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7701 Tampa Point Boulevard  
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ISBN 978-1-941715-09-3

JSOU Report 16-6

Military Innovation in War

Shultz



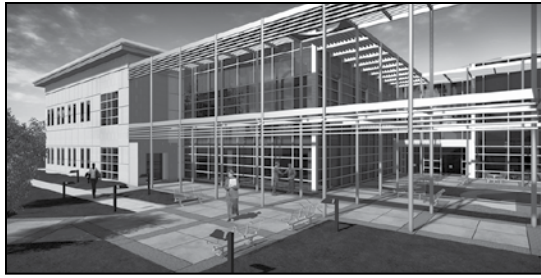
JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIVERSITY



# ***Military Innovation in War: It Takes a Learning Organization A Case Study of Task Force 714 in Iraq***

Richard Shultz, Ph.D.

JSOU Report 16-6



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Organization*

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*Richard Shultz*

**JSOU Report 16-6**

*The JSOU Press*

*MacDill Air Force Base, Florida*

2016



Comments about this publication are invited and should be forwarded to the Director of the Center for Special Operations Studies and Research, Joint Special Operations University, 7701 Tampa Point Blvd., MacDill AFB FL 33621.

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This work was cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

Printed in July 2016.

ISBN 978-1-941715-09-3

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**On the cover.** Clockwise from top right: General Stanley McChrystal (Source: Getty Images); CV-22 Osprey in night vision (Source: U.S. Air Force); Admiral William McRaven (Source: Department of Defense); model of terrorist network nodes (Source: Author); Airman at Talisman Sabre exercise (Source: U.S. Air Force).

**Back cover.** Iraqi special operations forces advised by U.S. Army Special Forces conduct a combat operation in Baghdad, Iraq. Source: Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System.

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# Foreword

In this monograph, Dr. Richard “Dick” Shultz provides the reader key findings of how organizational change and innovation by the U.S. counterterrorism forces deployed to Iraq in 2003 as Task Force (TF) 714 dismantled al-Qaeda in Iraq’s (AQI) networked secret organization. His executive summary highlights: 1) the insurgent puzzle TF 714 encountered; 2) the organizational learning and innovation framework employed to assess the evolution of TF 714; and 3) how the Task Force transformed in order to adapt to and significantly degrade the enemy.

Dr. Shultz utilizes sound methodology to show how TF 714 was able to achieve this “remarkable transformation.” He draws from General (retired) Stanley McChrystal’s two books on Task Force 714, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* and *Team of Teams*, and then augments these with in-depth interviews with General McChrystal, Admiral (retired) William McRaven, General Joseph Votel, and several other TF 714 leaders. Dr. Shultz further analyzes these sources through the use of analytic tools drawn from leading business and management studies focused on organizational learning and innovation. This analysis resulted in a monograph that captured the unprecedented organizational changes and lessons learned by Task Force 714 in adapting to an enemy for which it was not prepared.

The first chapter describes the unforeseen challenges and ugly surprise Task Force 714 encountered. Shultz discusses the impact of that surprise and unfamiliar wartime environment that required TF 714 to transform itself into an “industrial strength counterterrorism machine.” Chapter 2 highlights the task force’s development and use of the Joint Interagency Task Force, while Chapter 3 discusses how the leadership of Task Force 714 changed organizational practices of command and control and empowered decision making from a top-down to a bottom-up approach. The next chapter shifts into the intelligence dominance of the task force moving from finding, fixing, and finishing targets and adding track and assess, or exploit and analyze.

Chapter 4 highlights the innovations in TF 714 and how learning organizations create innovative adjustments in procedures and mechanisms to respond to complex challenges. Chapter 6 addresses the leadership evolution and how collective learning, adaptation, change, and empowering members

of the organization are all essential for success in today's complex, interdependent, and rapidly evolving environment. In the seventh chapter, Dr. Shultz provides an overall assessment of what "industrial strength counterterrorism" and counterinsurgency did to degrade and weaken AQI accomplished in Iraq, which he terms "the irreducible minimum." He sums up the monograph with some thoughts on the limits of U.S. counterinsurgency and counterterrorism efforts.

This monograph provides critical insights and lessons learned for all Special Operations Forces and interagency partners who will establish, deploy, or support a special operations command and control organization. It is also a good historical case study and provides a foundation on how to adapt, innovate, and grow military structures into learning organizations to meet the future challenges of complex environments and our enemies.

Kenneth H. Poole, Ed.D.  
Director, Center for Special Operations Studies and Research

## About the Author

**D**r. Richard H. Shultz, Jr., is a professor of international politics at the Fletcher School, Tufts University, where he teaches graduate-level courses in various aspects of international security affairs, internal/transnational conflict and war studies, and intelligence and armed groups. He is also the director of the Fletcher School's International Security Studies Program. The program is dedicated to graduate-level teaching and research on a broad range of conflict, defense, and strategic issues. In Washington he has served as director of research at the National Strategy Information Center (NSIC) where in 2010 he completed, with NSIC President Roy Godson, a major study focused on Adapting America's Security Paradigm and Security Agenda for 21st century security challenges.



With the assistance from the U.S. Marine Corps, he recently completed an in-depth study analyzing one of what he believes is illustrative of the types of conflicts that will characterize the 21st century security environment—the U.S. Marine Corps' 2004-2008 campaign in Al Anbar Province in Iraq. To complete the research he had access to the records and Iraq oral history collection at the U.S. Marine Corps History Division. The study has been published under the title *The Marines Take Anbar: The Four-Year Fight against Al Qaeda* (Annapolis, MD: The Naval Institute Press, 2013). Recently, the book was reviewed in *The Wall Street Journal*.

His recent research project was “A U.S. Blueprint for Security Sector Reform (SSR) for the 21st Century.” The project focused on developing a framework for the U.S. that adapts SSR theory and practice for addressing dysfunctional security sectors of fragile states; examines the state of capabilities across the U.S. government for addressing these challenges; and identifies gaps in those capabilities that need to be filled if the U.S. is to employ SSR as an effective policy tool. The project was a joint effort with Dr. Querine Hanlon. The study was published as a book in the spring of 2016 by the U.S. Institute of Peace Press under the title *Prioritizing Security Sector Reform:*

*A New Approach*. Support for the project comes from the Smith Richardson Foundation.

He has held three chairs: the Olin Distinguished Professorship of National Security Studies at the Military Academy, Secretary of the Navy Senior Research Fellow at the U.S. Naval War College, and Brigadier General H. L. Oppenheimer Chair of War-fighting Strategy, U.S. Marine Corps. Since the mid-1980s he has served as a security consultant to various U.S. government departments and agencies concerned with national security affairs. Currently he is Senior Fellow at the Joint Special Operations University and a consultant to the U.S. Special Operations Command and U.S. Marine Corps.

His other recent books include *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias: The Warriors of Contemporary Combat* (Columbia University Press, 2006; 2009 Paperback Edition) and *The Secret War against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999; 2000 Paperback Edition). His recent articles include: "States in the 21st Century," *Geopolitics, History and International Relations* 4:1 (2012); "A QDR for all Seasons," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (Sept. 2010); and "The Sources of Instability in the Twenty-First Century Weak States, Armed Groups, and Irregular Conflict," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* (Summer 2011). His JSOU Press publications are *Strategic Culture and Strategic Studies: An Alternative Framework for Assessing Al Qaeda and the Global Jihadi Movement* (2012) and *Security Force Assistance and Security Sector Reform* (2013).

# Executive Summary and Key Findings

## The Puzzle

The U.S. counterterrorism (CT) forces who deployed to Iraq in 2003 as Task Force 714 (TF 714) faced an ugly surprise. Tasked to dismantle the al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) dominated insurgency, the organization could not achieve that mission. Retired U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal, then TF 714 commander, concluded, “we were losing to an enemy ... we should have dominated.”<sup>1</sup>

But TF 714 transformed in the midst of war and during 2006-2009 was able to dismantle AQI’s clandestine networks to a degree that they could no longer function in a cohesive manner. By developing the capacity to operate inside those networks, TF 714 was able, in the words of General McChrystal, to “claw the guts out of AQI.”<sup>2</sup>

This transformation runs counter to what organizational experts identify as barriers inhibiting militaries from learning, innovating, and changing, especially in wartime. To decipher the puzzle of how TF 714 overcame these barriers, two questions were examined: 1) How did TF 714 transform from a specialized and compartmented unit customized for executing infrequent CT missions to an industrial-strength CT machine that by 2009 dismantled AQI’s networks that operated across Iraq, and 2) Why was TF 714 able to achieve this remarkable transformation?

## Organizational Learning and Innovation

Organizational learning has received considerable attention in business and management studies. That literature has identified behavioral/managerial characteristics that can equip organizations with the capacity to learn and innovate to overcome failures in operational performance. This study utilizes an analytic framework composed of those characteristics to determine if TF 714’s success in Iraq was due to its adopting these learning characteristics:

- Unforeseen challenges do not paralyze the organization,
- Problem solving is a core organizational competency,
- Organizational practices are challengeable,
- Knowledge collection methods set in motion systemic learning,

- Leaders nurture a milieu conducive to learning, and
- Organizational memory captures and retains innovations but not rigidly.

To determine if TF 714 learned and innovated by adopting these behavioral and managerial characteristics, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted with a range of former practitioners and specialists who served in TF 714. These included the senior leadership of the task force.

## **Transforming Task Force 714**

AQI was different. AQI's secret underground apparatus was unlike its 20th century counterparts. It was not top leaders but a vast array of mid-level commanders and managers of AQI's clandestine networks that fostered an enormous rise in attacks across Iraq in 2004-2006. AQI's unanticipated and burgeoning violence caused many in 2006 to believe the Iraq war was lost.

This 'ugly surprise' led TF 714's leaders to conclude they faced an enemy they never envisaged and could not degrade through existing ways of operating. They confronted an enemy they did not understand and for which TF 714 had to change its operational focus from a strategic scalpel capable of executing a small number of missions to an industrial-strength CT machine.<sup>3</sup>

Organizational experts have concluded that for organizations facing complex challenges, problem solving is a shared responsibility for the whole organization, not just the task of the leadership. Problem solving must become the duty of the entire organization, a new way of thinking and acting.

TF 714's method of problem solving was too deliberate, hierarchical, and self-contained to counter Iraq's fast-paced and networked insurgency. The task force had to transform and partner with several U.S. intelligence agencies to neutralize this unprecedented operational challenge.

The mechanism for this transformation was a joint interagency task force (JIATF). The JIATF forged these intelligence agencies and TF 714 into a union based on interdependence and cooperation that established problem solving methods capable of deciphering AQI's networks.

Having adopted the JIATF, TF 714 shed its top-down style of command, substituting decentralized authority and problem solving from below. To outpace AQI, problem solving and decision making could not wait for senior leaders to disseminate commands. That took too long.

Individuals and teams closest to the fight were best positioned to decide and act decisively. The velocity and volume of decisions needing to be made exceeded the ability of even the most gifted leader. Empowerment of those at the operational levels was indispensable.

Agency and empowerment were critical enablers. They allowed the JIATF to prevail over a complex enemy that made effective use of information-age technologies to form an array of evolving and transforming networks able to execute attacks across Iraq.

To defeat AQI's complex networks, TF 714 transformed into an intelligence-led organization. The action arm of the JIATF, the operational units, was coordinated with a robust intelligence capability drawn from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), National Security Agency (NSA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), and other agencies—intelligence led the way.

To learn and adapt, TF 714 amassed information and knowledge about a new problem set—a complex, clandestine, and networked enemy empowered by information age technology. The task force achieved intelligence dominance over AQI.

This necessitated the JIATF's adoption of a new operational concept—find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, and disseminate (F3EAD). This transformed targeting and provided the means to get inside AQI's networks to dominate the operational tempo of the fight.

Once inside, the JIATF identified central and peripheral figures, patterns of behavior, and clusters of nodes to degrade parts of AQI's operating system. By doing this fast enough, hitting many targets every night, TF 714 outpaced AQI's capacity to adapt, causing it to collapse in upon itself.

To foster cross-organization ties, cross-fertilization of new ideas, and dissemination of new knowledge to respond to AQI's complex challenges, the JIATF established an operating environment based on cooperation, trust, and interdependence among its interagency members.

Several innovative procedures and mechanisms were adopted to facilitate this environment. Each enhanced the capacity of the JIATF to act decisively, with speed and precision, to maneuver inside AQI's networks fast enough to seriously dismantle those networks from the inside out.

As the JIATF matured and made headway, the stage was set for a showdown with AQI. But to reach the operational tempo needed to prevail, one

more hurdle remained. The more decisions were made at the top, the slower TF 714's operational tempo.

This traditional approach to military leadership was turned on its head. Rather than disseminating commands from above, task force leaders became 'eyes-on, hands-off enablers' that empowered those down the chain of command to take the initiative.

TF 714's transformation from a highly compartmented organization augmented by a JIATF had an extraordinary impact on its operational tempo. In August 2004 the task force executed 18 raids. Two years later, in August 2006, they were up to 300 raids a month.<sup>4</sup>

## The Irreducible Minimum

By the fall of 2009 the security situation in Iraq had dramatically changed. "Significant acts of violence," as reported in Pentagon's *Weekly Security Incidents* summary, had plummeted to less than 200 a week from a high of nearly 1,600 incidents weekly during 2007.<sup>5</sup>

Factors contributing to this turnabout included: 1) the adoption of a counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy; and 2) the addition of 30,000 troops through the surge; and 3) the awakening movement which gave coalition forces the added capacity needed to control the physical and human terrain.

But an effective COIN strategy also required the capacity to dismantle AQI's secret underground networks through which it executed operations. To do so, a specialized organization was needed that blended intelligence and paramilitary capabilities. TF 714 was that outfit.

By adopting the characteristics of a learning organization and transforming itself, TF 714 was able to sustain an industrial-strength CT operational tempo of 300 raids a month between 2006 and 2009. Those operations focused on attrition of AQI's mid-level commanders and managers, those who made its networks function. General McChrystal described them as "the guts of AQI."<sup>6</sup>

During 2008, the task force determined through intelligence collected on raids, interrogation of AQI members captured on raids, and by operational tempo that a major decline was taking place in the capacity of AQI to function. Task force raids were having a major impact on AQI's networks.

Three years of industrial-strength task force raids seriously degraded AQI's ability to function. By operating inside AQI's networks, TF 714



dismantled a large number of its operational cells, financial units, communications and media centers, improvised explosive device (IED) production facilities, and arms acquisition methods. In the words of General McChrystal, the TF 714 commander had “clawed the guts out of AQI.”<sup>7</sup>

As a result of three years of industrial strength CT, TF 714 reached what retired U.S. Army General Raymond Odierno, then Multi-National Force commander in Iraq during this period, characterized as the “irreducible minimum.” By this he meant that even when a COIN/CT program is able to greatly weaken and degrade a group like AQI, they will still retain a capacity to carry out periodic attacks and acts of violence.<sup>8</sup>

While TF 714 had greatly weakened AQI’s capacity to function by dismantling many of its networks across Iraq, it still could carry out periodic attacks and acts of violence. This was the irreducible minimum in such irregular wars.

### **The Limits of COIN and CT**

Once territory was held and AQI’s clandestine networks were dismantled to their irreducible minimum, the conditions were established to begin the transition to post-conflict reconciliation, reconstruction, and institutional development.

Iraq had reached this stage by late 2009. It was the beginning of the long and challenging phase of all such internal wars in which the political causes of the conflict have to be resolved. And a political formula has to be conceptualized for reconciling the warring parties, establishing the foundations for state legitimacy, and initiating national reconstruction.

During this extended period of mediation and reconciliation there was a role for TF 714 and its Iraq’s counterpart. As retired U.S. Navy Admiral William McRaven, explained: “once we and our counterparts had our collective foot on AQI’s throat we had to keep it there. And we could do so through our support to our Iraqi counterparts. But we had to stay to help them.”<sup>9</sup> This was all part of buying time and maintaining the irreducible minimum while the process of transition to post-conflict reconciliation, reconstruction, and institutional development took root.



## Introduction

The U.S. counterterrorism (CT) force was established in 1980 following the failure to rescue 52 Americans held hostage at the U.S. embassy in Tehran, Iran, and the results of the Holloway Commission review.<sup>10</sup> Over the next two decades, the United States Special Operations Command's (USSOCOM) CT force developed an array of highly proficient Army, Navy, and Air Force personnel tailor-made for hostage rescue and discrete direct action CT operations.<sup>11</sup> Arguably, the CT force became the best unit of its kind in the world. It also was a highly compartmentalized force with a culture of secrecy and semi-autonomy. But for the infrequent missions it was designed to carry out prior to 9/11, those characteristics did not impede its operational capacity to do so.<sup>12</sup>

However, once deployed to Iraq in 2003 the CT force found itself facing an ugly surprise—a crisis in operational effectiveness. Tasked to find, degrade, and dismantle the burgeoning al-Qaeda dominated insurgent apparatus or clandestine underground, it became apparent the unit was not able to successfully execute this mission. Then Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal, TF 714 commander, explained that as it was constituted, the CT task force could not keep pace with, let alone reduce AQI's burgeoning operational tempo. In fact, as he subsequently recounted, “we were losing to an enemy that ... we should have dominated.”<sup>13</sup> By early 2004, General McChrystal concluded the CT task force had to “adapt to a new, more ominous threat.” Deployed as TF 714, they “needed to become a more complex organization with unprecedented capability, and [they] needed to be able to employ that capability on a daily basis.”<sup>14</sup>

Over the next two years TF 714 did just that, transforming into a highly effective interagency organization described by one knowledgeable observer as “a precision-killing machine unprecedented in the history of modern warfare.”<sup>15</sup> To achieve this degree of operational effectiveness, TF 714 was reinvented in the midst of the Iraq war. Consider the following acceleration in its capacity to conduct operations against the AQI network. TF 714 was able to execute 18 raids across Iraq in August 2004. “As great as those 18 raids were, they couldn't make a dent in the exploding insurgency,” General McChrystal explained. By August 2006, the task force was able to execute

up to 300 raids per month.<sup>16</sup> And those raids did much more than decapitate the leadership of AQI. More importantly, they began to gut AQI's extensive network of mid-level operational commanders and the managers of its financial units, communications and media centers, intelligence services, bomb and IED production facilities, and arms acquisition specialists. In doing so, TF 714 acutely degraded AQI's capacity to operate well before the U.S. withdrawal in December 2011.

This was a remarkable transformation in the midst of war and runs counter to what more than a few specialists have discerned about the likelihood of military organizations, even highly specialized ones, being able to do so. For example, Janine Davidson in *Lifting the Fog of Peace* identifies an array of organizational, bureaucratic, and cultural barriers that make such transformations problematic.<sup>17</sup> Each constitutes an acute obstruction to change. Other scholars, to include Adam Grissom, Kimberly Zisk, John Nagl, Michael McNerney, Theo Farrell, and Richard Downie find that only under certain conditions—civilian intervention, military service competition, or a major shock—is it possible that the obstacles to innovation identified by Davidson and others can be circumvented.<sup>18</sup>

## The Puzzle

In spite of the odds, TF 714 was able to overcome barriers to transform and innovate. At first blush, this would seem counterintuitive given an organizational culture which, for over two decades, was honed to execute discrete and highly surgical CT missions and not to fight in an Iraq-type war. In fact, General McChrystal observed that even after it became clear that TF 714 was unable to weaken AQI, there was not a straight away recognition that major changes were demanded in the organization. This was because the CT task force constituted “very much a specialized culture for certain missions.” It employed a “surgical CT capability” and the view from inside was “we need to stick to our core tasks.”<sup>19</sup> Consequently, “there was resistance initially to going to war. I was told by people, one, that’s not what the CT force is for, and two, you are going to take this wonderful national scalpel and break the blade.”<sup>20</sup>

To decipher this puzzle, two interrelated questions were examined. First, how did the CT task force, deployed to Iraq as TF 714, transform itself from a pre-9/11 highly specialized and compartmented unit customized for

executing infrequent CT missions to an organization capable of a wartime operational tempo of 300 missions a month? Second, why was the CT task force able to achieve this remarkable transformation? These two questions were examined interchangeably to discover the ways in which TF 714, in the midst of an escalating war, was able to learn and innovate.

Organizational learning and innovation have been topics given considerable attention in business and management studies since the appearance first of James March and Herbert Simon's volume *Organizations*, and then of *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* by March and Richard Michael Cyert.<sup>21</sup> Both works were concerned with the circumstances in which an organization faces a major challenge or crisis that critically undermines its operational performance. In other words, its capacity to accomplish core tasks has fallen below minimum levels of effectiveness. Subsequently, the organization faces the challenge of identifying and implementing critical changes. In order to do so, it must be able to learn, adapt, and innovate to reestablish its capacity to execute core tasks.

From this starting point, subsequent research has sought to identify those processes and procedures that foster or thwart the attainment of such knowledge, and assess the impact of those processes and procedures on the learning cycle and on organizational change. What these studies have discerned is that knowledge acquisition, learning, and innovation can be exceedingly challenging for organizations to realize. However, those studies also identify behavioral and managerial characteristics that—if adopted—can equip organizations with the capacity to learn and innovate, successfully overcoming crises and failures in operational performance.<sup>22</sup>

This monograph will examine the extent to which the presence of successful organizational characteristics helps explain how and why the transformation of TF 714 between 2004 and 2006 was possible. To do so, the study utilizes the analytic framework, described below, deduced from the business and management literature concerned with organizational learning.<sup>23</sup> The construct is composed of the successful organizational characteristics that enable organizations to learn and innovate when faced with major challenges that undercut their capacity to function effectively.

## Assessing Learning Organizations

Descriptions of what constitutes a learning organization abound in the business and management literature. For David Garvin, a learning organization is one “skilled at acquiring and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behavior to reflect this new knowledge and insights.”<sup>24</sup> Likewise, Marlene Fiol and Marjorie Lyles propose that “organizational learning means the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding.”<sup>25</sup> Barbara Levitt and James March described organizational learning as “routine-based, history-dependent, and target-oriented. Organizations are seen as [demonstrating] learning by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behavior.”<sup>26</sup>

### The Learning Cycle

While there may be a consensus that learning organizations are those with the capacity to acquire new understanding about shortcomings in performance, and that such knowledge can become the basis for adapting institutional behavior to rectify performance shortfalls, what does not exist, observes Peter Pawlowsky, is a “theory or model of organizational learning [that] is widely accepted.”<sup>27</sup> This is due, Martin Schulz reflects, to the diverse nature of the field:

Is the main focus of the field on exploring the sources of organizational learning, is it on different forms of learning, or is it on the outcomes of organizational learning? It appears that organizational learning is about all three. At the root of this perplexing trilogy are divergent conceptions of learning and divergent ideas about the sources of learning.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, based on a review of the literature, Pawlowsky identifies the following features of a learning organization:

- A capacity to identify information that is relevant to learning and the generation of new knowledge,
- A mode for the exchange and diffusion of that knowledge from the individual level to the collective level,
- Knowledge that can be integrated into existing knowledge systems on the collective and individual levels or into procedural rules of the

organization whereby either integration or modification of the adopting system takes place, and

- Integration of new knowledge into organizational routines in order to have an influence on organizational behavior, developing new leadership styles, new products and services, and new praxis.<sup>29</sup>

The literature on sources and methods of learning has also generated several models of the learning cycle to illustrate the process by which organizations acquire knowledge and implement change. Chris Argyris and Donald Schön were among the first to do so.<sup>30</sup> Many others followed suit, proposing various patterns and prototypes.<sup>31</sup> Schulz describes these templates as:

performance feedback models ... based on the idea that organizations learn when they experience problems. Organizations would encounter a problem, initiate a search for solutions, adopt solutions which solve the problem, and retain good solutions for future use. Problems were conceptualized as performance shortfalls.<sup>32</sup>

Based on an examination of learning cycle designs, Downie proposed a basic model in which organizations “either learn and/or change their ... standard operating procedures to act on learning or disregard that information and retain their existing ... standard operating procedures.”<sup>33</sup> When the former takes place, an organization “uses new knowledge and understanding gained from experience to adjust institutional ... procedures in ways designed to minimize [identified] gaps in performance and maximize

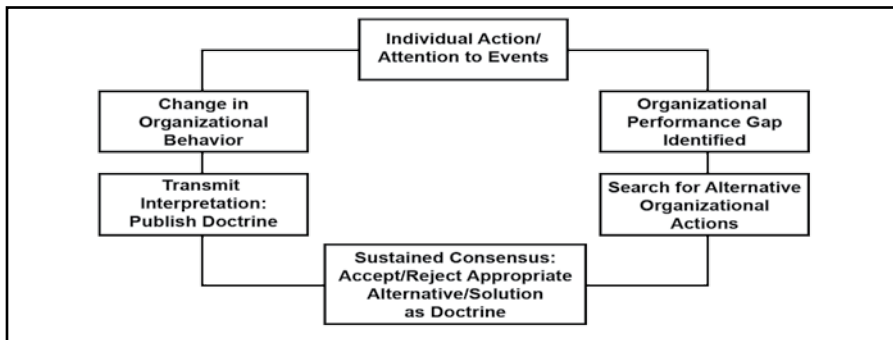


Figure 1. The Institutional Learning Cycle. Source: *Learning From Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* by Richard Downie. Reproduced with permission of Greenwood Publishing Group via Copyright Clearance Center.

future successes.”<sup>34</sup> This process is illustrated in Figure 1. It depicts a basic cyclical course of action involving several steps that can result in learning and innovation by an organization.

Downie’s model begins with members of the organization recognizing there are serious performance gaps that can only be remedied through major change. The organization has to acquire and process new information and knowledge in order to pinpoint the sources of failure and to identify alternatives. Based on these developments, the “organization assesses and interprets the discoveries or evaluations made by individual members [and groups], and if deemed valid through consensus, explores options to resolve an anomalous situation.”<sup>35</sup> Resolution of those problems will take the form of actions that “adapt organizational behavior” through changes in the organization’s “norms, doctrine, and standard operating procedures.”<sup>36</sup>

The cyclical process conceptualized by Downie and others propose steps through which an organization can learn and innovate. They make it sound straightforward. But the real world contains many obstacles that can undermine successful navigation of the learning cycle, and many of those impediments can be found in the institutional cultures, structures, and practices of organizations themselves. Nevertheless, some organizations are able to successfully manage gaps, weaknesses, and shortcomings in performance by introducing changes in their operating methods and processes.

### **Analytic Framework – Characteristics of Learning Organizations**

Since the appearance of the books *Organizations* and *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*, business and management studies have endeavored to identify those behavioral and managerial characteristics that facilitate a successful navigation of the learning cycle. Schulz notes that this research “has intensified considerably since the late 1980’s. The number of publications increased dramatically ... and new, empirical research programs got off the ground.” However, what has resulted is a “field of organizational learning [which] evolved into a diverse network of loosely interconnected clusters of ideas.”<sup>37</sup>

In other words, there is no agreement over what constitutes those behavioral and managerial characteristics that, if an organization possesses them, will enable learning to take place in today’s complex environments, resulting in subsequent improvements in operational practices. Rather, the literature contains wide ranging ideas, propositions, and empirical findings. Based on a review of a significant sample of that literature, the following conceptual



framework of the learning characteristics of organizations that successfully adapt to crises in performance in today's complex and interdependent environment have been identified below by the author.

1. **Unforeseen challenges do not paralyze the organization.** Learning organizations are not paralyzed by surprise. They develop competences for responding to unforeseen challenges that undercut operational performance. Members learn roles, methods, and modes of behavior that prepares them for the unexpected.<sup>38</sup> To do so, management specialists have identified ways of making organizations more agile by adopting methods that address surprise through team-based exercises. Consequently, when surprise occurs, agile organizations are prepared to manage it.<sup>39</sup>
2. **Problem solving is a core organizational competency.** Learning organizations institutionalize problem solving methods that foster the diagnosis of operational challenges. Problem solving is a shared responsibility for the organization as a whole, not just the leadership.<sup>40</sup> It is part of the organization's disposition, a way of thinking and acting.<sup>41</sup> Well-ordered and systematic problem solving is a central part of the organization's personality.<sup>42</sup>
3. **Organizational practices are challengeable.** All organizations develop routines or standard operating procedures (SOPs) to accomplish objectives. But only a subset of them is capable of changing those routines when confronted with a sudden breakdown in performance.<sup>43</sup> To do so, SOPs must be challengeable. Members of the organization are empowered to contest existing routines to foster needed changes in them.<sup>44</sup> Agency is introduced by an organization to curtail negative performance. Agency is understood as individuals within an organization exercising the capacity to challenge existing routines.<sup>45</sup>
4. **Knowledge collection methods set in motion systemic learning.** Learning organizations are able to understand the sources of failure in performance through their capacity to collect and analyze information about those shortcomings. Such organizations are collectively "skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge."<sup>46</sup> Through knowledge compilation and analysis, the reasons for which existing

practices have become ineffective can be determined.<sup>47</sup> This understanding is then employed to make changes in operational practices.<sup>48</sup>

5. **Leaders nurture a milieu conducive to learning.** Leaders of learning organizations create procedures that encourage the cross-fertilization of new ideas and promote the dissemination of new information and knowledge. They empower members of the organization through a participatory approach that encourages collective problem solving.<sup>49</sup> Organizations that function in this manner require a different style of leadership from that based on the assumption that only from the top can a decline in performance be understood and turned around.<sup>50</sup> In today's complex, interdependent, changeable, and fast paced environment, leaders must decentralize authority to nurture initiative by subordinates at the operating level.<sup>51</sup>
6. **Organizational memory captures and retains innovations but not rigidly.** Once innovation takes place, learning organizations insert those changes into the organization's memory. New SOPs are embedded in memory.<sup>52</sup> Knowledge and learning are transformed into new operating routines.<sup>53</sup> These are then put into practice by members of the organization. However, for organizations that function in today's complex and interdependent environment, fixed solutions may remain effective and suitable for only a transitory period.<sup>54</sup> In complex contexts, reconfiguring operating practices will require a resilient learning cycle.<sup>55</sup>

## Research Approach

To determine how and why TF 714 was able to learn and innovate, transforming itself in the midst of war, a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with a range of experienced former practitioners and specialists who served in the task force. These included, most importantly, the senior leadership of TF 714.<sup>56</sup>

The questionnaire utilized for the interviews was based on the analytic framework—characteristics of learning organizations. The objective of the research was to determine the extent to which the organizational and operational changes initiated by TF 714 in Iraq can be explained as a result of the task force emulating these successful organizational characteristics. In other words, to what extent can the TF 714 accomplishments in Iraq be explained

as the result of having adopted the practices and procedures of a learning organization?

To determine whether this was the case, each learning organization characteristic generated a series of CT task force specific questions that were investigated through semi-structured interviews with former members of TF 714. These questions sought to ascertain the degree to which each successful organizational characteristic of a learning organization helps explain why the CT force was able to reinvent itself in the midst of a wartime crisis, equipping the organization with the capacity to overcome serious shortcomings in performance in Iraq. To what extent did these behavioral and managerial changes enhance TF 714's capacity to acutely degrade AQI?

Supplementing the information collected through these interviews was related information gleaned from interviews with other Department of Defense officials knowledgeable about task force operations in the Iraq war. Open source literature on CT operations in Iraq and of the role of CT forces in those operations was also examined. There has been a noteworthy consideration of these issues in a number of open source venues. The author collected and reviewed these materials. They include General McChrystal's memoir, *My Share of the Task*, and his subsequent book, *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*, as well as his other publications, interviews, and public discussions.<sup>57</sup> Several other sources were helpful to the study, including interviews with the former chief intelligence officer of TF 714, retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, and U.S. Army Colonel William Ostlund, who commanded CT forces in Afghanistan.<sup>58</sup>

### **Fall 2003: The War after the War and the Emergence of AQI**

With the end of full-scale combat operations in Iraq in late April 2003, no one at the senior level in Washington or Baghdad—military or civilian—expected an organized resistance to materialize. Inside the U.S. defense and security institutions that planned and carried out Operation Iraqi Freedom, a 'war after the war' was unimaginable. However, mounting violence in August suggested otherwise. Then in the early fall several high profile attacks took place. A member of the Iraqi governing council was assassinated, the United Nations Headquarters and International Committee of the Red Cross offices in Baghdad and the Italian police facility in Nasiriyya were hit by suicide

bombs, and a Chinook helicopter was shot down near Fallujah killing 15 American soldiers.

By the beginning of 2004, the violence had shifted from periodic high-profile episodes to a rapidly increasing number of attacks against U.S. forces and facilities with small arms, mortars, rockets, IEDs, mines, and surface to air missiles. During early January, the number of significant insurgent activities reported throughout Iraq was over 200 a week. By the last week of April, these significant insurgent activities spiked to over 600 and continued to fluctuate around that number for the rest of 2004. During 2005 the number of weekly incidents, on more than one occasion, climbed over 800.<sup>59</sup>

The result of this escalation of organized violence was TF 714 having a new mission. TF 714 now had the mission to target and dismantle the clandestine infrastructure or secret underground apparatus of AQI. This covert mechanism gave AQI the capacity to initiate and sustain rapidly increasing insurgent operations across Iraq. According to William Rosenau and Austin Long, the goal of such “anti-infrastructure operations” as a core element of classic COIN doctrine is to comprehend, map, and degrade through “intelligence coordination and the integration of intelligence with an action arm, [like TF 714] the subterranean ‘ecosystems’ that sustain insurgencies.”<sup>60</sup> Only through such a dedicated effort, they add, is it possible to understand “the inner workings ... nature and contours of the largely invisible structures that sustain armed insurgent opposition.”<sup>61</sup>

However, what the CT task force soon discovered was that the secret underground apparatus of AQI was not like that found in yesterday’s insurgencies. The internal workings and organizational structure of AQI was considerably different from its 20th century counterparts. That realization, in turn, would have a profound impact on TF 714’s targeting strategy, necessitating a redefinition of what constituted a high value target (HVT). In the past, insurgencies were conceived as hierarchical organizations and HVTs were those in the top echelon. Consequently, taking out these key figures had a significant negative impact on the success of past insurgencies. This was the result, for example, of HVT operations against the National Liberation Front, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, Shining Path, Kurdistan Worker’s Party, and Irish Republican Army (IRA), all hierarchical organizations. Removing such leaders could also undermine insurgency esprit de corps and cause organizational fragmentation.<sup>62</sup> To varying degrees, each of these armed groups was demoralized when the top leadership was eliminated.

But AQI's effectiveness was not determined by its top echelon leadership. In fact, killing Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in June 2006 had little impact on the number of 'significant insurgent activities' taking place across Iraq. They increased from approximately 1,000 a week in the month of Zarqawi's demise to nearly 1,600 a week one year later. The reason for this, TF 714 would discover, had to do with the decentralized and networked nature of AQI. AQI's center of gravity was not in the top leadership but in all those who commanded and managed its mid-level functional components.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, AQI's clandestine underground apparatus was composed of a wide array of planning and decision-making mechanisms, operational detachments, financial units, communications and media centers, intelligence branches, bomb and IED production facilities, and arms acquisition systems. It was AQI's mid-level leaders and managers who had authority and capacity to keep up and even escalate operations. They were the new HVTs, and there was a plethora of them operating across Iraq. TF 714 found itself ill-equipped and unprepared for its new mission.

### **Transforming Task Force 714**

As noted earlier, in planning Operation Iraqi Freedom, consideration was not given to the possibility that in its aftermath a protracted irregular war would follow, and that TF 714 would play a major role in it. Consequently, following the fall of Baghdad, General McChrystal, who took command of the CT task force in the fall of 2003, focused on "capturing or killing high-value former Baathist leaders—a group known colloquially as 'the deck of cards' after the Pentagon had printed packs of playing cards with the grainy photographs and names of the top Baathists."<sup>64</sup> To that end, during the summer of 2003, TF 714 tracked down the Iraqi dictator's two sons, Uday and Qusay. Then on 13 December in the town of ad-Dawr, near Tikrit, they captured Saddam himself.

However, while this was taking place, the security situation in Iraq was rapidly deteriorating. During the fall, these signs, often dismissed by Washington, pointed to a robust and organized resistance taking shape. And as it grew in intensity, executing more and more devastating attacks, the mission of U.S. forces to include TF 714 was about to change dramatically.

Iraq was turning into another one of those ugly surprises that war always seems to spawn. Recall what Winston Churchill counseled: "Never believe

any war will be smooth and easy or that anyone who embarks on that strange voyage can measure the tides and storms he will encounter.” Rather, in the war room “on the morning of the declaration of war,” several unwelcome guests will “all take their seats,” including ugly surprise.<sup>65</sup> Iraq’s burgeoning violence, contrary to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld’s characterization of it as due to “pockets of dead-enders” and “small ... networks of attackers,” was illustrative of Churchill’s warning. The AQI-dominated insurgency plunged Iraq into an ugly surprise of unanticipated proportions as 2003 turned into 2004.

# 1. Unforeseen Challenges, Ugly Surprise, and TF 714

As AQI escalated the violence in Iraq, the mission of TF 714 transformed from taking down a small number of HVTs—the deck of cards—to going to war against an enemy that was different from any it had previously prepared to confront. Lieutenant General Flynn, TF 714’s intelligence chief beginning in the late spring of 2004, characterized the way in which AQI was operating as “a strategic surprise” because “the capability and scale of the threat [it posed] was far bigger than any we had ever previously thought about ... Clearly, the scale of the terrorist networks that existed, the quality of the leadership, and the scope of AQI’s operations surprised us.”<sup>66</sup> Others in the TF 714 leadership concurred. U.S. Army Lieutenant General Bennet Sacolick, who commanded one of the Army units, observed that, “The capacity of the insurgency to escalate and to change and to reinvent itself was a surprise.”<sup>67</sup>

The specialized units of TF 714 had been honed over decades to conduct highly discrete and surgical direct action and hostage rescue missions. A former mid-level member of TF 714 described this legacy as follows:

the units were closed, compartmented, and super-secret. They were ... like a skilled mechanic, very precise. Hostage rescue, single terrorists, onesies and twosies, go get them. By air, by boat, by whatever means go and take them out. And then Iraq happened ... The whole context changed, the enemy we were fighting changed to a combination of an insurgency and a terrorist organization that was using grizzly methods causing all kinds of problems for stability in Iraq.<sup>68</sup>

Surprise in war is a constant. Organizations can develop know-how to respond to such unforeseen challenges that undercuts their operational effectiveness. At the tactical level, the individual units that comprised TF 714 were prepared for surprise. They had learned roles, methods, and modes of behavior that prepared them to adapt to the unexpected. But the surprise TF 714 experienced in Iraq was not at the tactical level, and that proved to be a major challenge for an organization comprising units that had excelled at tactical adaptation.

Consequently, TF 714's initial response was to do more of what it already did extremely well. "The initial response," explained General McChrystal, was that "we will just do more of what we are already very good at and then we would have done our part."<sup>69</sup> Retired U.S. Air Force Major General David Scott, who from 2003-2006 served as one of two TF 714 deputy commanders, saw this resistance to change as due to a culture predicated on a self-perception of excellence:

The CT force was based on a culture and that culture was one that the members of the Task Force believed in. And this was a culture that developed over a long period of time, many years. And so the culture was believed in and doing more of the same, but improving it, doing more of it, refining the standard operating procedures of the CT force, that was the first choice because to change meant having to face failure and there was resistance to that. This was an organization that was based on a culture that believed it was the best in the world and so failure was not something that one expected. So there was resistance to changing routines and standard operating procedures to rectify major performance problems or the fact that the Task Force couldn't keep pace with the operational tempo of AQI. It was resistance to that idea that we had to change.<sup>70</sup>

What became evident to the CT task force leadership was that a 'more of the same' response was not going to have any meaningful impact on AQI. To be sure, those operations that TF 714 executed were highly successful. The problem was there were not enough of them. They had, at best, only a limited impact on AQI's operational tempo and on the new means it employed to maintain that tempo.

The CT task force was facing an enemy that it had never envisaged and could not degrade through its existing ways of operating. Doing more at what it excelled at—stepping up its own operational tempo—was not going to bring success, explained Lieutenant General Flynn. "We realized that we had to significantly increase our ops tempo because the enemy's tempo was outpacing us ... Tactically, we felt we are beating these guys, but operationally and strategically we were being outmatched, completely outmatched, and we were actually losing."<sup>71</sup>

Reaching a consensus among task force members that existing tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) were inadequate proved difficult,



explained General McChrystal, because the individual units were comfortable with what they believed were the effectiveness of their TTPs. The task force members excelled at the tactical level and that sense of excellence “increased inertia ... Why should we change ... [At] a micro-level we could do a lot of things very, very well. Even from the beginning of the fight [against AQI] we could go and we could hit targets, we could capture, kill, we could do those things exceedingly well.”<sup>72</sup> But the CT task force was operating as a peacetime strategic scalpel, and no matter how excellent, it was losing ground in an unfamiliar wartime environment.

That realization was going to necessitate a renovation in how TF 714 defined mission success and organized to accomplish it. A sea change was demanded, explained General McChrystal:

We needed to view the mission differently and that was whether we were winning or losing in Iraq against al-Qaeda ... [and] not just whether we captured or killed its members. We had to view the mission differently and we had to say that winning is what counts. That’s our metric of success, winning or losing, not whether or not we get this particular target ... We needed to change our thinking to say that capturing or killing is irrelevant unless we win.<sup>73</sup>

That was how TF 714 had to respond to an unforeseen and an unfamiliar challenge that undercut its operational performance. Its members had to learn ways of making the organization more agile so it could manage surprise above the tactical level.

By the fall of 2004 the realization had set in that the CT task force had to change from a strategic scalpel to what came to be termed an industrial-strength CT machine. It was going to need to “capture or kill on an industrial scale which is not something it had ever been built to do,” explained Admiral McRaven, who served as deputy CT task force commander under General McChrystal and then replaced him as the commander of TF 714.<sup>74</sup>

To operate at the industrial-strength level meant that “the basic mission fundamentally had to change,” which was going to “require us to change the way we were organizationally structured, manned, trained, equipped, and everything else.” But to do so meant, in the first place, that TF 714 “had to understand the enemy’s organization ... and that took us a while to realize it was a network.”<sup>75</sup> Moreover, that AQI network, General McChrystal observed, was unlike any terrorist network that had preceded it. AQI was

different, it was “much bigger ... much more dynamic. It had more speed, momentum, and it was benefiting from a very different operating environment than the task force had ever anticipated.”<sup>76</sup>

The complex nature of that network became apparent, recalled the commander of TF 714, when the CT task force tried to portray it on a standard map at its headquarters. They could not do it. “In place of maps, whiteboards began to appear ... As we gathered intelligence, we diagramed the relationships between members of the organization” on those white boards. But what the task force found was “tangled networks that did not resemble any organizational structure or pattern we had ever seen. New and unfamiliar patterns began to appear on the white boards.” They were not hierarchical or orderly, and there was little consistency to them. Soon, those charting AQI found that the organizational patterns they expected were “not there at all—AQI and this war were fundamentally different from anything we had seen in the past.”<sup>77</sup>

TF 714 had suffered a strategic surprise for which it was not prepared, but it was not paralyzed by that revelation. Rather, it was able to recognize the significance of what it had discovered and that it would have to demonstrate agility and adaptability to overcome an enemy it did not yet fully understand.

## 2. Problem Solving and the JIATF

As described previously, learning organizations are those that institutionalize and employ problem solving methods to diagnosis new and unforeseen operational challenges. And when facing today's complex challenges, problem solving is understood as a shared responsibility for organizations as a whole, not just the task of the top leadership. It has to become a part of the disposition of the entire organization, a way of thinking and acting.

The CT task force, however, was shaped over two decades as a top-down military organization, which was highly compartmented and semi-autonomous. General McChrystal noted it was a closed system that broadly reflected Henri Fayol's five step management formula:<sup>78</sup>

1. **Prepare.** Examine the context and draw up a plan of action.
2. **Organize.** Buildup the structure, both material and human, for the undertaking.
3. **Command.** Maintain the activity among the personnel.
4. **Coordinate.** Bind together, unify, and harmonize all activity and effort.
5. **Control.** See that everything occurs in conformity with established rules and commands.<sup>79</sup>

Problem solving in Fayol's system of management is the responsibility of the leadership. They break challenges down, think through puzzles, marshal information, and select the most efficient solutions. No matter how complicated the problem, there are discoverable solutions to them. Those solutions, once identified, are then implemented by the organization's rank and file membership. There is a hard line separating leaders and managers from workers or, in the case of military organizations, operators. The CT task force did not completely conform to Fayol in that there was flexibility in terms of problem solving at the tactical level. But above that level, the evolution of the CT task force reflected Fayol in its chain of command.

This was the structure of TF 714 when it deployed to Iraq. Its organizational configuration was hierarchical. But that "organization was designed for a problem set that no longer existed," explained General McChrystal.

“We brought an industrial-age force to an information-age conflict.”<sup>80</sup> They planned for complicated problems but found a complex one, as will be explained later. Figure 2 shows how TF 714 was structured for problem solving, according to its commander.<sup>81</sup> It mirrored Fayol.

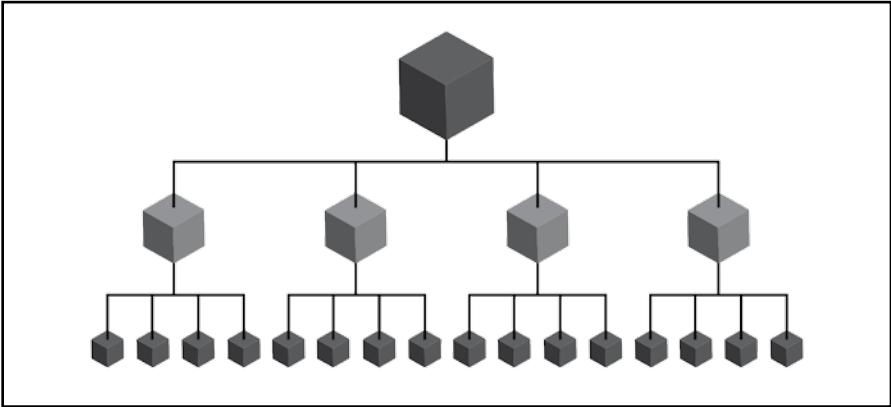


Figure 2. Traditional Chain of Command Structure<sup>82</sup>

This traditional method of problem solving was too deliberate and hierarchical to decipher the puzzle presented by Iraq’s fast paced and networked insurgency. The CT task force faced an existential crisis in its capacity to understand and prevail against AQI. And, as noted above, doing more of the same would not suffice. TF 714 had to be redesigned and partnered with several other U.S. Government security agencies to be able to comprehend and counter the unprecedented operational challenge confronting it in Iraq. The problem of understanding and degrading AQI could not be accomplished by a highly compartmented and top-down military organization. It came down to transforming or losing. Problem solving had to become a shared responsibility for the organization as a whole. And this meant changing roles, rules, and patterns of interaction within the organization. Moreover, that organization itself would have to expand to include new affiliates that were not normally part of the team. And they all were going to have to learn to work together as a team.

The far-reaching scope of that transformation was, only subsequently, captured in the often quoted General McChrystal maxim: “To defeat a networked enemy we had to become a network.” By this he meant that TF 714 “had to figure out a way to retain [its] traditional capabilities of

professionalism, technology, and, when needed, overwhelming force, while achieving levels of [unprecedented] knowledge, speed, precision, and unity of effort that only a network could provide.”<sup>83</sup>

But a mechanism for setting such a transformation in motion was not immediately apparent to the task force, as it grappled with this complex challenge. There was no blueprint for turning TF 714 into the kind of problem-solving organization that could achieve the objectives envisaged by its commander. However, there was a relatively unknown organizational concept—JIATF—that Admiral McRaven knew about and suggested to General McChrystal. If adapted to TF 714’s complex Iraqi battlespace, Admiral McRaven would propose, it could provide a way forward in unraveling the AQI puzzle.

A JIATF, according to Evan Munsing and Christopher J. Lamb, is a “model for whole-of-government problem-solving” that, by fostering “cross organizational collaboration,” seeks to overcome the “natural tendencies [of many organizations] to seek autonomy rather collaboration.”<sup>84</sup> Since the end of the Cold War such interagency collaboration has frequently been touted as the mechanism for addressing complex and unconventional international security problems. However, examples of successful JIATFs are few and far between.

The reason for this shortfall has to do with the demanding performance requirements of a successful JIATF. From their study of JIATF-South, which detects, monitors, and disrupts air and sea smuggling of illicit narcotics into the U.S. from Latin America, Munsing and Lamb identified the following preconditions:

- First, “there must be a single organization dedicated to leading the effort,” in which cooperation with others “is on a voluntary basis.” That lead organization must be able to convince interagency associates that they want to join up because “there are rewards for pursuing the mission.”<sup>85</sup>
- Second, interagency collaboration is more possible when there is a “discrete, clearly identifiable problem with a meaningful and measurable outcome.”<sup>86</sup> In the case of JIATF-South this entailed disruption of drug shipments and weakening of the cartels.
- Third, to recruit collaborative core partners, the lead organization has to learn about those it wants “to partner with, understand their

equities, and appreciate what it would take to develop a trust relationship with them.” And beyond core partners, building a truly networked task force necessitates “forging additional partnerships with varying levels of intensity ... with a diverse set of [other] interested parties.”<sup>87</sup>

- Fourth, the lead organization has to foster within the JIATF a “culture of trust and empowerment,” which takes the persistent nurturing of teamwork.<sup>88</sup>

While JIATF-South was one of the best kept secrets of interagency success,<sup>89</sup> USSOCOM in 2003 sent representatives to learn about it. In fact, “then U.S. Army Major General Dell Dailey, director of USSOCOM’s Center for Special Operations, was so impressed by JIATF–South that he visited the command every 3 months with his staff.”<sup>90</sup> And Admiral McRaven, who had served in the White House, was aware of the JIATF concept and thought it had applicability.

Admiral McRaven recalled that in 2004 there was significant frustration within TF 714 for reasons noted earlier. And this was voiced at a CT task force commander’s conference during that year. Among the quandaries identified was the paucity of obtainable intelligence to infiltrate AQI networks in order to disrupt them. Admiral McRaven recalled proposing at the time:

We need a joint interagency task force and Stan’s up at the whiteboard writing that down—joint interagency task force ... So, we talked it through. I said look, we need CIA, we need FBI, we need everybody, all the three-letter intelligence agencies. If we don’t understand what CIA’s doing, or what FBI’s doing, or NSA, then we’re missing things. They have information we’re not seeing.<sup>91</sup>

General McChrystal was convinced that the highly compartmented TF 714 needed a JIATF. Embracing the concept was the easy part; operationalizing it to meet the preconditions for success identified by Munsing and Lamb would prove very demanding. Deeply rooted cultures of secrecy, autonomy, and exclusiveness that infused not only the CT task force organization but also all those three-letter agencies had to be overcome. General McChrystal would have to convince each to voluntarily join the JIATF and collaborate in a work environment of interdependency, cooperation, trust, and transparency. “The need to share information was apparent,” explained Lieutenant

General Flynn, but “not everybody was sharing. The CIA was probably the most difficult ... NSA was probably second. And then third, right behind NSA and CIA were the operational elements ... of the task force. They weren’t even sharing.”<sup>92</sup>

It took until 2005 to establish the JIATF. To institute among its members problem solving methods capable of fostering effective diagnoses of AQI’s operational practices proved a knotty undertaking. It necessitated forging together members of the intelligence community—those three-letter agencies—and the CT task force into a union of trust and common purpose. Lieutenant General Flynn explained that creating trust meant, for example, that CIA would give the task force “access to some of their most sensitive human intelligence data and you’re going to use it appropriately. We had to constantly work to make sure that the big intelligence community agencies felt that they could trust the task force with their information.”<sup>93</sup>

In sum, the operating environment dominated by AQI demanded change in the cultures of secrecy, autonomy, and exclusiveness that pervaded in both the intelligence agencies and in the task force. The organizational mechanism to bring about that change was the JIATF. Through it, the CT task force leadership sought to foster a new operating environment of interdependence, cooperation, trust, and transparency, all essential attributes of effective problem solving in learning organizations. To bring these different organizations together to embrace the preconditions of an effective JIATF as spelled out by Munsing and Lamb took a great deal of convincing on the part of the CT task force leadership. One key to winning them over was to persuade each to join forces because there were rewards in it for them in pursuing the mission together. One of those rewards, explained Lieutenant General Sacolick, was to be part of an organization that had success in Iraq:

What you had then in the JIATF were a number of organizations that had elite institutional cultures. They tended to operate on their own. So why become a member of the task force? The answer was opportunity—opportunity to get involved with the counterterrorism task force. They wanted to become part of the mission because the task force was playing an important role in the war in Iraq. So, in a way this was an organic process that then was fostered and developed by Stan McChrystal and by Bill McRaven. Success held it together. The anchor was success. The JIATF initially was fragile

but as the insurgency started to grow so did the mission of the task force and so McChrystal began to build an interagency team and as that team became successful others wanted to be part of it. They wanted to participate in the success of the CT task force.<sup>94</sup>

There was another reason to share in the intelligence the CT task force was collecting as part of its operations. As will be underscored in the next chapter, it was considerable and, Admiral McRaven noted, it brought the intelligence agencies onboard.

[As] we started closing in on Zarqawi, I believe that is what really brought the CIA and task force together. CIA realized they did not have the sources where we had sources. They didn't have a screening facility like we had a screening facility and before long we were driving the train and the agency was very happy to be part of it.<sup>95</sup>

Achieving buy-in by the three letter intelligence agencies to set this in motion "took quite a while," recalled General McChrystal. The key was to convince each that "this isn't TF 714's mission that you are supporting; this is our mission that you are a part of." And TF 714 would "share our intelligence completely; we shared things that they would not have otherwise had access to ... Suddenly [they learned] we weren't just consumers, we were providers of intelligence and partners."<sup>96</sup>



### 3. Organizational Practices: Empowerment, Agency, and Complexity

Agency is a critical feature of learning organizations facing complex challenges.<sup>97</sup> It equips individual members with license to contest existing routines when those operating practices break down and fail to deliver. Members are empowered to appraise existing operational TTPs and to propose changes to them.

Having adopted the JIATF structure, the next step in the transformation process was to instill into new interagency partners an interdependent learning and problem solving way of thinking based on agency. That entailed empowering its members, down to the lowest practical working level, with the capacity described in the third characteristic of a learning organization previously noted.

The leadership of TF 714 knew it would have to shed its top down approach to command and control, substituting for it decentralized authority and problem solving from below. To outpace AQI, General McChrystal concluded that problem solving and decision making could not wait for him or his top deputies to disseminate commands. “A big piece of why we lagged behind AQI lay in our need to relay decisions up and down the chain of command. The requirement to consult me for strikes was symptomatic of a bureaucracy ... grown slower and more convoluted as the world around it had become faster.” The process was taking too long and its “effects were crippling.”<sup>98</sup> Instead, he asserted that “individuals and teams closest to the problem ... offered the best ability to decide and act decisively.”<sup>99</sup> That was because “the velocity and volume of decisions needing to be made in today’s complex environments so exceeds the capabilities of even the most gifted leaders. Therefore, empowerment of those lower rungs is a simple necessity.”<sup>100</sup>

As the JIATF began to take shape and enlarge with the addition of CIA, NSA, FBI, DIA, NGA, and others, personnel from each deployed to TF 714’s headquarters. Once deployed, they found a different kind of work environment from that at their home institution. Lieutenant General Flynn explained that they learned:

you've got voice [agency] ... Everybody had a voice and so rank didn't matter, age didn't matter, what mattered was the value you added. Did you have value to provide, and if you did, provide it! You have a responsibility to do that. It's not just the commander or the J2 or the J3, it's everybody.<sup>101</sup>

Lieutenant General Flynn gave two putative illustrations of how agency and empowerment manifested itself in junior personnel at the TF 714 headquarters. In the first, the joint operations center (JOC) scheduled night capture-kill operations to be executed in eight hours. In the interim, a junior interrogator happened to learn something during the interrogation of a prisoner captured on a similar mission the night before and realized "that's going to impact tonight's missions. So, he would step away from the interrogation and wouldn't go back through a layered hierarchy to report what he learned, but would go straight to the officer running the JOC to explain we just learned this and we think it's going to affect tonight's operations."<sup>102</sup> In the second example, very proficient but junior analysts would be embedded to support elite Army units at their austere forward operating bases. With no bureaucratic layers between them, and in a context of interdependence, cooperation, and trust, the analysts "began to see their ability and effectiveness just go through the roof. Operations were exponentially improved by having this type of communications between operators and analysts working side-by-side in the field."<sup>103</sup>

A member of the JIATF who served at the working level in 2007-2009 gave the following description of how agency and empowerment manifested itself during his time:

[It was] the only organization I have ever been in where as long as you're going toward mission accomplishment there was no fear of speaking out ... In some organizations I've seen it be feared to do so especially if the leader was going to bleed you white if you said something he didn't agree with. General McChrystal himself had a voracious thirst for knowledge. And if someone had a more accurate conception of what the truth was, what the right answer was, he would support him ... it didn't matter what rank they were. It could be an intel captain doing an update. [What was important was] creativity, imagination, and innovation.<sup>104</sup>

Agency and empowerment were critical enablers if the JIATF was to prevail over what its leadership came to describe as a complex AQI challenge. Over the last two decades the difference between complicated and complex problems has received considerable attention, mainly in business and management studies.<sup>105</sup> Gokce Sargut and Rita McGrath observed that coping with accelerating “levels of complexity” has posed an acute challenge for those “managing a business today.”

[Complexity] affects almost everything we touch: the products we design, the jobs we do, and the organizations we oversee. Most of this increase has resulted from the information technology revolution ... Systems that used to be separate are now interconnected and interdependent, which means that they are, by definition, more complex.<sup>106</sup>

What the leadership of TF 714 discovered was that coping with complexity to remain competitive was not a challenge only facing the business and corporate world. It was equally true for military organizations engaged in modern irregular warfare.

## Complex Challenges

Problem solving that advances adaptation in a complex environment warrants different leadership and managerial TTPs. This is because complex challenges “are far more difficult to manage than merely complicated ones,” explain Sargut and McGrath. “It is harder to predict what will happen, because complex systems interact in unexpected ways.”<sup>107</sup> Complicated problems, on the other hand, noted Roberto Poli, “originate from causes that can be individually distinguished; they can be [broken down and] addressed piece-by-piece; for each input there is a proportionate output ... and the problems they present admit to [identifiable] solutions.”<sup>108</sup>

David Snowden and Mary Boone have been in the forefront in differentiating how complicated domains or contexts diverge from complex ones, and in prescribing the methods and practices for managing each. They assert that executives who understand “which context they are in ... can not only make better decisions but also avoid the problems that arise when their preferred management style causes them to fail.”<sup>109</sup>

Defining characteristics of complicated domains include “a clear relationship between cause and effect.” For leaders facing these challenges, a successful outcome is discernible through systematic investigation. However, attaining it “is not [necessarily] easy and often requires [outside] expertise ... because a complicated context calls for investigating several options.”<sup>110</sup> This can take time. But the right answer is knowable, as Poli noted above.<sup>111</sup> An identifiable resolution can be attained for complicated problems. There is “one right answer.”<sup>112</sup>

Complex challenges are different in degree and in kind.<sup>113</sup> Three characteristics of complex challenges according to Sargut and McGrath, illuminate their distinctiveness: multiplicity, interdependence, and diversity. Complex domains have a much large number or multiplicity of “interacting elements.” And there are scores of connections and linkages among those elements fostering considerable interdependence. But those interactions are nonlinear, making the identification of enduring patterns unlikely. Finally, diversity is reflected in the high “degree of heterogeneity” among the elements that comprise a complex milieu.<sup>114</sup>

Unlike complicated situations, the outcome for complex ones cannot be identified beforehand. That becomes known only in retrospect. Complexity does not lend itself to reductionism. The consequences of actions are not, in advance, comprehensible due to the number of nonlinear interactions taking place among its parts. Sargut and McGrath observe that “in a complex system, the same starting conditions can produce different outcomes, depending on the interactions of the elements in the system.”<sup>115</sup>

In sum, leaders and managers faced with complex challenges have to think and act in ways that are different from the past, when they could assume an ordered universe. This is because an underlying characteristic of complexity is the presence of continuous change driven by innovative technologies.<sup>116</sup> To be successful in a complex setting, firms have to develop the ability to transform themselves continuously, explains E.K. Weick, by embracing “ongoing accommodation, adaptation, and alterations,” to “produce fundamental change.”<sup>117</sup> Snowden and Boone summarize the characteristics of complexity in Table 1.<sup>118</sup>

AQI posed a complex challenge for TF 714. Understanding it, General McChrystal recalled, was “not an easy insight to come by. It was only ... with considerable difficulty that we came to understand how the emerging networks of Islamist insurgents and terrorists were fundamentally different

**Complex Contexts Involve:**

- A large number of interacting elements.
- Nonlinear Interactions in which minor changes can produce disproportionately major consequences.
- A dynamic context in which solutions cannot be imposed but arise from the circumstances ... frequently referred to as emergence.
- Elements evolve with one another and with the environment. Evolution is irreversible.
- While a complex system may, in retrospect, be ordered and predictable, hindsight does not lead to foresight because the external conditions are changing.
- Unlike ordered systems, in complex ones the agents and the context constrain each, preventing the prediction of outcomes in advance.

Table 1. Complex contexts. Source: Author

from any enemy the United States has previously known or faced.”<sup>119</sup> Those differences were most apparent, David Knoke observed, in AQI’s “organizational structures and strategies. In place of vertically integrated hierarchies, today’s Jihadis assemble in continually shifting networks.”<sup>120</sup> Their organization did not mirror the hierarchical organizational structure depicted by Fayol. Their strategy was “to drive out foreign occupying forces by inflicting such high levels of injury and death that a democratic government would be forced to withdraw.”<sup>121</sup> This was AQI’s method of fighting—a plethora of decentralized groupings that made effective use of information technologies to form into an array of dispersed networks able to conduct operations across Iraq. They became “the embodiment of netwar,” observed Martin Muckian.<sup>122</sup>

The concept of netwar was not new to SOF. It had appeared in the 1990s as an outgrowth of globalization, the information revolution, and emergence of networks. The impact of these developments proved to be far reaching. They gave power to a wide range of non-state actors who were gaining the capacity to challenge states in a number of ways to include warfare designated as netwar.

The term can be traced to John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, who in the early 1990s proposed that future conflict would be waged through Internet-based modes of communications. The information age was “altering the nature of conflict” by “strengthening network forms of organization, often giving them an advantage over hierarchical forms. The rise of networks

means that power is migrating to societal-level non-state actors, because they are able to organize into sprawling multi-organizational networks ... more readily than can hierarchical state actors."<sup>123</sup>

Netwar could be waged over various Internet-based configurations and those actors engaged in it were diverse. They included terrorist organizations, criminal syndicates, activist groups, and social movements, among other non-state actors identified by Arquilla and Ronfeldt in the 1990s.<sup>124</sup> The following encapsulates how netwar was understood during its embryonic stage:

Netwar refers to an emerging mode of conflict (and crime) at societal levels, involving measures short of traditional war, in which the protagonists use network forms of organization and related doctrines, strategies, and technologies attuned to the information age. These protagonists are likely to consist of dispersed small groups who communicate, coordinate, and conduct their campaigns in an internetted manner, without a precise central command.<sup>125</sup>

What TF 714 faced in Iraq in 2004 far surpassed these early iterations of netwar, General McChrystal explained:

We had studied terrorism and terrorist networks. So, it wasn't this epiphany that this is different than what we thought ... this is much bigger, this is much more dynamic, and more complex. It had much more speed and it was benefitting from a very different operating environment than we had anticipated ... And that created the scope and complexity of the problem on a much greater scale than we had ever dealt with before or anticipated we would ever face.<sup>126</sup>

What TF 714 encountered was an AQI that was evolving and transforming expeditiously, said Admiral McRaven. "It was a rapid evolution ... The insurgents were building those networks very fast. They didn't just come into Iraq with a perfect organization. They had to build it."<sup>127</sup>

However, as AQI unfolded and evolved in the fight against TF 714, its component parts, as depicted in Figure 3, morphed and transformed the shape of its networks. It emerged as a web of dispersed, dynamic, and interconnected networks, described by one observer as follows:

The insurgency was primarily made up of clandestine cellular networks, applying excellent tradecraft to remain hidden and to hide

the connections between the individuals in the movement. Thus, the unseen linkages that connected the distributed cells were the clandestine infrastructure (form), further protected by the clandestine arts (function), to minimize signature so that the clandestine cellular networks were not readily visible.<sup>128</sup>

Clandestine insurgent infrastructures were not new. AQI's underground networks carried out functions that were not dissimilar from its Cold War forerunners.<sup>129</sup> The difference was the new "sanctuary" within which AQI was embedded and the speed with which it could execute distributed operations in Iraq. Lieutenant General Flynn explained the "global communications revolution" has provided AQI with:

a new complex terrain—an electronic sanctuary—in which actions can be hidden among the innumerable civilian signals that constitute daily cell phone and Internet traffic. It is from this new sanctuary that the enemy coordinates activities from dispersed networks in order to self-synchronize, pass information, and transfer funds. In this way, the insurgents have become 'networked coalitions of the willing' that come together temporarily and are thus difficult to observe and destroy. Drawing support from their networks, they remain low contrast until time to strike and then quickly blend back into the population.<sup>130</sup>

To defeat this complex web of networks, Lieutenant General Flynn told General McChrystal during an early 2004 visit to Iraq, TF 714 had to become more of an intelligence organization than an operations organization. Lieutenant General Flynn was in Iraq assessing the state of TF 714's intelligence capacity in preparation for becoming the J2, chief of intelligence.

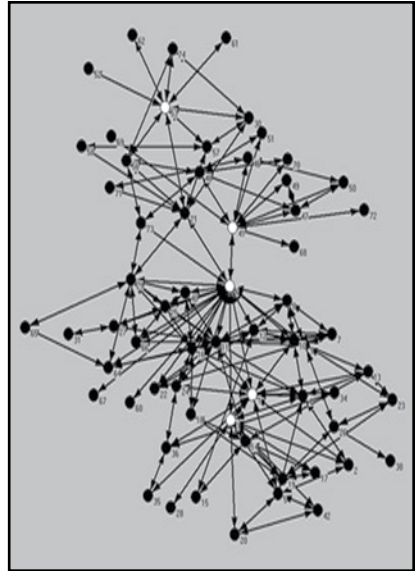


Figure 3. AQI Web of Networks in Iraq at One Point in Time.

Source: Author

I said to Stan, “your intelligence operations are a small part of your organization and they need to be 80 percent of what you do as an organization. It needs to be the majority of what the task force does because frankly, what we were facing we don’t know squat about.” In those couple of weeks spent assessing TF 714 what I realized was that this organization was an exquisite capability but they didn’t have the intelligence that they needed. They weren’t even considering it to the degree that they should have.<sup>131</sup>

In sum, an important learning point for TF 714 was the realization that to be an effective action arm of the JIATF, the operational units had to be coordinated with a robust intelligence capability composed of several of the three-letter agencies of the intelligence community. Actionable intelligence had to lead the way in the fight against AQI.



## 4. Information, Knowledge, and Intelligence Dominance

Business and management studies have found that successful learning organizations are able to identify the causes of their ineffectiveness by developing the means to secure information and knowledge about those shortcomings.<sup>132</sup> For a military organization at war this is an essential capability. And this was true for TF 714, which was embroiled in a fight with a clandestine and networked enemy. Intelligence—information and knowledge—had to lead the way. Amassing and disseminating timely and accurate intelligence about AQI was the *sine qua non* for success. The task force had to achieve what has been termed intelligence dominance.

Intelligence dominance has been an essential tool employed by a number of intelligence services to overcome the threats posed by contemporary armed groups. According to Roy Godson and his associates, achieving intelligence dominance means to develop “sufficient local knowledge to map the infrastructure of armed groups, and gather the evidence to arrest and/or neutralize the support structure and leadership of the groups.”<sup>133</sup> A former senior member of Israel’s internal security agency, Shin Bet, described its importance as follows:

To defeat terrorists you must know everything about them. Everything! Who are their leaders and how do they plan and carry out operations? How are they organized and what methods are used for recruitment? What are their weaknesses and vulnerabilities ... Without systematic knowledge of the enemy, operations to neutralize such unconventional adversaries are usually futile.<sup>134</sup>

A former intelligence officer who worked against the IRA described the methods he used to collect such information as “complete block by block coverage—of each location out of which the terrorists operate.”<sup>135</sup>

In 2004, TF 714 was nowhere close to having intelligence dominance. General McChrystal recalled that his organization was not exploiting the intelligence collected on operations. The process was defective. Across the task force, he explained, operations should have been conducted to collect and produce more and better intelligence on AQI’s networks. They should

have generated intelligence and that intelligence should have been the means for accelerating the tempo of operations.

We intuitively knew that the day we had that kind of knowledge on AQI we would win, it would be over. Because any time we knew where they were and who they were we could capture or kill them quickly. The challenge was to know enough to rapidly carry out operations that degraded AQI's networks. It was this constant search for intelligence.<sup>136</sup>

This was not how task force intelligence functioned in 2004. Operators were collecting considerable intelligence as a byproduct of raids, but that intelligence was not being exploited to ramp up the pace of operations. "On each mission," explained TF 714's commander, operators "found documents and electronics, as well as people who knew names and plans that we wanted to know. But human error, insufficient technology, and organizational strictures limited our ability to use that intelligence to mount the next raid." Instead of exploiting it to achieve intelligence dominance, the teams "filled emptied sandbags, burlap sacks, or clear plastic trash bags with scooped-up piles of documents, CDs, computers, and cell phones, and then sent them down to our base in Baghdad. Detainees thought to be important made the trip with the bags."<sup>137</sup> Once the bags arrived they were placed in storage. General McChrystal found little to suggest that their contents were being methodically mined—intelligence was not leading the way. The CT task force focused on the standard find, fix, finish (F3) construct, explained Lieutenant General Flynn. That was the main effort. What was missing was attention to "track and assess" or "exploit and analyze." After Lieutenant General Flynn got to the CT task force, he said, "F3 was where we were spending most of our time. I looked at that and I asked what are we doing in the areas of exploiting and analyzing? F3 is where 80 percent, probably more like 90 percent, of the attention of the task force was focused."<sup>138</sup> "The problem with that cycle [was] you never understand the scope of the network you were fighting," Admiral McRaven added.

[A]s in years past, somebody like CIA would find the target, somebody like NSA would fix the target, they would give it to us to go finish the target. We'd hand what we collected on the mission back off to CIA or FBI to do the analysis of the captured materials. They'd

hand it to somebody else to do the dissemination and we'd just wait for the next target to come to us.<sup>139</sup>

General McChrystal very early on recognized he had to “own it all.” He needed to “own find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, and disseminate.”<sup>140</sup>

But AQI posed a new, complex problem set enhanced by information age technology. To achieve intelligence dominance the JIATF had to develop a new approach. The task force, as matters stood, only excelled at the ‘finish’ part of the equation. ‘Finish’ was necessary but far from sufficient. The task force was pitted against a networked insurgency and that necessitated adoption of a new operational concept for attacking and degrading it. That concept was F3EAD.

To step up the operational tempo against AQI, the JIATF had to collect, analyze, and utilize intelligence collected on each operation. F3 had to be transformed into F3EAD. To accomplish that, said Lieutenant General Flynn, “the task force flipped the targeting process completely around.” Instead of 80 percent of the task force effort being focused on operations and 20 percent on intelligence, the opposite became the case. What this meant, he explained, was that “the days are gone where intelligence was a subordinate component of operations. Intelligence now was going to be the leading component.”<sup>141</sup>

He argued that transforming F3 into F3EAD was essential:

if we were going to defeat this enemy. They had to have pressure applied to them constantly. And the only way to apply pressure constantly was to make them feel like they will never have a good night's sleep. And that they would have to constantly be on the move ... And that's what we had to do. And that's what our raids did, and that was across the board.<sup>142</sup>

## **Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyze, Disseminate**

By itself, the CT task force could not execute F3EAD. It did not have the intelligence capacity to do so. That necessitated an interagency collaborative effort. Therefore, achieving the buy-in of the three-letter intelligence agencies, as discussed earlier, was essential to achieve intelligence dominance. It was the indispensable prologue. Without it, the process of analyzing and exploiting intelligence collected on operations to foster more operations could never have achieved the tempo needed to degrade the insurgent

underground and networked apparatus. As a highly compartmented and semi-autonomous organization, TF 714 did not have the necessary intelligence capacity.

The JIATF brought together three critical ingredients—people, process, and systems—to employ F3EAD to achieve intelligence dominance. Charles Faint and Michael Harris describe it as a “system that allows Special Operations Forces (SOF) to anticipate and predict enemy operations, to identify, locate, and target enemy forces, and to perform intelligence exploitation and analysis of captured enemy personnel and materiel.”<sup>143</sup>

The key to successful employment of F3EAD was speeding up turnaround time. “The goal of operations/intelligence fusion and of the rapid pace of the F3EAD process” was to enable the task force “to plan and execute operations against the enemy faster than the enemy could react” to those operations. It provided the way for the task force to get inside AQI’s networks to “simultaneously direct [multiple] operations against several parts of [it].”<sup>144</sup> When done successfully, the reconfigured interagency JIATF dominated the operational tempo of the fight.

F3EAD transformed targeting. No longer was the focal point on seizing or destroying enemy personnel, equipment, and facilities. Rather, the main effort now concentrated on the intelligence elements of the process—exploit and analyze. This set in motion a continuous cycle, captured in Figure 4, which provided the JIATF with the capacity to dominate the operational speed of the battle with AQI.

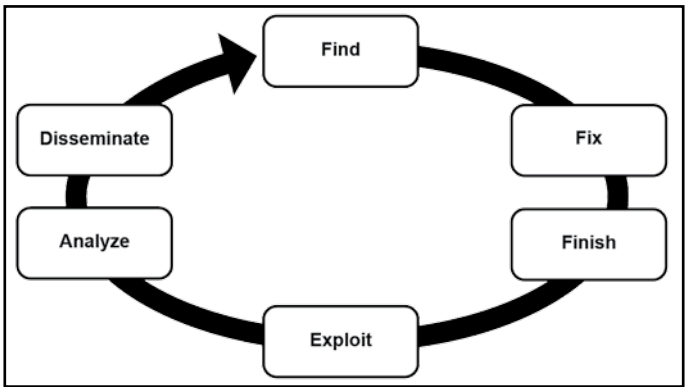


Figure 4. The F3EAD Process. Source: Joint Publication 3-05, Special Operations, page IV-1.

F3EAD, as with its F3 predecessor, began with target selection. Targets were identified organically by personnel within the JIATF. Faint and Harris note that “the targeting start point can be deliberate or opportunity-based, and can focus on a known personality, a facility, an organization, or some other type of signature.”<sup>145</sup>

But once identified, the JIATF could call on the full toolbox of intelligence capabilities its interagency partners brought to the table to locate and fix a target “in time and space.”<sup>146</sup> And having representatives from the intelligence agencies deployed forward and present at TF 714’s headquarters increased the speed with which their capabilities could be brought to bear to track and frame a target’s pattern of life, physical movements, and connection within one or more AQI networks. Their presence also made it easier for the CT task force to have a reach back connection to draw on the capabilities of those agencies at their home headquarters. Through the JIATF, the CT task force could marshal the intelligence capabilities available to it from across the intelligence community, drawing on specific agencies to provide specific expertise to help fix a specific target.

At the center of the intelligence process was TF 714’s J2 Chief of Intelligence Lieutenant General Flynn. He explained that intelligence began with operators during a mission; they were “primary collectors. The convergence of intelligence and operations began with the operator not with the intelligence specialists in the task force. Operators had to accept the fact that they were going to have to do things differently,” and that their operations had more in common with techniques used by “the law enforcement community.” For example, they had to collect details on the detainees from a mission at the site of the raid. Lieutenant General Flynn gave the example of “pocket litter.”<sup>147</sup>

In the past, three guys would be captured on a mission and a bag of items collected. A bag of stuff would be captured, and we might ask the operators, where did you get this particular item? And they would say ... we don’t remember. We wanted to know whose pocket it was in, who was in possession of it. This kind of detail was important because we found over time that guys who were holding documents were not actually the guys we wanted. It was somebody else who was in the room. And that somebody else would play dumb. Because

they knew we didn't always keep everybody detained. So we needed to know that kind of detail.<sup>148</sup>

This could lead to an interrogation that revealed information on another target in the same neighborhood where the initial operation took place.

Other items in that bag, such as laptops and cell phones, likewise could quickly identify other members of an AQI network, resulting in new targets. General McChrystal described how these were mined at TF 714 headquarters by intelligence specialists from those three-letter agencies.

We went from ... bags of captured items sitting there and we'll read them when we get time, which was weeks later, to all these analysts sitting in a series of rooms. And this room was the cell phone room. Detainee phones were taken there immediately after a raid and they had these machines that as soon as we capture someone with a phone, we hook the phone up and we have computers that suck the guts out of the phone, they see who he's called ... who he's talked to. Has anybody else that we captured talked to these people?

Triangulating this was the beginning of the uncovering of a network of new targets. A similar capability existed at TF 714 headquarters for captured computers, he explained. "Specialists laid everything out in the computer room ... they start triangulating what they found, they start translating it ... they're doing a scan for information which we could use for target identification and simultaneously ... we're pumping it back to the CIA, to the NSA."<sup>149</sup>

Targets generated by this process could be immediately "fixed" by the J2 employing what Lieutenant General Flynn described as "a robust all-source intelligence network" that could call on airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) in conjunction with human intelligence (HUMINT), signals intelligence (SIGINT), and detainee intelligence, to track a target continuously.<sup>150</sup> Against an enemy embedded in both the population and on the Internet, it:

took multiple sources of intelligence to corroborate one another. SIGINT, for example, can locate a target but may not be able to discern who it is. FMV [full motion video] can track movements but not necessarily identify the targets intentions. HUMINT can provide intent but may not be able to fix a target in a precise location. However, these intelligence disciplines and others working together

are able to focus the spotlight on low-contrast foes, so they can be captured or killed.<sup>151</sup>

What these intelligence capabilities permitted the members of the JIATF to do was to develop the 'pattern of life' for a member of AQI and then to map out his place in an AQI network. In effect, they could put the target under a multidimensional stakeout. And all the intelligence that was gathered could be fed into the exploit and analyze part of the F3EAD cycle. Having these capabilities forward at the headquarters was essential for speeding up turn-around time to achieve the operational tempo needed to degrade the insurgent network. Lieutenant General Flynn gave the following example of how the system worked when processing a captured insurgent from a night raid:

What exploit meant was to know what it was that you were going after and what you were looking for. You could already have intelligence that you collected from previous operations. For example, our interrogators would go into an interrogation looking for something in particular. We might be going after a particular individual and we find out that the just captured detainee knew him, was in contact with him, and could know his location. How did we know this? Here is an example I remember. At 2200 one night we do a download on the phone of a just captured detainee, and we have the technology in place because technology was never the problem. So, we would process it immediately. Here are his contacts. We do a quick contacts check, and that's all done internally. We didn't have to go back to big NSA, all is being done internally. And we find out here is a number that's associated with an insurgent we are looking for. That information from the analyst is provided in real time to the interrogator who would go back into the interrogation booth and bring the guy back in to the booth and ask about this guy and about his location. This led to a new target that we put ISR collection on. This is all happening in a span of 3 or 4 hours. Now we know the house, we have a phone number that's associated with it, and we have the site under observation. If the phone rings, we can listen in. If the target leaves the house we can follow him. And as we are doing this, a team is preparing to carry out a raid on the house and capture the target. It is still the same night. To me this is revolutionary; it is an RMA, a revolution in military affairs.<sup>152</sup>

The example illustrates the speed of the F3EAD cycle with respect to one night. The faster TF 714 could move through the cycle, the faster its operational tempo. General McChrystal explained:

the great change for the task force was in taking this process and basically bending it into a seamless, repeating circle. We made it a circle but then we also made it possible that you could go to here in the cycle and then go to there within it. You didn't have to go slavishly through every step of the cycle. The idea was it was an interconnected system.<sup>153</sup>

A member of the CT task force in Iraq described the F3EAD process as making TF 714:

more agile, responsive, and speedy. We could capture, kill, exploit, develop, and disseminate intelligence within a 24-hour cycle, and in one period of darkness we would sequentially execute up to eight to 12 missions. And some of those missions are on the same night, exploiting intelligence captured that night. We could do that because of all the interagency representatives. They all brought something. NSA brings their signal capacity, DIA and CIA bring in their analytical capacity, FBI helps with forensics ... We tracked targets with all the tools of intelligence.<sup>154</sup>

F3EAD achieved intelligence dominance against a modern, networked armed group. However, what this intelligence process could not produce was a grand organizational design of all of al-Qaeda's different elements in Iraq. There was no such fixed structure that the F3EAD process could discern. AQI was a complex system comprising a large number of interconnecting networks, as illustrated in Figure 4, which were always adapting and changing. It was not an ordered system. The F3EAD process allowed TF 714 to get inside an AQI sub-network to reveal particular nodes and the interrelationship between them. It could expose an operational unit or an IED production and distribution facility or a financier group. And once inside the task force could distinguish central and peripheral figures, patterns of behavior, and clusters and groupings of nodes in order to disrupt and degrade that part of AQI's system. Do this fast enough, hit many targets rapidly every night, and the task force would outpace AQI's capacity to adapt and renew itself.



At first, explained retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General Eric Fiel, “we would not know what a particular element of AQI looked like. All we knew was that a certain geographic location was experiencing a high level of insurgent activity. An initial raid could give the task force pieces of information about it.”<sup>155</sup> It all began with a piece of intelligence from a phone, computer, or detainee interrogation gathered on a night raid. In that data the analysts were looking for a number of things. First, for contacts—who is talking to whom? Second, information found on phones and computers was used to press detainees to outline his network grouping. Who comprised it and what did it do? Third, based on that intelligence, analysts begin to put together the outline of a sub-network for one part of AQI in one part of Iraq. They figured out where it was located, who populated it, what the communication patterns looked like, who was in charge, and what they were planning to do.

All of this intelligence, collected and exploited in a very short period of time, was triangulated with information already in data management systems. This allowed the analysts to fill out a diagram of an AQI sub-network in a particular part of Iraq. The schema that emerged was not orderly and hierarchical. Rather, it seemed chaotic, disorganized, and dispersed. They had no single operation center. But it was effective. Those who comprised it used technology competently, they had military skills, and they were adaptive. The picture that emerged was of a complex, adapting system. There were critical nodes within the network that could be attacked to disrupt and degrade it once the task force was able to operate inside. General McChrystal summarized the process as follows: “The way we dealt with a particular part of their network once we identified it was to dominate its operational tempo, to pummel it constantly through raids against it, to drive it down and make it collapse in upon itself.”<sup>156</sup>



## 5. Augmenting the JIATF

Learning organizations create innovative procedures and mechanisms that foster cross-organization ties, cross-fertilization of new ideas, and dissemination of new knowledge to respond to complex challenges. The JIATF established a networked operating system based on cooperation, trust, and interdependence among its members. Moreover, several innovative procedures and mechanisms were adopted at the TF 714 headquarters to augment the JIATF's operating system. Each helped foster an environment that generated real time interaction and problem solving across the CT task force to exponentially increase operational tempo. These innovations enhanced the capacity of the JIATF to act decisively, with speed and precision, to maneuver inside AQI's networks fast enough to seriously degrade them from inside out. Below, several of these innovations are highlighted beginning with the physical layout of the headquarters.

### Open Spaces and Unrestricted Workspace

Given the JIATF's essential preconditions of cooperation and interdependence, the command center could not take the form of a standard military headquarters, divided into offices that were segmented into cubicles with little common space and security restrictions on movement. The TF 714 headquarters was its antithesis, dominated by a large open space without cubicles, compartments, or limits on movement within it. It was an unrestricted, organic workspace whose aim was to facilitate the free flow of information and ideas through collaboration and interaction. At the front was a large U-shaped set of tables where General McChrystal, his component commanders, and senior interagency representatives sat. This allowed them to communicate easily with each other as well as with all of those seated outward from them. The rest of the space was filled with a plethora of tables and chairs for all of the working level personnel assigned to the headquarters from the various interagency components of the JIATF.

General McChrystal provided the following description of the layout:

Our personnel were placed strategically throughout the space, depending on their function—those with access to real-time

information critical to ongoing operations were closer to the center of the room, those with longer term focus were on the fringes.

But they were not cordoned off from one another. Rather,

any of them could walk freely across the room for quick face-to-face interaction. And with the touch of a button on a microphone, everyone's attention could be captured simultaneously ... almost any document or issue relevant to our operations, many of them very sensitive, could be discussed and debated on the open floor.

This was an unprecedented adaptation for a military organization, but it was essential if the JIATF was to foster transparency throughout the force and with partners,

providing every component on the task force with an unobstructed, constantly up-to-date view of the rest of the organization. It was the type of transparency that those of us raised in the comfort of bureaucratic silos found uncomfortable. But it was absolutely critical to our ability to coalesce and succeed as a team of teams ... We normalized information sharing and interdependency among people [and agencies] use to the opposite.<sup>157</sup>

## **The Daily Operations and Intelligence Briefing**

A second innovation enabling the evolution of the JIATF into a networked operating system that normalized information sharing and interdependency was reflected in the protocol for conducting the daily operations and intelligence briefing (O&I). Attendance was open to everyone assigned to TF 714 headquarters, regardless of rank or position. Each session began at 4 p.m. Iraq time and ran for 90 minutes or longer. It started with up-to-the-minute details and appraisals of the raids conducted the night before and of the intelligence collected on those operations. This included a delineation of key intelligence insights deduced from those missions and what that information and knowledge contributed to furthering understanding of the makeup and inner workings of specific AQI networks.

The daily O&I also reported on and discussed missions planned for later that night. "These briefings were interactive, information sharing, and

problem solving exercises,” said Lieutenant General Sacolick, at the time commander of one of the TF 714 Army units.<sup>158</sup>

If you had something to say, you could weigh in and comment on what was being discussed that day about operations from the previous day or about different methods that were used as part of operations ... [The] organization was challengeable. To win you had to be adapting to this adapting enemy.<sup>159</sup>

### **Video Teleconference: A Vehicle for Intelligence Sharing**

The JIATF transmitted the daily O&I brief out from TF 714 headquarters by video teleconference (VTC) to 20-30 operational detachments and intelligence units affiliated with TF 714 located across Iraq.<sup>160</sup> It was also transmitted to other units of U.S. CT forces fighting elsewhere in the Levant, Maghreb, and beyond. Finally, the home headquarters in Washington, DC, and other regional posts for each of the JIATFs intelligence community partners with personnel at the TF 714 headquarters could also take part in the daily O&I brief.

To be able to do this, noted Admiral McRaven, it “was necessary to overcome a VTC architecture that was not built for this kind of undertaking and kept crashing.” The CT task force had to “make the investment to get the old technology changed out and to build a whole new network that created a 90 percent reliability on the VTC.”<sup>161</sup> As a result, the attendance grew to “7,000 almost daily ... [T]he information that was shared in the O&I was so rich, so timely, and so pertinent to the fight in Iraq and beyond, no one wanted to miss it.”<sup>162</sup> Information and knowledge learned about AQI was often highly valuable to others fighting al-Qaeda elsewhere and vice versa.

The JIATF made use of VTC technologies in other ways as well. For example, Lieutenant General Flynn stated:

cameras were placed in special rooms at the task force headquarters where intelligence exploitation teams worked examining and assessing items captured on raids only a few hours earlier. As they poured over those materials, intelligence specialists at CIA in Langley [Virginia], for example, through video links, took part in that exploitation process in real time.<sup>163</sup>

VTCs were also used to elicit help with problems TF 714 faced in Iraq, the TF 714 J2 pointed out. It might be explained in a VTC session that:

we thought we needed some help with something and we might ask NSA specialists linked in through VTC ‘do you think you guys can do this for us?’ And their answer would come back right then and there. They would answer the question right there ... In the early days they usually would say I have to go back and ask their higher officials. But as time went on they would immediately say ‘we can do that.’<sup>164</sup>

These information technologies provided “a great deal more knowledge, a great deal more information, and a great deal more speed,” a former analyst summarized. This was “the essence of the JIATF network. Connectivity made it work and having a shared understanding of the enemy and the environment and how it was changing were crucial facets of how we built an industrial strength CT capability.”<sup>165</sup>

### **Airborne Stakeouts: Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance**

Other technologies likewise made significant contributions to the effectiveness of TF 714. Of these, Lieutenant General Flynn and General McChrystal singled out ISR, which is defined as “an activity that synchronizes and integrates the planning and operation of sensors, assets, and processing, exploitation, and dissemination systems in direct support of operations.”<sup>166</sup> According to Lieutenant General Flynn, against a dispersed enemy like AQI, the ability to amass airborne ISR provided the task force with “long dwell-time [and] persistent surveillance directed against known and suspected terrorist sites or individuals.” The goal was “to apply multi-sensor observation 24/7 to achieve a greater understanding of how the enemy’s network operates by building a pattern-of-life analysis.”<sup>167</sup>

In Iraq, this resulted in hundreds of successful raids because airborne ISR provided the technical means to become “intimately familiar with a target’s habits and characteristics to the degree that they could easily recognize something unusual and in some cases even detect a visual signature of how the target walked, traveled in groups, or engaged other people.”<sup>168</sup> ISR was a tremendous force multiplier. General McChrystal recalled that, “at one point

I went to General [George] Casey [Multi-National Force–Iraq] and I said if you double the amount of ISR we have I’ll more than double the number of targets we can hit. Guaranteed! He did, and we did. We tripled the output.”<sup>159</sup>

ISR was particularly crucial in the fix phase of the F3EAD targeting process, noted Lieutenant General Sacolick, because of the intelligence it could generate.<sup>170</sup> Fixing a particular target was akin to a police stakeout. But it was much more dynamic because of all the special intelligence tools that TF 714 could bring to bear in watching and listening in on a particular AQI member or facility for an extended period of time. And, when able to do so, Faint and Harris add, the task force employed the “practice of ‘federating’ or spreading the intelligence effort [the stakeout] amongst multiple intelligence agencies.”<sup>171</sup> The reason for doing so was to enable the task force to fully exploit the intelligence collection process during the fix phase by reaching back to specific members of the intelligence community, and even particular individuals in those agencies, to engage them in the operation in real time. This would allow the CT task force to fully exploit the individual or facility under observation before proceeding to the finish stage. By reaching back and bringing these actors into the process, the fix phase could be fine-tuned to generate new knowledge, and intelligence might be gleaned on a particular part of AQI, resulting in additional targets.

### **Analytic Toolbox: Operating Inside AQI Networks**

ISR also provided important intelligence that was needed to exploit AQI’s increasing use of modern communications devices, General McChrystal added. Once under video surveillance, a target’s cell phone and computer could likewise be monitored from airborne ISR platforms through SIGINT collection [signals intelligence], revealing the identities, locations, and activities of other potentially key mid-level commanders and managers of AQI’s networks.<sup>172</sup> The JIATF also had available a close-in, on-the-ground SIGINT capability it could deploy to monitor a target’s cell phone usage. Once this intelligence was collected and processed it was fed into databases in which the JIATF employed an analytic toolbox of innovative methods to search for linkages and relationships among widely dispersed members of al-Qaeda’s networks in Iraq. Within the F3EAD process, the exploit phase involved an array of specialists at TF 714 headquarters who identified and triangulated important pieces of intelligence about AQI personnel and activities gathered

through ISR, as well as found in all of those communications devices, documents, and other materials collected by task force teams during night raids. Sometimes what they found clearly identified a new target that could be quickly fixed in time and space by all the intelligence capabilities available to the JIATF.

But when this was not the case, the intelligence was then integrated into large data management systems for deeper network exploitation using various analytic tools.<sup>173</sup> According to Admiral McRaven, “a great deal of money was allocated for these systems. Every bit of intelligence collected was coded and put into them.”<sup>174</sup> It all was digitized and made available to U.S.-based analysts at CIA, NSA, DIA, and other intelligence agencies. They received direct access to it.

Social network analysis tools and methods allowed task force specialists, as well as their counterparts in the intelligence community,

to identify and portray the details of a network’s structure. It shows how an insurgency’s networked organization behaves and how that connectivity affects its behavior. Social network analysis allowed analysts to assess a network’s design, how its member may or may not act autonomously, where the leadership resides or how it is distributed among members.<sup>175</sup>

This understanding is then placed on a network graph which lets the analyst identify more important individual actors or nodes and the connections or links between them. Based on this knowledge, “organizational-level analysis provided insights about the insurgent organization’s form, efficiency, and cohesion,” while “individual-level analysis characterizes every member of an organization and identifies ... key individuals from a large mass of data.”<sup>176</sup>

Through an examination of the nodes that connected AQI sub-networks, JIATF analysts were able to get inside its clandestine apparatus. In doing so, it could concentrate targeting on a network’s mid-level commanders and the managers of its financial units, communications and media centers, intelligence services, bomb and IED production facilities, and arms acquisition systems. They were AQI’s center of gravity, as General McChrystal explained: by degrading “the middle of the network ... you caused the network to collapse in on itself.”<sup>177</sup> Consequently, that is where TF 714 targeting eventually focused.



However, this initially was not the case, he noted. At first, “we started the war thinking ‘Mr. Big’ was the answer. And it was a great temptation to think if we can remove Mr. Big that will do it.” However, eliminating Zarqawi had little impact on AQI’s operational tempo. Against complex, decentralized, networked enemies, old theories focused on HVTs or ‘Mr. Big’ no longer were the answer, as was noted earlier. Consequently, General McChrystal refocused on “those doing the work. Those who directed operations, managed communications, those who made AQI’s networks function ... I described them as the guts of AQI. I said we will claw the guts out of AQI and it will collapse.”<sup>178</sup> To do so, this analytic toolbox played an important part.

## Detainees and Interrogation

The detention and interrogation of captured members of al-Qaeda following 9/11 generated tremendous controversy because of the use of coercive methods employed by the CIA to extract intelligence. With the release in December 2014 by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) of its “Study of the CIA’s Detention and Interrogation Program,” the controversy reached a new level of intensity. Senator Diane Feinstein, chair of the SSCI, went so far as to characterize the program as “a stain on our values and our history.”<sup>179</sup>

Interestingly, the task force approach to interrogating all those AQI members captured on raids did not rely on such coercive methods. Many of those operatives captured nightly had extensive knowledge of a particular function or aspect of the AQI network in which they were situated and that information often generated new targeting options. The challenge was to get the detainee to ‘spill the beans.’

If this was to take place, CT task force interrogators concluded, an interdependent relationship between interrogators and intelligence analysts was essential. The knowledge exploited by analysts from the intelligence collected by ISR and HUMINT, and extracted from all those devices and documents gathered up on TF 714 raids and utilized to identify the nodes and links in AQI networks was also vital to how interrogators conducted the questioning of detainees. All of this information could greatly empower the interrogator.

The goal, explained Lieutenant General Flynn, was that as an interrogator, “I wanted to know more about that guy being interrogated by me than he knew about himself. And that was our goal. In fact, that was one of our

stated goals for our interrogation officers. I want the detainee to think that I know more about him than he knows about himself.”<sup>180</sup> The master Israeli interrogator, Michael Koubi, described this as convincing detainees that “they cannot hide anything from you ... You have to learn everything about his background. You have to know about his family, his wife, his children, his friends, and his neighborhood.” With such knowledge, he concluded, “people who talk tough in public often submit in interrogation.”<sup>181</sup>

JIATF interrogators could rely on subtle and clever methods because they had information dominance over detainees. “It became this machine,” said General McChrystal. “When we started, we had, I don’t know, 10 people handling the detainees. By the time this was cranking, in this facility at our headquarters, the task force had approximately 300 personnel working in there focused on detainees.”<sup>182</sup> These included analysts, who often were part of interrogations.

This approach of integrating analysts into the interrogation process has been employed by other intelligence services operating against armed groups. Here is how a highly experienced Israeli intelligence analyst described how she interacted on a daily basis with her case officer counterparts.

[S]he could request that a specific suspect be detained for interrogation if, based on other sources, she knew he was potentially a valuable source for a critical piece of information. She could request the interrogation take place quickly, especially if the intelligence sought was perishable. She could provide a local interrogator with specific questions and detailed knowledge that he could use in interviewing the suspect.<sup>183</sup>

And she even could listen into the actual interrogation and “say to the case officer, ‘Ask him about this ...’ or ‘Get him to clarify that ...’ By being able to do so, I could get the specific details I needed to guide the police and military commanders.”<sup>184</sup>

These approaches developed by other intelligence services to integrate intelligence analysts into the interrogation process were fully employed by the task force at TF 714 headquarters. Admiral McRaven deemed that these methods were so successful that detainees became “the single best source of knowledge and information on AQI and greatly facilitated the targeting process. Amazingly, the detainees would tell you literally everything they knew about their place in the network. And you did not have to use force

to get them to do so.”<sup>185</sup> Matthew Alexander, one of those skilled task force interrogators, provides numerous illustrations of how this process worked in his book.<sup>186</sup> The end result was that intelligence gained from a detainee one night could generate one or more targets for the next night. It was yet another innovation that contributed to the transformation of TF 714 into an industrial-strength CT machine.

## Liaison Officers

The final innovation highlighted here was the use of liaison officers, or LNOs, by the TF 714 to generate trust and strengthen ties with a wide array of partner agencies and organizations that were tasked with managing different aspects of al-Qaeda’s global franchises, activities, and operations beyond Iraq. The role of LNOs was to facilitate effective working relationships with this larger U.S. Government CT network. The mission of the LNOs, General McChrystal writes, was to foster a reciprocal rapport in which each partner agency shared and benefited. “We hoped that if the liaisons we sent contributed real value to our partners’ operations, it would lay a foundation for the trusting relationships we needed to develop between the nodes of our network.”<sup>187</sup>

LNOs were necessary, the TF 714 leadership had concluded, because AQI did not exist in a vacuum. It was part of a Jihadi global apparatus of al-Qaeda associates and affiliates. Consequently, the sharing of information and knowledge was essential. The value of the intelligence the task force could provide to other parts of the U.S. Government was apparent by the attendance at the previously discussed daily O&I briefings. Individuals from across the U.S. CT network concerned with AQI’s global activities sat in each day through VTC because the information that was shared during the O&I session was so rich and timely, and often quite pertinent to the fight beyond Iraq. And the JIATF had much more to share than just what was provided in the daily briefings. All of the intelligence derived from the exploitation of the locations of night raids plus the detainee debriefings was fed into databases the JIATF shared with others working against al-Qaeda.

By assigning LNOs to facilitate the sharing of this new knowledge and information, the goal was to contribute valuable intelligence to their partners’ operations. In return, TF 714’s commander hoped they would reciprocate because “we wanted to get a better sense of how the war looked from

our partners' perspectives to enhance our understanding of the fight. We saw our piece of AQI up close and daily, but we knew that they were part of a larger, global system of finance, weapons, and ideology about which other people [and agencies] knew more than we did."<sup>188</sup>

To enable this process of reciprocal sharing, the LNOs were handpicked, according to Admiral McRaven. They were "always high performers," because each was expected to breakdown bureaucratic walls and build relationships between their assigned location and the task force. Therefore, "they had to have a proven record of exceptional success in previous assignments. Task force LNO assignments were seen as critical and you picked from among your best for those positions."<sup>189</sup> For Lieutenant General Flynn, the LNOs were "transformational." The goal was for "those liaison officers to transform the State Department's view, primarily CIA's view, the country team's view" of their relationship with the task force. The LNOs:

had to be incredibly mature, they had to become a trusted member of that country team, they spoke directly for the task force commander so they didn't work for the staff's chief of operations (G3) ... The ambassador knew if [he] needed to make sure McChrystal knows this, that the LNO would get that information to McChrystal. They didn't have to go through three layers. Most LNOs in the military have that problem. They work for some G3 ops chief ... At one time there was 84 LNOs. And they were part of the organizational construct. They had to be transformational and not transactional. LNOs of the past are transactional. Give me some information I give it back to you. Transformational means they're going to transform how you support me and how we support you. That was much different thinking and that was the idea that we wanted in all the LNOs.<sup>190</sup>

The CT task force had first transformed from a highly compartmented, semi-autonomous organization into a joint interagency task force, and then, through the LNOs, had transformed again into a globally interconnected network of U.S. Government agencies tasked with CT missions. To achieve this level of cooperation, the LNOs had to mediate and build trust and cooperation in bureaucratic environments that not infrequently were hostile to such interlopers. This was yet another innovation that augmented the TF 714's operating system, contributing to the exponential increase in operational tempo.

## 6. Leadership Evolution: Nurturing Learning, Adaptation, and Change

Organizational experts argue that in today's complex, interdependent, and fast-changing environment, leaders can no longer assume that only from the top can a crisis in operational performance be understood and turned around. Instead, today's leaders are called on to decentralize authority in order to nurture initiative by subordinates at the operating level. They must empower members of their organization through a leadership approach that nurtures collective learning, adaptation, and change. To this end, Snowden and Boone maintain that:

In the complex environment of the current business world, leaders often will be called upon to act against their instincts. They will need to know when to share power and when to wield it alone, when to look to the wisdom of the group and when to take their own counsel. A deep understanding of context, the ability to embrace complexity and paradox, and a willingness to flexibly change leadership style will be required for leaders who want to make things happen in a time of increasing uncertainty.<sup>191</sup>

What Snowden and Boone found to be true for conducting business in today's complex world was also found by the leadership of TF 714 to be equally true for the conduct of war. What this meant was that in order to increase operational tempo to overwhelm AQI, decision making had to be decentralized. Those down the chain of command had to be empowered, and the leadership of TF 714 had to learn to, in the words of Snowden and Boone, "act against their instincts."<sup>192</sup>

With the establishment of the JIATF and its maturation through the transformative steps explained above, the stage was set for a showdown with AQI. But in order to reach the operational tempo needed to prevail, yet another hurdle had to be overcome—the problem of what Lieutenant General Sacolick characterized as "blinks" in the F3EAD cycle.<sup>193</sup> A blink was a bottleneck that slowed the cycle down. The more blinks, the slower the process, the fewer the raids against AQI's network General McChrystal explained:

When we first started, those five steps were performed by different parts of our organization or different security agencies. And as a consequence, each time you passed information from one to another, it would be like a game of telephone, so that by the time information got to the end, it would be not only slow but also corrupted. We learned we had to reduce the number of steps [and time] in the process.<sup>194</sup>

To gain a better understanding of this problem, Lieutenant General Sacolick conducted a deep scrutiny of the cycle and discovered “that between each of the F3EAD elements there [could be] an unintended pause or ‘blink’ that resulted all too often in a missed opportunity to hit a target.” If you could “remove the blinks from the process,” said the commander of an Army unit of TF 714, the result would be a “dramatic increase in operational speed that the enemy could neither understand nor counter.”<sup>195</sup>

Lieutenant General Sacolick added there were different sources of blinks. Early on, many were due to a lack of trust and cultural barriers among the agencies that comprised the JIATF. Although it took time to establish interdependence and cooperation, these blinks were reduced considerably as the JIATF took root. Technology shortfalls could likewise slow down the cycle, as Admiral McRaven noted above. However, these too were reduced over time. The final source of blinks identified by Lieutenant General Sacolick was the command system. The more decisions had to be made at the top, he noted, the slower was TF 714’s operational tempo. The more traditional the command and control process, the slower the cycle moved, and the stronger AQI remained.<sup>196</sup>

To overcome this last source of blinks—bottlenecks caused by the chain of command hierarchy—would necessitate a change in the traditional approach to leadership exercised by military organizations, even special ones like TF 714. Blinks in the command and control system could be removed, but that meant empowering the rank and file by delegating authority downward. Operational decision making would have to be decentralized and pushed downward if the number of raids were to be accelerated. Waiting for General McChrystal and the senior leadership of the task force to make the call on missions would only delay TF 714’s capacity to win the fight against AQI.

Empowerment of those at the operational level of the task force was necessary to accelerate the rate at which raids were carried out, explained General

Joseph Votel, who replaced Admiral McRaven as TF 714 commander. To do so meant decentralizing authority and decision making. Within the parameters set as the task force commander, “lieutenant colonels and colonels leading raiding teams in the field had a great deal of decision making authority to select and hit targets. There were standards that had to be met, but within them they made the call.” This ran counter to the traditional conception of the military chain of command. It required that senior officers let go of authority. And, General Votel added, it meant that the task force commanding general “had to be willing to accept risks, give up control, and trust those they were empowering.”<sup>197</sup> Only in this way could the task force speed up the operational tempo from 15-20 to 300 raids a month.

To accomplish this, writes General McChrystal, traditional leadership models were turned on their heads. In those approaches,

subordinates provide information and leaders [make use of it to] disseminate commands. We reversed it. We had our leaders provide information so that their subordinates, armed with [knowledge about the] context, understanding and connectivity, could take their own entrepreneurial, empowered initiative.<sup>198</sup> This was a very different approach. Now, those “individuals and teams closest to the [fight], armed with unprecedented levels of insights derived from across the [JIATF] network, offered the best ability to decide and act decisively.”<sup>199</sup>

As a result of this transformation, task force commanders became enablers rather than “hands-on leaders whose personal competence and force of will dominated battlefields and boardrooms for generations.”<sup>200</sup> To defeat the AQI network, the JIATF chief concluded that “the temptation to lead as a chess master, controlling each move of the organization” had to be eschewed. Rather, he and his cohorts became “eyes-on, hands-off enablers”<sup>201</sup> that facilitated a milieu in which those down the chain of command took the initiative.

They did not have to look over their shoulders wondering am I doing it the way Stan McChrystal said it should be done or thought it should be done. And that opened up for people a sense of freedom which had a lot to do with this change in leadership. They are not looking over their shoulder wondering what does the old man want

done. The old man wants to win. That's it, and so a lot of them were ready to do it, to take the lead, particularly in the specialized units.<sup>202</sup>

The impact on F3EAD operational tempo was remarkable recounted General McChrystal in a *Foreign Affairs* interview:

In 2003, in many cases we'd go after someone, we might locate them and capture or kill them, and it would be weeks until we took the intelligence we learned from that and were able to turn it into another operation. Within about two years, we could turn that cycle three times in a night. We could capture someone, gain intelligence from the experience, go after someone else, and do three of those in a row; the second two involving people we didn't even know existed at the beginning of the night. In August 2004, in all of Iraq, our task force did 18 raids. And we thought that was breakneck speed. I mean, we really thought we had the pedal to the metal ... Two years later, in August 2006 we were up to 300 raids a month—ten a night. This meant [our] network now had to operate at a speed that was not even considered before, not in our wildest dreams.<sup>203</sup>

The only way this could be achieved, he added, was by changing the TF 714 command and control process. "It had to have decentralized decision-making, because you can't centralize ten raids a night. You have to understand them all, but you have to allow your subordinate elements to operate very quickly." They had to be able to "understand who or what is a target, locate it, capture or kill it, take what intelligence you can from people or equipment or documents, analyze that, and then you go back and do the cycle again, smarter."<sup>204</sup>

Finding such leaders for TF 714 took careful consideration. "You have to handpick the leaders," Admiral McRaven explained when describing how each was selected. "The fact of the matter is we handpicked them because they're the right ones to lead. And you also have to handpick those that are below because the team of teams is not just about the task force commander ... Will those leaders work well together, because that was also a key piece."<sup>205</sup>



## 7. Nonstop Learning and Adaptation

In the past, a breakdown in an organization's operational practice was resolved by making changes in SOP. Recall what Downie proposed: organizations could "either learn and change their doctrine, norms, and standard operating procedures [SOP] to act on learning or [they could] disregard that information and retain existing doctrine, norms, and standard operating procedures."<sup>206</sup> The institutional learning cycle proposed by Downie assumed that there are identifiable changes in standard operating procedures that can resolve an organization's crisis in practice. March and Levitt explained that once identified, new routines capture these learning experiences and embed them into the organization's SOPs to "guide behavior."<sup>207</sup>

The underlying assumption is that a SOP end state—a set of conditions that will produce a desired outcome, in this case a solution to performance shortfalls—can be identified. In other words, it is possible to pinpoint changes in SOPs that will resolve performance shortfalls. And once identified, learning organizations can institutionalize those changes in "organizational memory ... which can be consulted, retrieved, and utilized."<sup>208</sup> Those changes will bring efficiency and stability back to organizational practice.

However, to manage complex challenges like those that were posed by AQI, changes in SOPs may have only a momentary or short-lived applicability. This is because, as Sargut and McGrath explained, organizations managing complex challenges must be "designed to continuously adjust." Consequently, the relationships among network nodes cannot be "reduced to clear predictable interactions. It's not possible to understand complex systems in this way, because all the elements are interacting continuously and unpredictably."<sup>209</sup>

What this meant for TF 714, General McChrystal makes clear, was that there could be no rigidity in operating procedures.

You do have to have certain SOPs but they have to be understood as very fluid and flexible. And they may have to be able to change every day. There may be some SOPs that don't have to change. But each should be viewed as only good until it's no longer effective. In which case the day it doesn't work we have to look at it and decide whether that is a temporary problem or do we need to change it.<sup>210</sup>

General Votel gave two examples of SOP fluidity and adaptation. The first had to do with the standard way a raiding team entered a building, which was to bust in fast and go hard to find the AQI target. This method had been the SOP for entering a target for some time. But it was generating a great deal of public criticism by those present at target sites as extremely abusive behavior. General Votel explained that it had to be changed because of this, even though it gave up surprise. The new method adopted was to “call out the name of the target before entering to give him the opportunity to surrender.” The second was to change to daylight operations. The modus operandi of the SOF units had always been to strike at night because they owned the night. But as AQI found ways of offsetting that advantage, TF 714 went to daytime missions.<sup>211</sup>

Given that AQI frequently changed its networked shape, was composed of an interdependent, dense, and unpredictable tangle of nodes, and operated in an environment that extended across Iraq, SOP flexibility and adaptability at all levels of the task force was essential. And it had to be able to take place at the lower levels of the organization. The context in Iraq did not lend itself, explained the chief of TF 714, to the application of rigid SOPs and operational planning based on predictable outcomes. Rather, resilience and flexibility on the part of task force operating procedures was essential. To confront a protean and constantly changing enemy, SOPs had to be adaptable and changeable to be relevant. In other words, there was no SOP end state.

To make the task force comfortable with the proposition that newly adopted SOPs were subject to change due to the unpredictability of AQI was not easy, Admiral McRaven asserted. “A lot of people had trouble with that” because they “wanted clarity.”<sup>212</sup> The challenge was to take the adaptive attributes of the TF 714 members and to scale that up to instill those qualities at the broader organizational level.

## 8. Winning: The Irreducible Minimum

A situation report of U.S. prospects in Iraq as 2006 devolved from the spring into the early fall would have had the following ominous bottom line assessment: surging violence and grim prognoses. To be sure, such a forecast could have been deduced from the escalating significant acts of violence reported in the Department of Defense's *Weekly Security Incidents* summary. By September 2006 those totals had risen well above 1,400, nearly double from the previous summer.<sup>213</sup> And by the summer of 2007, significant acts of violence peaked at nearly 1,600 incidents weekly.<sup>214</sup> Enemy violence was skyrocketing, while almost every prediction of any possibility of U.S. success in Iraq was spiraling downward.<sup>215</sup>

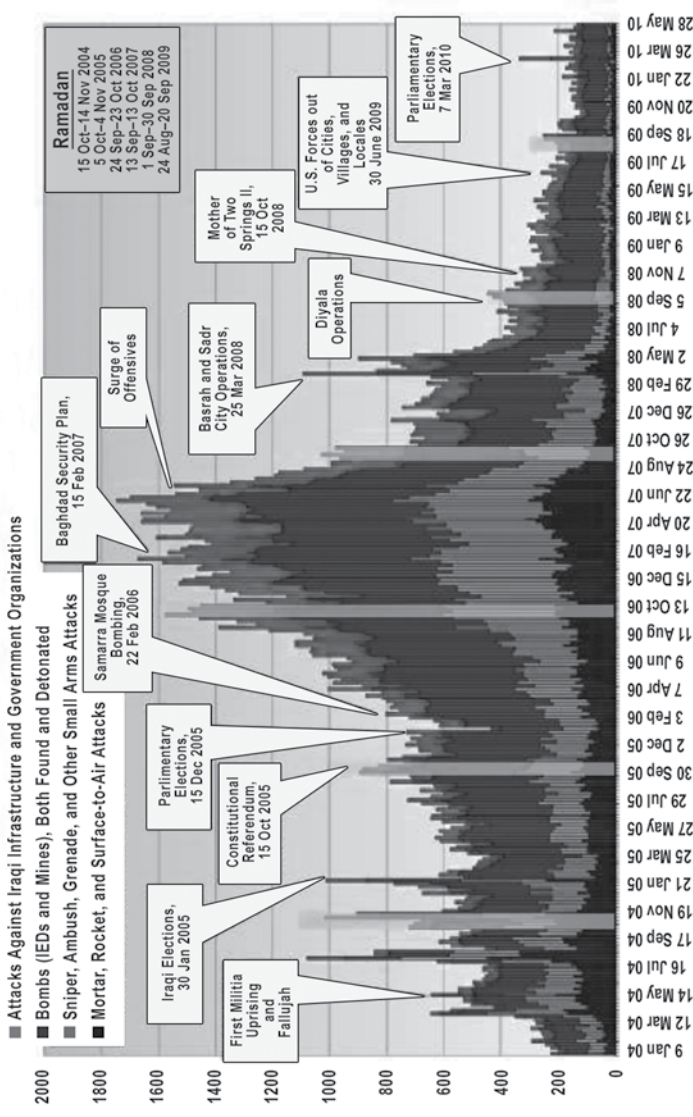
However, by fall 2009, significant acts of violence had plummeted to fewer than 200 a week. And this continued during the first part of 2010 with a weekly average of 169 security incidents.<sup>216</sup> As depicted in Figure 5, the security situation had dramatically changed.<sup>217</sup>

A number of factors contributed to this turnabout, to include: 1) the adoption of a new strategy—COIN; 2) the addition of 30,000 troops through the surge; and 3) the Awakening movement which opened the door for the remarkable growth of police and, in turn, gave the coalition forces the capacity needed to control the physical and human terrain.

The introduction of COIN began with the Marine campaign initiated in early 2006 in Anbar Province. At that time many believed Anbar was lost.<sup>218</sup> But by the end of 2006 Anbar was reaching a security tipping point. The COIN program with its interrelated elements of clearing out insurgents, holding territory through combat outposts, engaging and aligning with the sheikhs and their tribes, and building local Iraqi police units drawn from those tribes had shifted the ground in Anbar. The conditions were in place to bring about a sea of change in 2007.<sup>219</sup> And that came in the late spring when the weekly security incidents for the province dropped from 450 attacks the first week of January to roughly 150 four months later. By July it was less than 100.<sup>220</sup> And when General John Kelly took command of the Marines in Anbar in January 2008, the number was down to 50 attacks a week.<sup>221</sup>

In February 2007, General David Petraeus replaced General Casey as commander of Multi-National Force-Iraq. He initiated a similar COIN effort

# Overall Weekly Security Incident Trends January 3, 2004 – May 28, 2010



Source: USF-J5 Assessments SIGACTS III Database (U.S. and Iraqi Reports) as of June 5, 2010. Chart includes executed attacks and potential (found and cleared) attacks. As a result of the June 30, 2009 withdrawal from cities, USF-J now relies on host nation reporting as the primary data source. Current charts now show a combination of U.S. and host nation reported data. The combination of these reports causes baseline numbers to increase, making it difficult to directly compare these charts with those presented prior to June 2009.

Figure 5.

that was enabled by the addition of 30,000 surge forces and the Awakening movement. The focus initially was on the greater Baghdad region. As in Anbar, the results were the same as the violence declined precipitously by the end of 2008.

But an effective COIN strategy requires more than the “clear, hold, build” formula found in the classic COIN literature of the 1960s,<sup>222</sup> as well as in its post-9/11 counterpart, *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*.<sup>223</sup> It also necessitates the capacity to dismantle the clandestine infrastructure or secret underground apparatus of the insurgent organization. It was that subterranean networked mechanism that gave AQI the capacity to initiate, rapidly increase, and sustain insurgent operations across Iraq. The mission of the task force was to learn about the inner workings of that largely invisible ecosystem in order to dismantle it or, in the words of General McChrystal, to “claw the guts out of AQI.”<sup>224</sup>

To what extent was TF 714 able to accomplish this mission? As noted earlier, by adopting the characteristics of a learning organization, as this study has illuminated, TF 714 was able to raise its monthly operational tempo from 18 raids in August 2004 to 300 in August of 2006 and to sustain that rate forward to 2009. But how effective were those operations? To what extent were they able to “claw the guts out of AQI” so that it collapsed in upon itself?<sup>225</sup> Did they achieve General McChrystal’s goal of winning against AQI? Finally, what constituted winning in this kind of war?

To answer these questions, follow-up sessions were held with the leadership of TF 714, beginning with three former commanders—General McChrystal, Admiral McRaven, and General Votel. To each, as well as to other senior members of the CT task force, the following questions were posed:

- TF 714 sought to degrade AQI’s operational tempo: How did you know when you had done so? Could it be gauged?
- By the end of 2008, what was the assessment of AQI’s capacity to execute operations? To what extent had its operational tempo declined?
- Were you able to determine the degree to which you degraded AQI’s mid-level operational commanders and managers?
- Was the task force winning the fight against the AQI network? What did winning constitute in this kind of war?
- How do you prevent an AQI revival once you put them on their backs?

The linchpin for degrading AQI's operational capacity was to reduce its mid-level commanders and managers, those who made AQI networks run. This was what General McChrystal described as the guts of AQI. They were identifiable and vulnerable because they had to move, communicate, and make things happen. "But the way to degrade them was not," said General McChrystal, to try to identify, isolate, and focus on one key node or individual within AQI networks at a time. "That was a fool's mission trying to be so precise. It was beyond what we could have known when we initiated operations against a particular part of AQI," he noted. The alternative was to take an industrial approach and focus on the attrition of those mid-level elements as they emerged through the F3EAD process. "To hit those targets faster than they could replace them, to make them worry about our ability to constantly pummel them, and to make younger and less experienced those who replaced them."<sup>226</sup>

The goal was attrition, said Lieutenant General Sacolick. "We intended to conduct raids at a rate that they could not withstand. Through those raids we sought to disrupt, degrade, and dismantle their networks faster than they could re-establish them. Over time, we concluded, that would lead to the decline of their networks."<sup>227</sup> The results were demonstrable over time, and "we could see our impact on particular parts of their networks during a given period," explained Admiral McRaven, once TF 714 reached the 300 missions a month tempo.

We measured cycles in different operational elements such as bomb making facilities and financing elements. We might seriously degrade a bomb making unit and we could measure its decline in productivity. The same was true for other parts of their operating systems. We could also see when that unit was able to re-establish itself, and how long it would take to do so. Then we would begin hitting it extensively again, driving down its capacity.<sup>228</sup>

In sum, there were several indicators of TF 714's ability to weaken AQI's operational capacity through the attrition of its network components. But it was not a linear process explained Lieutenant General Fiel, who served in the task force during 2006-2008. Rather, to weaken AQI was understood as decreasing a components' ability to carry out attacks, to keep it on the defensive, to keep up the pressure on it over time to have a cumulative impact.

“You had to be like a machine that pounded away at it and weakened it cumulatively over time.”<sup>229</sup>

Between 2006 and 2009 the task force maintained an operational tempo of 300 raids a month against AQI’s networks in Iraq through the JIATF system described in this study. During 2008, explained Admiral McRaven:

what we saw in the intelligence being collected during our raids and from the interrogations of the many members of AQI that we captured on those raids was that a major decline was taking place in the capacity of different parts of their network to carry out operations. Our kill/capture raids were considerably driving down their operational capacity. We were able to evaluate that decline.<sup>230</sup>

In fact, added General McChrystal, as early as the late fall of 2006, the commanders of TF 714’s raiding teams began sensing the impact of their operations. They began telling him that AQI was “cracking, it was not at the same level of proficiency and its effectiveness was lessening. We can see it.” He noted that this was “counter-intuitive because at that time violence was escalating in Iraq.”<sup>231</sup> But those who were at the level to best know were seeing a subtle weakening. “What they saw and what we heard from those captured was that AQI could not control territory as they had earlier. And that the TF 714 teams were able to attack them in those areas and beat them up badly.”<sup>232</sup>

By the late spring of 2007 those same commanders were coming to the conclusion that AQI was in decline.<sup>233</sup> One year later Lieutenant General Fiel believed the indicators were stronger, signifying that “AQI had been seriously degraded.”<sup>234</sup> These indicators, pointed out General Votel, also included: “What AQI was saying about the situation in their own messaging and communications.” This reinforced what “we were learning from detainees about the impact of our targeting.”<sup>235</sup>

“Capturing or killing AQI’s mid-level managers and commanders were,” according to TF 714’s leadership, the most important targets because they “made the organization function.”<sup>236</sup> But “estimating with precision the degree to which the task force was able to degrade those mid-level operational commanders and managers was difficult.” This was because there was no “finite target set we could know about,” observed General McChrystal. That said, TF 714 did “keep a running total of the Emirs, commanders, and managers that were taken off the battlefield. And there was real attrition.”<sup>237</sup>

During the 2006-2009 timeframe the count grew considerably because the task force was gaining extensive knowledge about various parts of those networks through the methods and processes established by the JIATF. This included who the commanders and managers were of various sub-network components. Admiral McRaven observed that as this period progressed, “we were able to map out different parts of their networks, what they were involved in, who was involved, how they were linked together. With that knowledge we would be able, through raid after raid, to shatter it.”<sup>238</sup>

But by the end of 2008, after three years of what earlier in this study was described as an industrial-strength CT campaign, did TF 714 reach General McChrystal’s goal of winning the fight against AQI? And if so, what did winning constitute in this kind of war?

Among senior commanders interviewed for this study, there was a strong consensus that by the end of 2008, AQI had been seriously degraded by the CT task force operations, and this was reflected in the decline in its ability to function and carry out missions. Lieutenant General Sacolick, in asserting this was the case, employed the “continuum of effects” framework—disrupt, degrade, dismantle, and defeat. By 2009 the CT task force had disrupted AQI’s clandestine apparatus and operational timetable, putting it on the defensive. It also degraded the group’s ability to conduct larger operations, took away its freedom of movement, and disrupted a large number of AQI’s operational cells, financial units, communications and media centers, bomb and IED production facilities, and arms acquisition networks. Finally, TF 714 dismantled networks of the terrorist group to the degree that they could no longer function in a cohesive manner.<sup>239</sup> The task force had developed the capacity to operate inside those networks to break up a considerable number of them.

However, when it came to defeat and winning, Lieutenant General Sacolick proposed that in today’s irregular conflicts, a final defeat of the insurgent underground networks is illusive. This is because, he elaborated, the remaining elements of such organizations, once they have been seriously disrupted and degraded, can go into a semi-dormant stage, regroup, and then phoenix-like reappear. Consequently, once AQI was largely dismantled, it had to be kept at that stage, while the larger political and governance developments that follow a successful COIN/CT program have time to be established and take root.<sup>240</sup>



On this point, General McChrystal added that: “Winning is relative in these kinds of wars. There is no VE Day. We put AQI on its back, having badly beaten it up. But until the larger political causes of the conflict are addressed, it could reemerge.” Consequently, during this interim period which can go on for an extended period of time because post-conflict political reconciliation, development, and reconstruction do not happen overnight, AQI “had to be kept on its back.”<sup>241</sup>

In effect, after three years of industrial-strength CT, TF 714 had reached what General Raymond Odierno, the Multi-National Force commander in Iraq during this period, referred to as the “irreducible minimum.” By this, he meant that even when a COIN/CT program is able to greatly weaken and degrade a group like AQI, they will still retain a capacity to carry out periodic attacks and acts of violence.<sup>242</sup> At the operational level, said Admiral McRaven, this is winning. During 2009, the task force was “only carrying out two to three raids a night because AQI’s operational tempo was way down. And we were beginning to hand those missions off to our Iraqi CT force counterparts.”<sup>243</sup> In early 2010 those missions contributed to the killing or capturing of 26 insurgent leaders including Abu Ayyub al-Masri, AQI’s overall leader, and Abu Abdullah al-Raschid al-Baghdadi, the head of the Islamic State of Iraq.<sup>244</sup>

That said, the conclusion of those who had led TF 714 was that an effective COIN and CT program can take you only so far. COIN and CT (or counter-infrastructure) are necessary parts of the resolution of such wars, but they never are sufficient in and of themselves. This critical conclusion was stressed by the entire leadership of TF 714. What COIN and CT can achieve, each explained, is to establish the prerequisites for post-conflict political reconciliation, development, and reconstruction. For the COIN forces, the goal was to sweep the insurgents from the cities and towns in Iraq in which they were embedded and then to hold that ground after it was cleared. In Iraq, the Awakening movement was an important facilitator for holding ground once the insurgents were cleared out of a location. For TF 714 the mission was to disrupt, degrade, and dismantle AQI’s clandestine networked infrastructure or secret underground; to hit AQI’s networks every night, killing or capturing a large number of its mid-level managers and operational commanders, and undermining its operational tempo.

Once territory was held and the insurgent clandestine infrastructure disrupted and degraded to its irreducible minimum, the conditions were

established for attention to shift to the non-kinetic lines of operations and to begin the transition to post-conflict reconciliation, reconstruction, and institutional development. This was the critical juncture in all COIN/CT campaigns, and once it is reached it is not the responsibility of those COIN/CT forces. It is the beginning of the long and challenging phase of all such internal wars in which the larger indigenous political causes of the struggle have to be addressed. Moreover, a political formula has to be conceptualized for reconciliation of the warring parties, the foundations for state legitimacy established, and national reconstruction initiated.

During this extended period of mediation, reconciliation, and political development there is a role for Iraq's counterpart to TF 714, explained the former leaders of the task force. As 2009 came to an end, those counterparts were taking over the finish phase of the F3EAD process. And they were considered by the leadership of TF 714 to be operationally quite effective. But, explained Admiral McRaven, they still needed our "find, fix, exploit, and analyze" intelligence support capabilities. While Iraq's CT raiding forces were judged to be very professional by Admiral McRaven, they needed the task force to maintain a presence in Iraq during and after the draw down to help them with intelligence support and operational mentoring.<sup>245</sup> The former TF 714 commander added:

once we and our counterparts had our collective foot on AQI's throat in 2009 we had to keep it there. And we could do so through our support to our Iraqi counterparts. But we had to stay to help them. Without our find, fix, exploit and analyze support, as well as operational mentoring, they were not capable of keeping AQI down.<sup>246</sup>

This was all part of buying time and maintaining the irreducible minimum whilst the process of transition to post-conflict reconciliation, reconstruction, and institutional development took root. But that was not meant to be.

What transpired during this phase of the conflict in Iraq was just the opposite, as several accounts of the post-2009 period have documented. The transition to post-conflict reconciliation, reconstruction, and institutional development was not facilitated through the formation of a long-term strategic partnership between Washington and Baghdad. For that transition to have had a chance of succeeding, General Odierno believed according to his long serving political advisor Emma Sky, "there needed to be a political

agreement among Iraqi leaders. Otherwise the security gains the troops had fought so hard for would not be sustainable. He took every opportunity to communicate the complexities of Iraq to the new Obama administration.”<sup>247</sup> The new administration had an important role to play in helping mediate that political reconciliation process, was his persistent counsel. But, Sky observed, “the administration ... just wanted to get out of Iraq.”<sup>248</sup>

As Sky and others chronicle,<sup>249</sup> following the March 2010 national elections in Iraq, the U.S. set a course for withdrawal from Iraq which was carried out in two stages. On 31 August 2010, following the departure of the last U.S. combat brigade, President Obama declared, “the American combat mission in Iraq has ended. Operation Iraqi Freedom is over.”<sup>250</sup> This left approximately 50,000 troops in Iraq, which were serving in an advisory and assistance capacity as part of Operation New Dawn. Then, with the failure of the U.S. and Iraq to reach a Status of Forces Agreement to extend the presence of U.S. forces in this advisory and assistance role, President Obama announced the full withdrawal of troops and the formal end to the American mission in Iraq on 14 December 2011. The remaining U.S. troops left Iraq four days later.

It was during this crucial period following the March 2010 election that, explained Sky, Washington chose not to help mediate the establishment of a new Iraqi government that reflected the electoral outcome and was not dominated by sectarianism.<sup>251</sup> This was an essential starting point in the reconciliation process. But instead, the U.S. backed Nuri al-Maliki for yet another term as prime minister, even though in the national election results his was not the winning bloc with the most seats in the parliament. The U.S. looked the other way as Maliki manipulated the electoral process.

The details of why and how Washington chose to take this course of action and then in 2011 completely withdraw from Iraq during the critical period of transition from successful COIN/CT military operations to post-conflict political reconciliation is beyond the scope of this study. Likewise, the consequences of those decisions and the takeover of a part of Iraq by ISIS will not be covered here.

What this paper has established is that as a result of the transformation of TF 714, with all that entailed in terms of learning and adapting, the CT forces were able to reach that irreducible minimum and put AQI on its back. In 2009, TF 714 was poised to continue to advise and assist its Iraqi counterparts going forward to prevent a revival of AQI during the critical transition phase of political reconciliation.



## 9. Afterthoughts: The Limits of Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism

An important component of COIN campaigns is the capacity to attack, degrade, and dismantle the insurgent's clandestine infrastructure or secret underground apparatus through which it plans and executes operations. To do so, specialized organizations are needed that blend intelligence and paramilitary capabilities. TF 714 was one such outfit that was recreated in the midst of war to fight and overcome a complex networked enemy for which it was not initially prepared.

TF 714 was able to transform itself and establish an operational tempo that hit AQI's networks multiple times every night between 2006 and 2009, killing and capturing a large number of AQI's mid-level managers and operational commanders. TF 714 dismantled the networks of the terrorist group to such a degree that they could no longer function in a cohesive manner. The CT task force was able to do so because it developed the capacity to operate inside those networks to break up a considerable number of them.

In Iraq, these CT operations were an important complement and made a vital contribution to the overall success of the U.S. military's COIN campaign. While those COIN forces conducted 'clear, hold, and build' security related operations and trained the emerging Iraqi security forces, TF 714 systematically attacked and dismantled the clandestine networks of AQI, degrading them to the irreducible minimum. That is the most that can be expected of such a CT force in this kind of internal war. They can make a critical contribution to the overall COIN program which can, if successful, set the conditions for post-conflict reconciliation, reconstruction, and institutional development. ↑



## Appendix A: Acronym List

<b>AQI</b>	al-Qaeda in Iraq
<b>CIA</b>	Central Intelligence Agency
<b>COIN</b>	counterinsurgency
<b>CT</b>	counterterrorism
<b>DIA</b>	Defense Intelligence Agency
<b>F3</b>	find, fix, finish
<b>F3EAD</b>	find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, disseminate
<b>FBI</b>	Federal Bureau of Investigation
<b>HUMINT</b>	human intelligence
<b>HVT</b>	high value target
<b>IED</b>	improvised explosive device
<b>IRA</b>	Irish Republican Army
<b>JIATF</b>	joint interagency task force
<b>JOC</b>	joint operations center
<b>ISR</b>	intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance
<b>LNO</b>	liaison officer
<b>NGA</b>	National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
<b>NSA</b>	National Security Agency
<b>O&amp;I</b>	operations and intelligence
<b>SIGINT</b>	signals intelligence
<b>SOF</b>	Special Operations Forces
<b>SOP</b>	standard operating procedure

<b>SSCI</b>	Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
<b>SSR</b>	security sector reform
<b>TF 714</b>	Task Force 714
<b>USSOCOM</b>	United States Special Operations Command
<b>VTC</b>	video teleconference



## Endnotes

1. Stanley McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams: The New Rules of Engagement for an Interconnected World* (New York: Portfolio, 2015), 19.
2. Follow-up interview with General Stanley McChrystal, U.S. Army retired, Alexandria, VA, May 2015.
3. "A Conversation with Stanley McChrystal," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2013).
4. Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 92.
5. Department of Defense Report to Congress, "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq" (June 2010), accessed at: [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/June\\_9204\\_Sec\\_Def\\_signed\\_20\\_Aug\\_2010.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/June_9204_Sec_Def_signed_20_Aug_2010.pdf).
6. Follow-up interview with General McChrystal.
7. Ibid.
8. Cited in David Strachan-Morris, "The Irreducible Minimum: Al Qaeda in Iraq and the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *RUSI Journal* (August/September 2010), 32-36.
9. Follow-up interview with Admiral William McRaven, U.S. Navy retired.
10. Holloway Commission Report, led by Admiral James L. Holloway III, U.S. Navy retired, review with observations and recommendations.
11. William B. Ostlund, "Irregular Warfare: Counterterrorism Forces in Support of Counterinsurgency Operations," *The Land Warfare Papers*, No. 51 (September 2012).
12. David Tucker and Chris Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Linda Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004); Susan L. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare: Re-building U.S. Special Operations Forces* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997); and Thomas Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action: The Challenge of Unconventional Warfare* (London: Routledge Press, 1998). For a discussion of the theory underlying such forces, see chapter one of William McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Presidio Press, 1995).
13. McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 19.
14. McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 92.
15. Robert Scales, "The Quality of Command: The Wrong Way and the Right Way to Make Better Generals," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2012).
16. "A Conversation with Stanley McChrystal," *Foreign Affairs*.
17. Janine Davidson, *Lifting the Fog of Peace* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), Ch. 1. According to Davidson, organizational resistance to military

innovation is the result of formalized norms, standard operating procedures, and the routine ways that large organizations in general, and military ones in particular, function. Those practices often serve as barriers to innovation. Davidson sums up this constraint as follows: “in this model, even when actors within a military organization desire a change in strategy or doctrine, structural mechanisms ... mitigate against it.”

18. Adam Grissom, “The Future of Military Innovation Studies,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* (October 2006); John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Richard Downie, *Learning From Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); Kimberly Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation 1955-1991* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Michael McNerney, “Military Innovation During War: Paradox or Paradigm,” *Defense & Security Analysis* (June, 2005); Theo Farrell, “Figuring Out Fighting Organizations: New Organizational Analysis in Strategic Studies,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* (March 1996).
19. Interview with General McChrystal, Alexandria, VA, July 2014.
20. Ibid.
21. James March and Herbert Simon, *Organizations* (New York: Wiley, 1958), and Richard Cyert and James March, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963).
22. For two good reviews of these studies see Martin Schulz, “Organizational Learning,” in Joel A. C. Baum, ed., *Blackwell Companion To Organizations* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002); Linda Argote and Ella Miron-Spektor, “Organizational Learning: From Experience to Knowledge,” *Organizational Science* (March 2011), 1123-1137.
23. Among the major texts on the subject are ones by Chris Argyris and Peter Senge, as well as the classic studies of James March. See, for example, Argyris, *On Organizational Learning* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999); Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization*, revised edition (New York: Random House, 2006) and March, *Decisions and Organizations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) and *Organizations*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993). There also is a rich literature in the business and management professional journals.
24. David Garvin, “Building a Learning Organization,” *Harvard Business Review* (July-August 1993), 4.
25. Marlene Fiol and Marjorie Lyles, “Organizational Learning,” *Academy of Management Review* (October 1985), 803.
26. Barbara Levitt and James March, “Organizational Learning,” *Annual Review of Sociology* (1988), 319.
27. Peter Pawlowsky, “Management Science and Organizational Learning,” in M. Dierkes et al., ed., *Handbook of Organizational Learning and Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 64.

28. Schulz, "Organizational Learning," 423.
29. Pawlowsky, "Management Science and Organizational Learning," 80.
30. Chris Argyris and Donald Schon, *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978).
31. See Mark Easterby-Smith and M. Lyles, *Handbook of Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management* (London: Wiley: Chichester, 2011); Peter Pawlowsky, "The Treatment of Organizational Learning in Management Science," in Meinolf Dierkes et al., eds., *Handbook of Organizational Learning and Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62-88; and Tracy A. Jenkin, "Extending the 4I Organizational Learning Model: Information Sources, Foraging Processes and Tools," *Administrative Sciences* (No. 3, 2013, 3) 96-109.
32. Schulz, "Organizational Learning," 426.
33. Downie, *Learning From Conflict*, 34.
34. *Ibid.*, 22.
35. *Ibid.* Davidson notes that "some organizations actively promote the collection and dissemination of new information, while others rigidly adhere to standard operating procedures and ignore new information—especially if that information challenges existing paradigms and norms." Davidson, *Lifting the Fog of Peace*, 19-20.
36. Downie, *Learning From Conflict*, 34-35.
37. Schulz, "Organizational Learning," 418.
38. Such shocks may be difficult to predict because they can lie beyond the realm of what can be anticipated. Learning organizations recognize this limitation or the fallacy of what March and Simon described in their classic volume, *Organizations*, as the assumption that "all the alternatives of choice are a given" and that one has "a complete utility-ordering for all possible sets of outcomes." While this may be the case in some situations, they observe that not infrequently "this becomes problematic." Why? Because of uncertainty. James March and Herbert Simon, *Organizations*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 158-159.
39. See Nirmal Pal and Daniel Pantaleo, *The Agile Enterprise: Reinventing your Organization for Success in an On-demand World* (New York: Springer, 2005) and Emmanuel Gobillot, *The Connected Leader: Creating Agile Organizations for People, Performance and Profit* (London: Kogan, 2008). Nagl found this was true of the British army in the colonial period. It was structured "precisely to deal with the unexpected" and was "actively expected to innovate." Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 215.
40. Creating and sustaining such an organizational approach to problem solving, explain Spender and Grinyer, should be a responsibility "shared by top management and employees." They do so by nurturing a "dialectic between the organization as a whole and its parts." J.C. Spender and P.H. Grinyer, "Organizational Renewal: Top Management's Role in a Loosely Coupled System," *Human Relations* (No. 8, 1995), 913.

41. Garvin describes this as “relying on the scientific method, rather than guesswork.” Members of the organization “become more disciplined in their thinking and more attentive to details. They [learn to] continually ask, ‘How do we know that’s true,’ recognizing that close enough is not good enough if real learning is to take place. They must push beyond obvious symptoms to assess underlying causes ... Otherwise, the organization will remain a prisoner of sloppy reasoning, and learning will be stifled.” Garvin, “Building a Learning Organization,” 4.
42. In other words, the organization en masse as a body applies a method of analysis that systematically weighs contending facts and data with a view to the resolution of those differences through a process that engages all members in problem solving. See Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), part III.
43. Routines, according to M.C. Becker, “allow organizations to do four things.” They 1) provide stability of behavior; 2) foster coordination; 3) economize limited resources; and 4) bind knowledge to application. M.C. Becker, “Organizational Routines: A Review of the Literature,” *Industrial and Corporate Change* (No. 4, 2004), 662. In their classic study, March and Levitt describe routines as “rules, procedures, conventions, strategies, and technologies around which organizations are constructed and through which they operate.” Routines become accessible to organizational members and they draw on them to “guide their behavior.” Levitt and March, “Organizational Learning,” 320.
44. Organizational routines, depending on how they are structured, can be either resistant or open to change. Studies have found those resisting change do so because they are “bound by rules and customs.” Marther Feldman, “Organizational Routines as Sources of Continuous Change,” *Organizational Science* (November-December 2000), 622. Becker notes this is particularly true “in situations of pervasive uncertainty. Routines make an important contribution to actors’ ability to pick a course of action ... Empirical results support the idea that routines can indeed help actors cope with uncertainty.” Becker, “Organizational Routines: A Review of the Literature,” 657-658. Such a mechanistic commitment to routines not infrequently results in organizational misfortune because it prevents change when it is most needed. M. Kilduff, “Performance and Interaction Routines in Multinational Corporations,” *Journal of International Business Studies* (1992), 133-145; and N. Costello, *Stability and Change in High-Tech Enterprise: Organizational Practices and Routines* (London: Routledge, 2000).
45. Feldman found that implanting agency within the organization will allow those executing routines to foster change if needed. “The potential ... for ongoing change in organizational routines is intrinsic to organizational behavior,” concludes Feldman, “so long as human agents [have the flexibility to] perform them.” He notes that if this exists within an organization’s culture, it will allow for change when routines 1) do not result in the intended outcomes; 2) generate new problems that need to be solved; 3) produce new resources and therefore enable new opportunities; and 4) produce a successful outcome but reveal the need for further improvement. Feldman, “Organizational Routines as Sources

- of Continuous Change,” 622-623. See also Edwin Hutchins, “Organizing Work by Adaptation,” *Organizational Science* (No. 2, 1991), 14-39.
46. Garvin, “Building a Learning Organization,” 3.
  47. Spender explains that “collective knowledge is the most powerful strategically” because it “comprises both meaning (cognitive, affective, symbolic and cultural) and praxis (behavior, rituals, and organizational routines) ... This knowledge is both situated and embedded in the organization as a community of practice.” J.C. Spender, “Organizational Knowledge, Learning, and Memory: Three Concepts in Search of a Theory,” *Journal of Organizational Change Management* (No. 1, 1996), 73, 75.
  48. Knowledge acquisition has received considerable attention in the literature on organizational learning. Garvin notes that it can be derived from two sources: one, “the experiences and past history” of an organization itself; and two, “the experiences and best practices of others.” With respect to the former, organizations “review their successes and failures, assess them systematically, and record the lessons in a form that employees find open and accessible.” Learning organizations also recognize that “powerful insights can come from looking outside one’s immediate environment to gain new perspectives. Enlightened managers know” that others likewise “can be fertile sources of ideas and catalysts for creative thinking.” Garvin, “Building a Learning Organization,” 4-9.
  49. Spender describes such organizations as one’s “re-conceptualized as a community of practice ... The resulting model is a firm which is a dynamic self-referring system only partially responsive to managerial influence.” Leaders foster transformation of the organization’s praxis through a collective learning process that engages those at all levels of the organization. They do so by empowering, motivating, and building the trust of members of the organization through a participatory approach that embodies collective problem solving and adaptation. Spender, “Organizational Knowledge, Learning, and Memory,” 72-75.
  50. In the traditional approach, notes Senge, appraisal “is based on assumptions of people’s powerlessness, their lack of personal vision and inability to master the forces of change, deficits which can be remedied only by a few great leaders.” Juxtaposed to this traditional view, Senge and others propose a different approach to leadership. They find that organizations that are able to learn and innovate to address declining practice have senior leaders and managers who foster and institutionalize interplay and interaction between themselves and the rest of the organization’s staff. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization*, 340. See also: Peter Drucker, *Management*, revised edition (New York: Harper Collins, 2008); Douglas McGregor, *Human Side of Enterprise*, annotated edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2006); and A. Edmondson and B. Moingeon, “Learning, trust and organizational change” in M. Easterby-Smith, L. Araujo and J. Burgoyne, eds., *Organizational Learning and the Learning Organization* (London: Sage, 1999).
  51. McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, Ch. 10-12; J. Richard Hackman, *Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances* (Cambridge: Harvard Business School

- Publishing Corporation, 2002); and Morton Hanson, *Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Build Common Ground, and Reap Big Results* (Cambridge: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2009).
52. At its core, an organization's memory captures and retains the decisions it has made about changing operational praxis to solve the problems it has encountered in executing its missions. Argyris and Schon assert that "learning agents' discoveries, inventions, and evaluations must be embedded in organizational memory." Argyris and Schon, *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective*, 19.
  53. Once innovation and adaptation takes place, explains Downie, learning organizations "institutionalize those lessons in organizational memory." He characterizes this as a "prerequisite for institutional learning." Downie, *Learning From Conflict*, 23.
  54. F. A. Hayek, "The Theory of Complex Phenomena," in Michael Martin and Lee McIntyre, ed., *Readings in the Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Build Common Ground, and Reap Big Results Philosophy of Social Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994); Ben Ramalingam et al., *Exploring the Science of Complexity: Ideas and Implications for Development and Humanitarian Efforts* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2008); and John Urry, *Global Complexity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2003).
  55. Andrew Zolli and Ann Marie Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012); and Brian Walker, *Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2006).
  56. To gain access to these individuals the author drew on his long standing and close association with the special operations community. Since the mid-1980s, he has maintained a close working relationship with various elements of that community. Currently, he is a senior fellow with the U.S. Special Operations Command's Joint Special Operations University (JSOU). And this research project is being conducted under the auspices of JSOU. In addition to the U.S. Special Operations Command, the author has worked closely with other parts of the special operations community including the U.S. Army's Special Warfare Center and School (SWCS). It was with the assistance of SWCS that he conducted research that led to his book *The Secret War against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam*, which is the most comprehensive assessment of MACVSOG's campaign during the Vietnam War.
  57. See McChrystal, *My Share of the Task* for the most complete description of the evolution of TF 714. Also illuminating is his article "It Takes a Network: The New Frontline of Modern Warfare," *Foreign Policy* (March/April 2011), and "Lessons from Iraq: It Takes a Network to Defeat a Network," accessed at: <http://www.mcchrystalgroup.com/index.php/lesson-from-iraq-it-takes-a-network-to-defeat-a-network/>. See also McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*. The volume includes a great deal of information that relates directly to the questions that served as the basis for the author's interview of General McChrystal.

58. See Michael T. Flynn et al., “Employing ISR: SOF Best Practices,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* (3rd Quarter 2008) and William B. Ostlund, “Irregular Warfare: Counterterrorism Forces in Support of Counterinsurgency Operations,” *The Land Warfare Papers* (No. 51, September 2012).
59. This data, which was compiled weekly by the Department of Defense from January 2004 to April 2009 is contained in Anthony Cordesman, *The Uncertain Security Situation in Iraq: Trends in Violence, Casualties, and Iraqi Perceptions* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2010).
60. William Rosenau and Austin Long, *The Phoenix Program and Contemporary Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009), vii-viii.
61. *Ibid.*, 24.
62. Graham Turbiville, *Hunting Leadership Targets in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorist Operations* (Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2007), 74-75.
63. For an interesting discussion of what constitutes al-Qaeda’s center of gravity, see Peter Neumann, Ryan Evans, and Raffaello Pantucci, “Locating Al Qaeda’s Center of Gravity: The Role of Middle Managers,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (No. 11, 2011). The authors argue that “the ongoing debate about the structure and dynamics of al Qaeda has failed to appreciate an organization layer that is situated between the top leadership and the grass-roots. Rather than being ‘leaderless’ or ‘leader-led,’ it is the group’s middle management that holds Al Qaeda together ... that facilitates the grass-roots’ integration into the organization and provides the leadership with the global reach it needs in order to carry out its terrorist campaign. They are, in other words, the connective tissue that makes Al Qaeda work.” While not focused on Iraq, but al-Qaeda regional components, their argument parallels what TF 714 discovered in Iraq in 2004 about the need to target mid-level commanders and operators. The authors write that; “From an operational point of view, therefore, a much higher priority—both in terms of attention and resources—should be given to identifying and neutralizing the middle managers who connect the top of the organization with the bottom, and—in doing so—undermine Al Qaeda’s military strength and strategic coherence.”
64. McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 101.
65. Cited in Richard Shultz and Andrea Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias: the Warriors of Contemporary Combat* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 230.
66. Interview with Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, U.S. Army retired, Alexandria, VA, October 2014.
67. Interview with Lieutenant General Bennet Sacolick, U.S. Army, McLean, VA, September 2014.
68. Interview with a mid-level member of TF 714 who served during 2007-2009, August 2014.
69. Interview with General McChrystal.

70. Interview with Major General David Scott, U.S. Air Force retired, Tampa, FL, June 2014.
71. Interview with Lieutenant General Flynn.
72. Interview with General McChrystal.
73. Ibid.
74. Interview with Admiral McRaven.
75. Ibid.
76. Interview with General McChrystal.
77. McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 25.
78. Ibid. For a discussion of this point see chapter 2 and 208-210
79. Henri Fayol, *General and Industrial Management* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2013, reprinted).
80. Stanley McChrystal, "Lesson from Iraq: It Takes a Network to Defeat a Network," (21 June 2013), accessed at: [www.linkedin.com/pulse/20130621110027-86145090-lesson-from-iraq-it-takes-a-network-to-defeat-a-network](http://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20130621110027-86145090-lesson-from-iraq-it-takes-a-network-to-defeat-a-network).
81. Ibid.
82. This graphic is drawn from McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 129.
83. Stanley McChrystal, "It Takes a Network: The New Frontline of Modern Warfare," *Foreign Policy* (March/April 2011).
84. Evan Munsing and Christopher J. Lamb, *Joint Interagency Task Force–South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, June 2011), 1, 83.
85. Ibid., 83.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid., 83-84.
88. Ibid., 85.
89. Munsing and Lamb attribute this to: "First, interagency research suffers from the 'tragedy of the commons.' Even though it is clearly in everyone's interest to better understand the relatively few interagency successes that the national security system has produced, it is not perceived to be in any given department's or agency's interest to conduct or fund such work. Second, there is the widespread presumption ... that JIATF–South is a unique organization that cannot be easily duplicated." Ibid., 82.
90. Ibid.
91. Interview with Admiral McRaven.
92. Interview with Lieutenant General Flynn.
93. Ibid.
94. Interview with Lieutenant General Sacolick.
95. Interview with Admiral McRaven.



96. Interview with General McChrystal.
97. In the social sciences, an agent refers to an individual engaging with the structure of the social system. Human agency is about how individuals and groups can, if empowered, exercise their capacity for acting freely to question the operating procedures and processes of the larger organization of which they are a part. Individuals can take part in a range of activities in doing so. Human agency challenges the hierarchical structures of traditional organizations built on the Fayol framework. Albert Bandura describes agency as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs function as an important set of proximal determinants of human motivation, affect, and action. They operate on action through motivational, cognitive, and affective intervening processes.” Albert Bandura, “Human Agency in Social Cognitive Theory,” *American Psychologist* (September 1989), 1175. See also: Erasmus Mayr, *Understanding Human Agency* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
98. McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 202.
99. *Ibid.*, 219.
100. *Ibid.*, 209.
101. Interview with Lieutenant General Flynn.
102. *Ibid.*
103. *Ibid.*
104. Interview with a mid-level member of TF 714 who served during 2007-2009.
105. For a review of these studies see Bernard Burnes, “Complexity Theories and Organizational Change,” *International Journal of Management Reviews* (Issue 2, 2005), 73-90.
106. Gokce Sargut and Rita McGrath, “Learning to Live with Complexity,” *Harvard Business Review* (September 2011), 68.
107. *Ibid.*, 4.
108. Roberto Poli, “A Note on the Difference Between Complicated and Complex Social Systems,” *Cadmus* (11 November 2013), 142. See also: Roberto Poli, “Complexity, Acceleration, and Anticipation,” *ECO* (No. 4, 2012), 124-138.
109. David Snowden and Mary Boone, “A Leader’s Framework for Decision Making,” *Harvard Business Review* (November 2007), 2. See also: David Snowden, “Strategy in the Context of Uncertainty,” *Handbook of Business Strategy* (2005), 47-54.
110. *Ibid.*, 3.
111. Poli, “A Note on the Difference,” 142.
112. Snowden and Boone, “A Leader’s Framework for Decision Making,” 4.
113. *Ibid.*
114. Sargut and McGrath, “Learning to Live with Complexity,” 4.
115. *Ibid.*

116. Burnes, "Complexity theories and organizational change," 73-90.
117. E.K. Weick, "Emergent Change as a Universal in Organizations," in M. Beer and N. Nobria, eds., *Breaking the Code of Change* (Boston: Harvard business Review Press, 2000), 237.
118. Snowden and Boone, "A Note on the Difference Between Complicated and Complex Social Systems," 3.
119. McChrystal, "It Takes a Network: The New Frontline of Modern Warfare," 2.
120. David Knoke, "It Takes a Network: The Rise and Fall of Social Network Analysis in U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine," *Connections* (July 2013), 2.
121. Ibid.
122. Martin Muckian, "Structural Vulnerabilities of Networked Insurgencies: Adapting to the New Adversary," *Parameters* (Winter 2006-2007), 15.
123. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, RAND (2001), 1.
124. Ibid., 17.
125. David Ronfeldt, John Arquilla, Graham E. Fuller, and Melissa Fuller, *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1998), 9.
126. Interview with General McChrystal.
127. Interview with Admiral McRaven.
128. Derek Jones, *Understanding the Form, Function, and Logic of Clandestine Insurgent and Terrorist Networks: The First Step in Effective Counternetwork Operations* (MacDill AFB, FL: JSOU Press, 2012), 39.
129. Ibid., 20.
130. Michael Flynn, Rich Juergens, and Thomas Cantrell, "Employing ISR: SOF Best Practices," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (No. 3, 2008), 57.
131. Interview with Lieutenant General Flynn.
132. Garvin, "Building a Learning Organization," 4-9.
133. Roy Godson et al., "Intelligence Dominance Consistent with Rule of Law Principles," in Godson and Richard Shultz, *Adapting America's Security Paradigm and Security Agenda* (Washington, DC: National Strategy Information Center, 2011), 134.
134. Richard Shultz and Roy Godson, "Intelligence Dominance," *The Weekly Standard* (31 July 2006), 23.
135. Ibid.
136. Interview with General McChrystal.
137. McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 105.
138. Interview with Lieutenant General Flynn.
139. Interview with Admiral McRaven.
140. Ibid.

141. Interview with Lieutenant General Flynn.
142. Ibid.
143. Charles Faint and Michael Harris, "F3EAD: Ops/Intel Fusion Feeds the SOF Targeting Process," *Small Wars Journal* (31 January 2012), 1.
144. Ibid., 3.
145. Ibid., 4.
146. Ibid.
147. Pocket litter can include a variety of different materials found on a detainee during his or her capture. This can range from notes written on pieces of paper found in an individual's pockets or backpacks to various forms of identification, transportation cards, photographs, computer thumb drives, documents, and related material.
148. Interview with Lieutenant General Flynn.
149. Interview with General McChrystal. These issues cited from interviews with General McChrystal are also discussed in several places in *My Share of the Task*, 105-107, 138-140, 153-157, 199.
150. Flynn, Juergens, and Cantrell, "Employing ISR: SOF Best Practices," 55.
151. Ibid., 57.
152. Interview with Lieutenant General Flynn.
153. Interview with General McChrystal.
154. Interview with a mid-level member of TF 714 who served during 2005-2007.
155. Interview with Lieutenant General Eric Fiel, U.S. Air Force retired, Tampa, FL, 28 May 2015.
156. Follow-up interview with General McChrystal.
157. McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 163-164.
158. Interview with Lieutenant General Sacolick.
159. Interview with Major General Scott.
160. VTC or video teleconferencing is a set of information technologies that connect multiple remote physical locations together through video and audio transmissions to communicate simultaneously with one another. The technologies used for real time video conferencing include digital compression of audio and video streams.
161. Interview with Admiral McRaven.
162. McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 168.
163. McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 155-156.
164. Interview with Lieutenant General Flynn.
165. Interview with a mid-level member of TF 714 who served during 2007-2009.

166. Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (March 2013), 14, accessed at: [http://www.lawfareblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://www.lawfareblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/jp1_02.pdf).
167. Flynn, Juergens, and Cantrell, "Employing ISR: SOF Best Practices," 58-59.
168. Ibid.
169. Interview with General McChrystal.
170. Follow-up interview with Lieutenant General Sacolick.
171. Faint and Harris, "F3EADD: Ops/Intel Fusion Feeds the SOF Targeting Process," 4.
172. McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 157-158.
173. Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994); Stephen P. Borgatti, Martin G. Everett, and Jeffrey C. Johnson, *Analyzing Social Networks* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013); and Charles Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also: Brian Reed, "A Social Network Approach to Understanding an Insurgency," *Parameters* (Summer 2007).
174. Follow-up interview with Admiral McRaven.
175. FM 3-24, "Social Network Analysis and Other Analytical Tools," *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2006), B 10-13.
176. Ibid.
177. Cited in Peter Neumann, Ryan Evans, and Raffaello Pantucci, "Locating Al Qaeda's Center of Gravity: The Role of Middle Managers," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (No. 11, 2011), 825.
178. Follow-up interview with General McChrystal.
179. Mark Mazzetti, "Panel Faults CIA over Brutality and Deceit in Terrorism Interrogations," *The New York Times* (9 December 2014), 1.
180. Interview with Lieutenant General Flynn.
181. Michael Bond, "Interview: Michael Koubi, Israeli Interrogator," *New Scientist* (20 November 2004).
182. Interview with General McChrystal.
183. Shultz and Godson, "Intelligence Dominance," 25.
184. Ibid.
185. Follow-up interview by telephone with Admiral McRaven, 3 May 2015.
186. Matthew Alexander, *How to Break a Terrorist: The U.S. Interrogators Who Used Brains, not Brutality, to take Down the Deadliest Man in Iraq* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011).
187. McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 177.
188. Ibid.

189. Interview with Admiral McRaven.
190. Interview with Lieutenant General Flynn.
191. Snowden and Boone, "A Note on the Difference Between Complicated and Complex Social Systems," 6.
192. *Ibid.*, 8.
193. Interview with Lieutenant General Sacolick.
194. "Generation Kill: A Conversation with Stanley McChrystal," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April, 2013).
195. Quoted in Paul Bontrager, *Renovating Organizational Culture: Influencing your Unit's Destiny* (Washington, DC: Joint Advanced Warfighting School, Master Thesis, 2011), 59-60, accessed at: [www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a545544.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a545544.pdf).
196. Interview with Lieutenant General Sacolick.
197. Interview with General Joseph Votel, U.S. Army, Tampa, FL, 29 May 2015.
198. McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 216.
199. *Ibid.*, 219.
200. *Ibid.*, 231.
201. *Ibid.*, 232.
202. Interview with General McChrystal, 25.
203. "Generation Kill: A Conversation with Stanley McChrystal."
204. *Ibid.*
205. Interview with Admiral McRaven.
206. Downie, *Learning from Conflict*, 34.
207. Levitt and March, "Organizational Learning," 320.
208. *Ibid.*
209. Sargut and McGrath, "Learning to Live with Complexity," 5.
210. Interview with General McChrystal.
211. Interview with General Votel.
212. Interview with Admiral McRaven.
213. This total included: 1) attacks against Iraqi infrastructure and government organizations; 2) bombs (IEDs and mines), both those found and those that exploded; 3) sniper, ambush, grenade, and other small arms attacks; and 4) mortar, rocket, and surface-to-air attacks.
214. Department of Defense Report to Congress, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq* (June 2010), accessed at: [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/June\\_9204\\_Sec\\_Def\\_signed\\_20\\_Aug\\_2010.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/June_9204_Sec_Def_signed_20_Aug_2010.pdf).
215. Consider the December 2006 report of the Iraq Study Group, co-chaired by former Secretary of State James Baker and former Indiana Congressman Lee Hamilton. It painted a grim picture. "The challenges in Iraq are complex," it said. "Violence is increasing in scope and lethality ... If the situation continues to deteriorate, the

consequences could be severe.” The Report made 79 recommendations, but the key issue was security and the role of U.S. forces. With respect to that it asserted: “There is no action the American military can take that, by itself, can bring about success in Iraq.” Moreover, it proposed changing the “primary mission of U.S. forces ... to one of supporting the Iraqi army, which would take over primary responsibility for combat operations.” If the U.S. took this course of action, then “by the first quarter of 2008 ... all combat brigades ... could be out of Iraq.” This amounted to a call for a phased withdrawal and it would go forward whether or not the Iraqi government reformed. See the Iraq Study Group Report, 7, 48, 51, accessed at: [http://media.usip.org/reports/iraq\\_study\\_group\\_report.pdf](http://media.usip.org/reports/iraq_study_group_report.pdf).

216. Department of Defense Report to Congress, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, 27.
217. *Ibid.*, 30.
218. Thomas Ricks, “Situation Called Dire in West Iraq,” *Washington Post* (11 September 2006).
219. Richard Shultz, *The Marines Take Anbar: The Four Year Fight Against Al Qaeda* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012), chapter 5.
220. *Ibid.*, chapter 6.
221. *Ibid.*, 232.
222. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 1964); Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966); Richard Clutterbuck, *The Long Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966); Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1971); and John McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Press, 1966).
223. Sarah Sewall et al., *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
224. Follow-up interview with General McChrystal.
225. *Ibid.*
226. *Ibid.*
227. Follow-up interview with General Sacolick.
228. Follow-up interview with Admiral McRaven.
229. Interview with Lieutenant General Fiel.
230. Follow-up interview with Admiral McRaven.
231. Follow-up interview with General McChrystal.
232. *Ibid.*
233. *Ibid.*
234. Interview with Lieutenant General Fiel.

235. Interview with General Votel.
236. Interview with Lieutenant General Fiel.
237. Follow-up interview with General McChrystal.
238. Follow-up interview with Admiral McRaven.
239. Follow-up interview with General Sacolick.
240. Ibid.
241. Follow-up interview with General McChrystal.
242. Cited in David Strachan-Morris, "The Irreducible Minimum: Al Qaeda in Iraq and the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *RUSI Journal* (August/September 2010), 32-36.
243. Follow-up interview with Admiral McRaven.
244. Strachan-Morris, "The Irreducible Minimum," 32.
245. Follow-up interview with Admiral McRaven.
246. Ibid.
247. Emma Sky, *The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), 311.
248. Ibid., 321.
249. See Joel Rayburn, *Iraq after America: Strongmen, Sectarians, Resistance* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2014); Michael Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, From George W. Bush to Barack Obama* (New York: Vantage Books, 2012); Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Vantage Books, 2014); and Zaid Al-Ali, *The Struggle for Iraq's Future: How Corruption, Incompetence and Sectarianism Have Undermined Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).
250. For President Obama's speech, see: [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/38944049/ns/politics-white\\_house#VbOQYbVmqFg](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/38944049/ns/politics-white_house#VbOQYbVmqFg).
251. Sky, *The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq*, Chapter 18.

