Downie found that the American army's counterinsurgency doctrine did not change substantially in the fifteen years after its failure in Vietnam.

An early and particularly interesting examination of the importance of organizational culture as a factor creating resistance to adaptation in military organizations is Edward L. Katzenbach's "The Horse Cavalry in the Twentieth Century: A Study in Policy Response."[31] Katzenbach examines the institutional forces that allowed the horse cavalry to survive in the face of four profound changes in military technology: the invention of automatic weapons, the introduction of internal combustion engines to the battlefield in the air and on the ground, the creation of airborne forces, and the development of nuclear weapons. To explain the remarkable adherence of cavalrymen in both Europe and the United States to their mounts despite these developments (the Belgian General Staff suggested the reintroduction of the horse into its military forces in 1956 for mobility on the nuclear battlefield!), Katzenbach dissected the organizational culture of the cavalry. He discovered that emotional faith in battle-tested systems, the hierarchy of the military culture, the lack of peacetime pressure to make changes whose actual importance to the state becomes clear only in war, and the lack of desire of civilian leadership to spend money on military change in peacetime all conspired to keep horses in the cavalry.[32] Since the military bureaucracy could not overcome the organizational culture to create needed change, Katzenbach supported the external theory of military innovation: "The greatest instigation of new weapons development has in the past come from civilian interest plus industrial pressure. The civilian governors get the weapons systems *they* want."[33]

Successful adaptations of military doctrine in the course of a war are interesting cases of organizational adaptation under extreme pressure. One such case is the development of infiltration tactics by the German Army in 1917, after three hard years of trench warfare[34]; another is the adaptation of the American army to *bocage* fighting in the hedgerows of Normandy.[35] This book will examine the British army's process of learning successful counterinsurgency doctrine in 1951 after three unsuccessful years fighting Communist insurgents in Malaya; the conclusion of the Malayan Emergency in 1960 marked one of the few Western successes in counterinsurgency. The American army, in contrast, did not learn how to defeat an insurgency during the course of its war, and it also failed to learn from a British Advisory Mission invited to Vietnam for the sole purpose of imparting lessons learned from the Malayan conflict.

Figure 1-2
Question Set #1: Was the Army a "Learning Institution"?

1.) Does the army promote suggestions from the field?

2.) Are subordinates encouraged to question superiors and policies?

3.) Does the organization regularly question its basic assumptions?

4.) Are high-ranking officers routinely in close contact with those on the ground and open to their suggestions?

5.) Are Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) generated locally and informally or imposed from the center?

EVALUATING ARMIES AS LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

Although there is no universally accepted question set that can be used to determine whether a specific institution performs as a "learning organization," the characteristics of such institutions are generally well accepted. A recent book by the former U.S. Army chief of staff, Gordon R. Sullivan, and one of his strategic planners, Colonel Michael V. Harper, applies this consensus in a study of the early post–cold war performance of the U.S. Army.[36] Chapter 11 of *Hope Is Not a Method*, specifically dedicated to "Growing the Learning Organization," argues, "The [U.S.] Army began its journey to becoming a learning organization in the 1970's."[37] Sullivan and Harper posit a six-step organizational learning process, with the steps very similar to those presented by Richard Downie in his organizational learning cycle: targeting opportunity, collecting data, creating knowledge, distributing knowledge, performing short-term applications, and performing long-term applications.[38]

This study draws on these six steps in building Question Set #1 (Figure 1-2), but also on what Sullivan and Harper describe as "the three key elements" in meeting "the learning challenge": "the right culture, the knowledge itself, and access to the knowledge."[39] The questions aim at determining not just whether an army is interested in the collection of data—promoting suggestions from those engaged in combat—but, far more important, whether the institution is willing and able to apply the information to create change in procedures, organization, training, and thinking about conflict. In the words of a student of U.S. Army learning during conflicts, "An army learns lessons *after* it incorporates the conclusions derived from experience into institutional form."[40] It is therefore essential that the army leadership be willing to accept, or at least consider, even what at first appear to be heretical ideas. The 1902 *Combat Training* manual of the British army explains an institutional culture that would earn full marks from Question Set #1:

Success in war cannot be expected unless all ranks have been trained in peace to use their wits. Generals and commanding officers are, therefore, not only to encourage their subordinates in so doing by affording them constant opportunities of acting on their own responsibility but, they will also check all practices which interfere with the free exercise of the judgment, and will break down, by every means in their power, the paralyzing habit of an unreasoning and mechanical adherence to the letter of orders and to routine, when acting under service conditions.[41]

The answers to the "structured, focused" questions in Question Set #1 will demonstrate that the British army was in fact a "learning institution" during the period of this study as a result of its organizational culture. The army developed a successful counterinsurgency doctrine in Malaya largely as a result of its performance as a "learning institution." The answers to the same questions will show that the American army was not a learning institution during its involvement in Vietnam but was in fact organizationally disposed against learning how to fight and win counterinsurgency warfare. It was as a result of this failure to become a "learning institution" that the American army did not learn how to fight a counterinsurgency war in Vietnam, and that the British Advisory Mission to Vietnam was ineffective in passing on counterinsurgency lessons from the recent British success in Malaya to the American army in Vietnam.

The next chapter will discuss the long history of guerrilla warfare, the changing nature of revolutionary warfare from Napoleon through Mao, and the definition of a successful counterinsurgency strategy, all of which are necessary to evaluate the performance of the British and American armies in developing their own counterinsurgency doctrines.

NOTES

1. They include Steven Van Evera, "Why Cooperation Failed in 1914," in Kenneth Oye, ed., *Cooperation Under Anarchy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War," *International Security* 9/1 (Summer 1984), 58–107.

2. Christopher M. Gacek, *The Logic of Force: The Dilemma of Limited War in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 6. Gacek argues that the tension between concepts of limited war and "Total Victory" has driven postwar American decisions regarding the use of force in international relations; see p. 20.

3. Stephen P. Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

4. Ricky Lynn Waddell, *The Army and Peacetime Low Intensity Conflict, 1961–1993: The Process of Peripheral and Fundamental Military Change* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1993).

5. Kimberly Martin Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955–1991* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

6. Deborah Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

7. Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, eds., *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). This study further develops the work done by Millett and Murray in their three volumes on *Military Effectiveness* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1988), focusing on the learning process during the interwar years.

8. Watts and Murray, "Innovation in Peacetime," in Murray and Millett, *Military Innovation*, 409.

9. Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1974), 26–28. This discussion of the concept of organizational culture relies heavily on Halperin, who was one of the first and most perceptive analysts of the organizational culture of the American army. The organizational culture of the British army has not been extensively studied; Patrick Mileham's *Ethos: British Army Officership, 1962–1992* (Camberley: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute Occasional Paper #19) is a recent exception that also helps to explain the cause of the neglect: "Aversion to abstract theory is a known and well documented British national characteristic" (4).

10. Morton Halperin and Arnold Kanter, "The Bureaucratic Perspective," in Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis, eds., *International Politics: Anarchy, Force, Political Economy, and Decision Making*, 2d ed. (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1985), 444.

11. Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 39–40.

12. Ibid., 51.

13. Ibid., 55.

14. Ibid., 56.

15. James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 91.

16. The evolution of strategic culture explanations for military policies is reviewed by Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking About Strategic Culture," *International Security* 19/4 (Spring 1995), 32–64.

17. Theodore G. Stroup, Jr., "Leadership and Organizational Culture: Actions Speak Louder than Words," *Military Review* LXXVI, No. 1 (January/February 1996), 45.

18. Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 34–35.

19. Elizabeth Kier, "Culture and Military Doctrine: France Between the Wars," *International Security* 19/4 (Spring 1995), 66.

20. The best review of organizational learning theory as applied to international relations is Jack S. Levy, "Learning and Foreign Policy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," *International Organization* 48, 2 (Spring 1994), 279–312. See also Barbara Levitt and James G. March, "Organizational Learning," in Michael D. Cohen and Lee S. Sproul, eds., *Organizational Learning* (London: Sage, 1996), 516–540.

21. Richard Downie, *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and that Drug War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 9. Downie examines the learning ability of the American army by tracing the development of American counterinsurgency doctrine after Vietnam and in El Salvador, and by evaluating counterdrug doctrine in the Andean Ridge. This study applies Downie's theoretical

base to cases of military innovation during the course of conflicts and to a cross-cultural comparison to determine the relative importance of the learning institution in accounting for military success and failure.

22. James C. March and Johan P. Olsen, "Organizational Learning and the Ambiguity of the Past," in March and Olsen, eds., *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations* (Oslo, Sweden: Universitet forlaget, 1976).

23. Downie, *Learning from Conflict*, 22.

24. Bo Hedberg, "How Organizations Learn and Unlearn," in Paul C. Nystrom and William H. Starbuck, eds., *Handbook of Organizational Design* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 6.

25. Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 3–0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2001), 1–45 and 1–46.

26. When asked why it was that the British army began to publish doctrine so late in its history, General Sir Frank Kitson harumphed, "No one would read it if they did write it down." Interview in Devon, 12 December 1995.

27. Army Code 71451, *Design for Military Operations: The British Military Doctrine* (1989), vii.

28. Ibid., 21.

29. The concept is familiar in organizational learning literature; for example, "The Experiential Learning Cycle" consists of "Experience, Reflection, Generalization, and Experimentation" in a feedback loop process in Gervase R. Bushe and A.B. Shani, *Parallel Learning Structures: Increasing Innovation in Bureaucracies* (Wokingham, England: Addison-Wesley, 1991), 141. This cycle owes its intellectual heritage to Colonel John Boyd, developer of the "Boyd Cycle" or "OODA Loop" in which fighter pilots are taught to observe, orient, decide, and act faster than their opponents can. See "Colonel John Boyd Dies, Revolutionized Air Combat Tactics," *International Herald Tribune* (14 March 1997), 2.

30. Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Reason Why* (London: Constable, 1955), 22–25. Another good analysis is Correlli Barnett, *Britain and Her Army* (London: Penguin, 1970), 283–291.

31. Edward L. Katzenbach, "The Horse Cavalry in the Twentieth Century: A Study in Policy Response," *Public Policy* (1958), 120–149.

32. Ibid., 121.

33. Ibid., 148.

34. Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1981).

35. Michael D. Doubler, *Closing with the Enemy* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994).

36. Gordon R. Sullivan and Michael V. Harper, *Hope Is Not a Method: What Business Leaders Can Learn from America's Army* (New York: Random House/Times Business, 1996). The author is grateful to Sir Douglas Haig of Templeton College for an invitation to attend a seminar based on this book led by Colonel Harper at Templeton on 12 November 1996 and to Colonel Harper for his help in defining "learning institutions."

37. Ibid., 190. The quotation implies that the U.S. Army was not a learning organization during the Vietnam War, a conclusion with which this study agrees.

38. Ibid., 206–207.

39. Ibid., 206. These questions are also influenced by those asked by Allan R. Millett, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth H. Watman in "The Effectiveness of Military Organizations," the first chapter of Allan R. Millet and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness*. Volume I, *The First World War* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1988), 1–30.

40. Dennis J. Vetock, *Lessons Learned: A History of U.S. Army Lesson Learning* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army Military History Institute, 1988), 128. This is a good historical survey of U.S. Army use of its combat experiences to learn lessons in wartime, although it downplays the importance of organizational culture. This author disagrees with Vetock's conclusion that "the most effective procedures for managing the [U.S.] Army's usable combat experience involved the centralization of responsibility, control and operation" (127); this conclusion is true only for the major conflicts that have represented the organizational essence of the U.S. Army throughout its history.

41. Great Britain War Office, *Combined Training (Provisional)* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1902), 4. Quoted in Michael J. Meese, "Institutionalizing Maneuver Warfare: The Process of Organizational Change," in Richard D. Hooker, Jr., ed., *Maneuver Warfare: An Anthology* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1993), 204. The author is grateful to then-Major Meese for his assistance at West Point on 6 September 1996.

2
The Hard Lesson of Insurgency

Low-intensity conflict has been more common throughout the history of warfare than has conflict between nations represented by armies on a "conventional" field of battle. Until relatively recently, however, those who took up arms against the state were referred to as bandits or criminals rather than as combatants in irregular warfare; it was only the rise of nationalism, and the corresponding growth of acceptance of individual liberty and responsibility, that provided a sort of legitimacy to violence directed against the state.[1]

The essential features of guerrilla warfare are avoiding the enemy's strength—his main fighting forces—while striking at outposts and logistical support from unexpected directions. This principle is now often described as "asymmetric," but it is as old as the word *guerrilla* itself. The term is derived from the Spanish term for "small war" and springs from the Spanish rebellion of 1808 against an occupying French army. The combined efforts of Wellington's 60,000 men, a small Spanish army, and the Spanish *guerrilleros* tied up more than 250,000 French troops and supported Henry IV's remark that "Spain is a country where small armies are beaten and large ones starve."[2] Henry's appreciation for the unpleasant fate that befell foreign armies invading Spain echoes the Roman experience there in the second century B.C.; Napoleon was not the first to be checked by Spanish guerrillas!

Henry focused on the country of Spain, but the combination of difficult, broken terrain and a proud people who refuse to bow before a foreign invader is one of the constants of guerrilla warfare. A more contemporary

ficers the concept of conventional attrition-based warfare as the "American Way of War." Whereas the Persian Gulf War of 1990–91 was "the right war, at the right time, at the right place, against the right enemy" so far as the U.S. Army was concerned, the rebuilding of the American army after Vietnam into a force that could again fight and win remains a remarkable achievement. See James Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers: How the Generation of Officers Born of Vietnam Revolutionized the American Style of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

73. For a convincing argument that the army's "Lessons Learning" system remains constrained by its organizational culture, see Sean D. Naylor, "Somalia Revisited: Is the Army Using Any of the Lessons It Learned?" *Army Times* (7 October 1996), 9–12.

9

Organizational Culture and Learning Institutions: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife

The organizational culture of the British army allowed it to learn how to conduct a counterinsurgency campaign during the Malayan Emergency, whereas the organizational culture of the U.S. Army prevented a similar organizational learning process during and after the Vietnam War. This chapter attempts to place these conclusions in a wider context. It evaluates current ideas on military innovation, argues that organizational learning theory is a useful tool with which to analyze organizational change, and discusses the impact of varying organizational cultures on the learning abilities of different organizations. The chapter concludes with some ideas about how to make military forces adaptable in the light of emerging changes in warfare and about how to overcome institutional culture when necessary in building learning institutions.

IDEAS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

"Black box" theories of international relations suggest that states act only in order to increase their power in the international system; any state placed in the same situation would react in exactly the same way. The truth is more complicated. There are a number of factors other than power that

affect the ability of states to achieve their goals and preserve their positions in the state system.[1] One of these factors is the organizational culture of a state's armed forces. The organizational culture of military forces is a decisive determinant in their effectiveness and hence helps to determine the course of international politics. The ability of military organizations to adapt to change—whether that change occurs in military technology, in the structure of the international system, or in the nature of war itself—is an important component of a state's ability to guarantee its own security and that of its allies.

In short, military organizations that are "learning institutions" add to the influence of their states in the international system. This was the case for the United Kingdom in the wake of the Malayan Emergency. Military organizations that are unable to learn can substantially damage the ability of their states to influence the international system; the United States suffered appreciably during and after the Vietnam War because its military was unable to learn how to counter insurgency. Understanding the organizational culture of military institutions, and the effects of that culture on their ability to learn, increases our ability to understand how states act and react in the international system.

EVALUATING THE LITERATURE ON MILITARY INNOVATION

Current literature on military innovation focuses on the question of whether armed services can innovate independently[2] or whether civilian leadership must force innovation on an unwilling military.[3] Some authors have found that civilian reformers and members of the military combine to create changes in doctrine, an integrative model of military innovation.[4]

Most research to date has focused on military innovation in peacetime rather than during conflict. However, the process of innovation is very different in wartime. Steven Rosen notes that military forces "exist in order to fight a foreign enemy, and do not execute this function every day. Most of the time, the countries they serve are at peace. . . . Instead of being routinely 'in business' and learning from ongoing experience, they must anticipate wars that may or may not occur."[5] One of the few studies of military innovation under the pressure of combat is Timothy T. Lupfer's *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War*.[6] Although it examines only tactical level innovation, the study is significant for its description of the process through which the German army adapted to the demands of trench warfare.

Another examination of the relationship between civilian and military leadership and military innovation in wartime is Deborah Avant's *Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral Wars*.[7] Avant compares British army innovation during the Boer War and the Malayan Emergency with American army innovation in Vietnam. Rather than focusing on the differences between the two armies as the critical variable explaining the different patterns of innovation, Avant believes that the different political systems of the United States and Britain led the two nations' politicians to create different militaries:

Civilian leaders in Britain, who had institutional incentives to act as a unit, had an easier time agreeing on both policy goals and oversight options to ensure that the Army followed these goals. Under these conditions, the British Army reacted more flexibility to changes in civilian leaders' goals. Conversely, civilian leaders in the United States, who had institutional incentives to act separately, found it harder to agree on policy goals and often chose more complex oversight mechanisms, which did not always induce the U.S. Army to respond easily to change.[8]

According to this view, British army officers responded directly to their political masters in the Cabinet, creating a more flexible military. In the American system the military had the ability to "trade off" demands made by the Congress against the president or vice versa. There are wider implications: "Differences in institutional structures that affect ensuing differences in the growth of parties, the issue-focus of voters, the interpretation of the international system, and the terms of delegation will lead to differences in the preferences of military organizations and civilian leaders. These variations explain the deviations in policy."[9]

This study reaches different conclusions, arguing along with Barry Watts and Williamson Murray that "the potential for civilian or outside leadership to *impose* a new vision of future war on a reluctant military service whose heart remains committed to existing ways of fighting is, at best, limited."[10] The critical independent variable is not the nature of national government, which in most cases has little impact on which policies the military chooses to adopt. It is the organizational culture of the military institution that determines whether innovation succeeds or fails.

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEARNING THEORY AS A TOOL FOR ANALYZING MILITARY INNOVATION

This study has attempted to explain why one military force successfully adapted to change whereas another failed to do so by tracing the processes through which the British army in the Malayan Emergency and the American army in the Vietnam War learned counterinsurgency. Using a theory of organizational learning first developed from observations of business management, the study focused on the process through which change developed or failed to develop. It found that the organizational culture—the "persistent, patterned way of thinking about the central tasks of and human relationships within an organization"[11]—played a key role in allowing an organization to create a consensus either in favor of or in opposition to

proposals for change. Changes that conflict with the dominant group's ideas on preferred roles and missions—the essence of the organization—will not be adopted. Leaders of the organization, conditioned by the culture they have absorbed through years of service in that organization, will prevent changes in the core mission and roles. The key variable explaining when militaries will adapt to changes in warfare is the creation of a consensus among the leaders of the organization that such innovation is in the long-term interests of the organization itself.[12]

Unfortunately, organizational learning theory is not a succinct explanation for why some military forces innovate and others do not. Since it uses the technique of process tracing, learning theory demands in-depth study of individual cases of innovation or failure to innovate. Its emphasis on organizational culture and protection of the "essence of the organization" by elite decision makers within the organization similarly demands a high degree of familiarity with the organization under examination, as neither the identities of the dominant members of an organization nor their views on its core roles and missions are always immediately apparent.

But there is no other way to predict the likelihood of innovation nor to explain it once it occurs. If "a remembered past has always more or less constricted both action in the present and thinking about the future,"[13] then understanding that past, and understanding how it is remembered by those who direct an organization's present and future, is essential to understanding how that organization will adapt to changes in its environment.[14] To understand how and why an organization will change, it is essential to examine its past successes and failures—and those of the individuals who control the institution.[15]

THE IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ON ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

The organizational culture of the British army, developed over many years of service in colonial wars—and, just as important, in prevention of colonial wars through sound administration in conjunction with British police forces and colonial administrators—reflected varied experiences outside conventional conflicts on the continent of Europe. The leadership of the British army shared a common belief that the essence of the organization included colonial policing and administration. When conventional tactics and strategy failed in Malaya, the British army had few problems creating an internal consensus that change was needed and that political rather than purely military solutions were well within the purview of the British army. An innovative and varied past created a culture amenable to the changes in organizational process required to defeat a complex opponent in a new kind of war.

The organizational culture of the American army permitted no doubt in the army's leadership about the essence of the organization: its core competency was defeating conventional enemy armies in frontal combat. The organization never developed a consensus that change to its procedures and to its definition of its responsibilities was required by the nature of the revolutionary war it confronted in Vietnam. An unshakable belief in the essence of the organization precluded organizational learning and has continued to prevent the formation of a consensus on the "lessons of Vietnam" and on changes required to make the army more capable there and in future conflicts. Words recently applied to the Soviet system also describe the U.S. Army of the time: "The person at the head of the hierarchical system was given great power—but he was given that power only so long as he did not use it in a way which threatened the continuation of the system."[16]

Gen. Harold K. Johnson's description of an officer's tenure in command can also be applied to explain why his ability to apply innovative solutions diminishes after years inside an organization: "The longer that a man is there, the greater is his loss of capability to innovate. When he comes in, he can be completely innovative. Ask all kinds of questions because he's attacking the status quo, but every time that he throws out something and adopts something of his own, then he has to defend it. Over a period of time, his defending time begins to exceed his innovative time."[17]

Organizations acquire personalities over time. They develop abilities in certain areas to accomplish the tasks of the organization but are constrained by their experience to innovate only within the self-defined parameters of what they see as their purpose. Even under the pressures for change presented by ongoing military conflict, a strong organizational culture can prohibit learning the lessons of the present and can even prevent the organization's acknowledging that its current policies are anything other than completely successful. In the words of a prominent student of organizational learning:

Most people so restrict their frame of reference, or context, for the problem they are facing that little change can occur. They get into such a routine with their work that they view virtually all problems in a similar way—back to all problems looking like nails when all you have is a hammer. Consequently, when asked to change matters, they tend to operate in a confined "single loop" of learning on which they can only do "more of" or "less of" the same thing because of the given context.[18]

BUILDING ARMIES THAT LEARN

Carl H. Builder noted, "How the services perceive the next major war they must fight is an important determinant of the types of forces they try to acquire, the doctrine they develop, and the training they follow for the use of those forces in combat."[19] Services' self-concepts determine not only

how they will prepare for the next war, but also how flexible they will be in responding to unexpected situations when that war occurs. Chief of the General Staff General Sir Charles Guthrie recently paraphrased Michael Howard to the effect that "in structuring and preparing an Army for war you can be clear that you will not get it precisely right, but the important thing to ensure is that it is not too far wrong, so that you can put it right quickly."[20] The culture of the British army encourages such an attitude and such responses to changed situations. The culture of the American army does not, unless the changed situation falls within the parameters of the kind of war it has defined as its primary mission.[21]

Among the changes required are drastic modifications of military organizations to make their leadership more responsive to change in their environment. One Vietnam veteran, John Grinalds, recalls, "Entrenched operational procedures made it very hard to implement change."[22] Eliot Cohen points out that the management structure of the U.S. military has not evolved since World War II and still resembles that of the General Motors Corporation of 1950. Meanwhile, the world has moved on. "The modern corporation has stripped out layers of middle management, reduced or even eliminated many of the functional and social distinctions between management and labor that dominated industrial organizations. . . . The radical revision of these structures will be the last manifestation of a revolution in military affairs, and the most difficult to implement."[23]

Eric Heginbotham argues that American proficiency in the employment of combined arms improved more rapidly in the European theater of operations during World War II than did British combined arms proficiency—that the American army "learned" more effectively than did the British in the field of conventional armored warfare. Heginbotham highlights differences in the organizational infrastructures of the two armies to explain differences in learning performance:

The British Army had relatively few channels through which a dialogue among top officers could be sustained. The communication that did occur was hampered by a lack of common army-wide doctrine and the lack of tactical protocols for the orchestration of combined-arms units. Reliance on a combination of single-arm regimental standards and on *ad hoc* guidelines issued by theatre commander permitted continued innovation but little accumulation of knowledge. In contrast, American forces benefited from a dense network of channels that allowed for effective communication within the force.[24]

Given the organizational cultures of the two armies, these results are hardly surprising. The American army was focused from its inception on the idea of fighting decisive conventional conflicts despite the fact that most of the wars it actually fought were limited wars for political objectives. It evolved a standard organization and doctrine devoted to ensuring unifor-

mity in the employment of American material and firepower superiority on the battlefield and encouraged innovation in line with these proclivities.

The British army, which had evolved to meet the needs of Imperial warfare and for which "conventional continental wars were an aberration" was unable suddenly to change its spots to meet the demands of a very different kind of warfare under the conditions of World War II in Europe. Williamson Murray, while praising the British conduct of grand strategy and mobilization, notes shortcomings in British operational and tactical performance during World War II: "On the one hand, there was no common doctrinal center in the army, as was the case with the Germans. Consequently, there was no consistent battle doctrine. On the other, there was no means of ensuring that the many decentralized training programs reflected similar approaches."[25] The very attributes that allowed the British army to respond to the demands of counterinsurgency in Malaya—decentralization, minimal use of firepower, independent and innovative theater commanders—made it a less effective learning organization on the conventional battlegrounds of World War II.

The demands of conventional and unconventional warfare differ so greatly that an organization optimized to succeed in one will have great difficulty in fighting the other. It will likely also be unsuccessful in efforts to adapt itself to meet changing requirements in the course of the type of conflict for which it was not originally designed and trained.[26] In fact, the very organizational culture that makes an institution effective in one area may blind it to the possibility that its strengths in that field are crippling deficiencies in a different situation—the more debilitating for being so deeply rooted in the culture that they are never even recognized, much less questioned.

The implications are dramatic. If it is in fact impossible for the same organization to perform effectively two very disparate tasks because the organizational culture that makes it effective in achieving one is counterproductive in accomplishing the other, then organizations should focus on achieving just one critical mission.[27] Those organizations that attempt to perform a mission for which they are unprepared and unsuitable by organization, training, doctrine, leadership style, organizational infrastructure, and equipment—all of which both contribute to and flow from organizational culture—will face grave difficulties in adapting to the new challenges they face. The U.S. Army in Vietnam is a classic example, but the relative weaknesses of the British and French armies in a high-technology combined arms conventional conflict in the Persian Gulf War of 1990–1991 should also be noted.[28] The difficulties of the United States Army in a peacekeeping role in Bosnia are another example of an organization's attempting to do something for which it is not designed, organized, or trained, at great cost to the health of the institution as a whole.[29]

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study presents no overarching explanation for why some military forces are better at adapting to the demands of change in warfare than are others but does provide a framework for tracing the process of military innovation and highlights one variable within the organizational culture that appears to explain variations in learning outcomes. The evidence suggests that other cases of military innovation or failures to innovate could profit from study along the same lines, focusing on the organizational culture while tracing the organizational learning process. The efforts of the French army to defeat insurgency in Indochina and Algeria are two such cases[30]; there are many others, responses to conventional tactical and operational changes as well as to those in revolutionary warfare. The technique could also be applied to other questions of why states behave as they do, helping to explain both why states alter their policies in response to changes in the international system and, often even more interesting, why they do not.[31] International organizations such as the United Nations could also profitably be studied to determine the influence of organizational cultures on changes to procedures such as the creation and employment of peacekeeping forces.

BUILDING LEARNING INSTITUTIONS: MAKING MILITARY FORCES ADAPTABLE IN LIGHT OF CHANGES IN WARFARE

"Building learning organizations entails profound cultural shifts."[32]
—Peter M. Senge

Richard Downie concludes his examination of the United States Army's modifications to its low-intensity conflict doctrine after the Vietnam War with six recommendations for facilitating doctrinal change:

1. Institutionalize doctrinal development as a continually evolving set of theoretical guidelines.
2. Establish a systemic assessment process to ensure the validity of current doctrinal operation assumptions.
3. Develop an efficient process to gain organizational consensus on emerging doctrines.
4. Establish a systemic process through which to rapidly transmit and disseminate doctrine to units in the field.
5. Welcome the civilian leadership's inquiries concerning military capability and appropriateness of doctrine as useful challenges for the military institution.

6. Doctrine as a focus of inquiry concerning military effectiveness for potential threats and challenges.[33]

These recommendations emerge logically from an examination of the organizational learning cycle and would undoubtedly improve the adaptability of the U.S. Army if they were adopted. Their adoption and implementation, however, require an organizational consensus that the army currently suffers from an inability to learn and a further consensus that these steps would help to remedy that shortcoming. Unfortunately, this study has shown that even during a war in which organizational failures were obvious to much of the army, no consensus emerged among the army leadership that change was required. Downie's own study indicates that the army failed to learn from its Vietnam experience as a result of a failure to achieve organizational consensus on required changes to the definition of the army's roles and missions in low-intensity conflict. Only organizational self-awareness can change organizational culture.[34]

Until the army is willing to recognize its past failings, it will not adopt significant changes to increase its adaptability. In the words of U.S. Army Lieutenant General Theodore G. Stroup, Jr., "Our Army culture, however, can also be a liability when it is inappropriate and does not contribute to the Army's overall goals."[35] Colonel (Retired) Powell Hutton concurs: "The Army learns very slowly, because you have to change the culture. The culture changes slowly because innovators are forced out. If we're going to do one thing to make the organization healthy, we have to promote people who aren't like us."[36]

Lieutenant General John Cushman agrees:

Among other duties, the duty of generals is to observe, to think, and to *listen*, even to majors and colonels. Break down the compartments—wherever they exist—of service parochialism, of "turf," of hierarchical layering. Let insight evolve from an atmosphere of open, shared thought . . . from a willing openness to a variety of stimuli, from intellectual curiosity, from observation and reflection, from continuous evaluation and discussions, from review of assumptions, from listening to the views of outsiders, from study of history, and from the indispensable ingredient of humility.[37]

Evaluating Downie's and Cushman's recommendations in light of the British army's experience in Malaya reveals that most of the suggestions are and have long been integral parts of the British army's standard procedure. The British army's organizational culture, developed over many years of colonial policing, not just encouraged but actively expected innovation. For years, the resulting informally developed "doctrine" was disseminated by word of mouth and through the unofficial writing of participants in the campaigns; the fact that it is now officially prescribed

from the new Doctrine and Training Directorate in Wiltshire may be the first step toward discouraging innovation in the British army. Organizational culture is hard to change, however; General Sir Frank Kitson's belief that "no one would read it if they did write it down" may yet preserve the institutional flexibility that played such an important role in defeating the Communist insurgency in Malaya. As the assistant under secretary (programmes) recently said to the Defence Committee in the House of Commons, "We have structured our forces precisely to deal with the unexpected."[38]

Is it possible for the U.S. Army to develop such a culture? Williamson Murray suggests that some improvements can be made, given efforts to "push cultural changes to encourage rather than discourage the process of innovation." Chief among these is a new "approach to military education that encourages changes in cultural values and fosters intellectual curiosity" in order to "foster a military culture where those promoted to the highest ranks possess the imagination and intellectual framework to support innovation."[39]

In the rapidly changing world of the post–Cold War era, such flexibility is a critical factor in the ability of military forces to meet the security needs their governments will demand of them. The Persian Gulf War of 1990–1991 may well have been an aberration, the last of the conventional industrial age conflicts; it was certainly a lesson to the states and nonstate actors of the developing world not to confront the West in conventional combat.[40] There are many other ways to use force to achieve political goals: terrorism, subversion, insurgency. Some years ago Eliot Cohen warned that America's increasing lead in weaponry created by digitized information, the so-called revolution in military affairs, would not guarantee her security. His words resound in the wake of 11 September 2001: "Just as nuclear weapons did not render conventional power obsolete, this revolution will not render guerrilla tactics, terrorism, or weapons of mass destruction obsolete. Indeed, the reverse may be true: where unconventional bypasses to conventional military power exist, any country confronting the United States will seek them out."[41]

The vast majority of armed conflict today occurs inside states rather than between them; as Steven Metz has noted, "For many countries in the world simmering internal war is a permanent condition."[42] The American army, so successful in waging and winning wars against other states, must adapt to increase its ability to moderate wars within states. The end of the cold war has returned to the front pages the small wars of the nineteenth century that were so critical an element in shaping the culture of the British army, including those in places like Afghanistan. U.S. Army Colonel Dan Bolger suggests that the trend toward these small wars is likely to continue: "To meet future challenges, America's Army must turn from the warm and well-deserved glow of its Persian Gulf victory and embrace, once more, the real

business of regulars, the stinking gray shadow world of 'savage wars of peace,' as Rudyard Kipling called them."[43]

In these dirty little wars, political and military tasks intertwine and the objective is more often "nation building" than the destruction of an enemy army. The ability to learn quickly during such operations in order to create an organizational consensus on new ways of waging war—or of waging peace—may be of more importance for modern military institutions than ever before.[44] Armies will have to make the ability to learn to deal with messy, uncomfortable situations an integral part of their organizational culture. In T.E. Lawrence's metaphor, they must learn how to eat soup with a knife. The process will not be comfortable, but it could not be more important.

NOTES

1. Charles Powell, James Dyson, and Helen Purkitt, "Opening the 'Black Box': Cognitive Processing and Optimal Choice in Foreign Policy Decision Making," in Charles Herman, Charles Kegley, and James Rosenau, eds., *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 203–220.

2. The best known is Stephen P. Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

3. Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

4. Kimberly Martin Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955–1991*; Ricky Lynn Waddell, *The Army and Peacetime Low Intensity Conflict, 1961–1993: The Process of Peripheral and Fundamental Military Change* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1993).

5. Rosen, *Winning the Next War*, 8. Rosen discusses wartime innovation on pp. 22 to 24.

6. Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1981).

7. Deborah Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1994).

8. Ibid., 130–131.

9. Ibid., 139.

10. Barry Watts and Williamson Murray, "Innovation in Peacetime," in Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, eds., *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 410.

11. James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 91.

12. "I'm not going to destroy the traditions and doctrine of the United States Army just to win this lousy war": an anonymous army officer quoted in Brian M. Jenkins, *The Unchangeable War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1972), 3, in Gunter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 198), 138.

13. John Shy, "The American Military Experience: History and Learning," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 1, 2 (Winter 1971), 210.

14. Jay M. Parker, "Change and the Operational Commander," *Joint Force Quarterly* (Winter 1995/96), 92.

15. These results parallel those of Richard E. Neustadt and Earnest R. May in *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decisionmakers* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), especially chapter 9, "Placing Strangers," and chapter 12, "Placing Organizations." For more insight into how early experiences condition cognition in decision makers, see Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

16. Professor Archie Brown on Mikhail Gorbachev in Oxford, 28 October 1996.

17. Johnson Oral History, Volume II, Section IX, 28–29, MHI.

18. Bob Garratt, *The Learning Organization* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), 42–43.

19. Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 128.

20. General Sir Charles Guthrie, "The British Army at the Turn of the Century," *RUSI Journal* 141/3 (June 1996), 6. The original citation is Michael Howard, "Military Science in the Age of Peace," *RUSI Journal* (March 1974), 3–4.

21. Sean D. Naylor, "War Games," *Army Times* (5 November 2001), 12–13.

22. Major General John Grinalds interview, Washington, D.C., 12 September 1996.

23. Eliot A. Cohen, "A Revolution in Warfare," *Foreign Affairs* 75, 2 (March/April 1996), 48. For a compelling explanation of how the U.S. Army should eliminate layers of bureaucracy, see Douglas A. MacGregor, *Breaking the Phalanx: A New Design for Landpower for the 21st Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger/CSIS, 1997).

24. Eric Heginbotham, *The British and American Armies in World War II: Explaining Variations in Organizational Learning Patterns* (Boston: MIT Defense and Arms Control Studies Program Working Paper, 1996), 1–2.

25. Williamson Murray, "British Military Effectiveness in the Second World War," in Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness*. Volume III, *The Second World War* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 112.

26. See John A. Nagl and Elizabeth O. Young, "*Si Vis Pacem, Pare Pacem*: Improving U.S. Army Training for Complex Humanitarian Emergencies," *Military Review* LXXX, 2 (March/April 2000), 31–37.

27. The "conventionalization" of U.S. Army Special Forces throughout their history by the much more pervasive organizational culture of the conventional army shows this process at work; see Thomas Adams, *Military Doctrine and the Organization Culture of the United States Army* (Ph.D. Thesis, Syracuse University, 1990).

28. Among the generally self-congratulatory literature on the war, see Rick Atkinson, *Crusade* (New York: Random House, 1992), for references to the training, planning, and especially logistical problems of these two armies in the war. Reports that a banner proclaiming, "We only do deserts" appeared on the Pentagon the day of the cease-fire recognize the fact that the Gulf War was exactly the war the United States would have chosen to fight if it could have scripted the scenario: midintensity combined arms warfare on a battlefield generally free of civilians.

29. William Langewiesche, "Peace Is Hell," *The Atlantic Monthly* 288, 3 (October 2001), 51–80.

30. Christopher C. Harmon notes that the French "forgot all too well" their counterinsurgency successes of the nineteenth century in Indochina but does not trace the learning process nor discuss the organizational culture of the French army, in "Illustrations of 'Learning' in Counterinsurgency," *Comparative Strategy* 11 (1992), 30–33.

31. George W. Breslauer and Philip E. Tetlock, eds., *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991). This book adopts such a perspective without focusing on organizational culture as a key factor in influencing learning.

32. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), xv.

33. Richard Downie, *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 261–265.

34. Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 205.

35. Lieutenant General Theodore G. Stroup, Jr., "Leadership and Organizational Culture: Actions Speak Louder than Words," *Military Review* LXXVI, 1 (January/February 1996), 46.

36. Powell Hutton interview, Washington, D.C., 18 September 1996.

37. Lieutenant General John H. Cushman, USA, "Challenge and Response at the Operational and Tactical Levels, 1914–1945," in Millett and Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness*, Volume III, 334–336.

38. Session 1991–2, Third Report, question 1190, quoted in Eric Grove, *The Army and British Security After the Cold War: Defence Planning for a New Era* (London: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute/HMSO, 1996), 10.

39. Murray, "Past and Future," in Murray and Millett, eds., *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, 326–327.

40. John A. Nagl, "Hitting Us Where We Don't Expect It: Asymmetric Threats to U.S. National Security," *National Security Studies Quarterly* 7, 4 (Autumn 2001), 113–121. See also Nagl, "Post–Cold War Priorities," *Military Review* LXXXI, 4 (July/August 2001), 104–106.

41. Eliot Cohen, "A Revolution in Warfare," *Foreign Affairs* 75 (March/April 1996), 51.

42. Steven Metz, "Insurgency After the Cold War," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 5/1 (Spring 1994), 63.

43. Daniel P. Bolger, "The Ghosts of Omdurman," *Parameters* (Autumn 1991), 31–32.

44. See Gen. Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Conflict* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), for insightful comments on how war has changed in the post–cold war world, and the current author's review essay, "Wes Clark's War," *The American Oxonian* LXXXVIII: 4 (Autumn 2001), 303–311, for less insightful reflections on the same topic.