

The Trend of COIN in the U.S. Army after the Gulf War: With a Central Focus on John A. Nagl in the 1990s

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After the end of the Gulf War, how did the U.S. Army position itself for Irregular Warfare? This research attempts to shed light on the U.S. Army's interest in Irregular Warfare following the Gulf War, with focus given to John A. Nagl, a central figure in counterinsurgency (COIN) studies after the Vietnam War.

The U.S. Army achieved quick military victories in Afghanistan in 2001 and in Iraq in 2003, and yet they faced the challenge of security deterioration after these victories. Later, the U.S. Army created COIN implementation guidelines, and Nagl played a leading role in this process.

In conventional research on COIN, focus has tended to be on the battle between the COIN positivists and COIN negativists within the U.S. Army since 2006. However, one important period when looking at COIN in America since the Vietnam War is the period from the end of the Gulf War to 2001. The U.S. Army in the 1990s adopted the concept of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW; or abbreviated OOTW by omitting the word "military"),¹ and therefore it is worth considering this period as a precursor to full-fledged COIN studies that began after 2006. The differences in views about MOOTW between Nagl and the military's top brass also appeared around this time.

This research takes a closer look at the differences in Nagl's opposing views of MOOTW (OOTW) compared to the U.S. Army, while shedding light on why Nagl re-visited COIN, which had lost importance following the Vietnam War. First, this research will elucidate how Nagl perceived future threats after the Gulf War and why he became interested in COIN through an examination of his problem recognition associated with MOOTW. Next, the U.S. Army's views at the time on future threats and how to combat them will be examined through its field manual, and by looking at Nagl's criticism of this, this research will examine the causes for the rift between Nagl and the U.S. Army.

¹ Operation Other Than War (OOTW) is a concept that defines various missions of the U.S. Army outside of conventional warfare, as explained in its operation manual of 1993. Headquarters, Department of the Army, *FM100-5, Operations*, June 1993. Later, however, confusion arose within the U.S. Army regarding the classification of OOTW and war, and for this reason, the term OOTW was standardized as MOOTW, the same term used in the 2001 integrated field manual. For more on this matter, see: Walter E. Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine: From the American Revolution to the War on Terror* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011) pp. 239-248. Strictly speaking, the definitions of OOTW and MOOTW differ, and so they should be used separate from one another. Despite this, the U.S. Army used OOTW and MOOTW interchangeably until 2001, and therefore this research will consider OOTW and MOOTW as if both carry nearly the same meaning.

Nagl's Problem Recognition and Interest in COIN

First, this research will present Nagl's brief personal record. Born in 1964, Nagl graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1988 and became a commissioned officer of the Armored Branch. He earned his master's degree from Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. In 1990, Nagl led a tank platoon in the 1st Cavalry Division during the Gulf War. Afterwards, he continued to serve in tank units and then decided to return to graduate school to obtain a doctorate while pursuing COIN studies. From 2003 to 2004, Nagl was involved with security operations in Iraq.

After returning from Iraq, Nagl was invited by David H. Petraeus, Commander of the Combined Arms Center, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, to join the editing team for FM3-24 Counterinsurgency, the COIN field manual for the U.S. Army. After FM3-24 was revised in 2006, Nagl became famous both inside and outside the military as a member of COINdinistas.²

However, around the time of his first commissioned officer posting, Nagl was more interested in conventional warfare, and particularly tanks, rather than COIN. His recollection from this time indicates his attachment to tanks. Also, from his appointment to retirement, Nagl wrote articles for the army's newsletter, and his articles from 1991 to 1995 covered armor and tanks.³ Why did Nagl shift his interest from conventional warfare to COIN? This is because Nagl had an interest in MOOTW.

Nagl was transferred to the 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment of 1st Armored Division in 1993 and stationed for about two years in Germany. Around this time, instability in Eastern Europe caused by the end of the Cold War led to the outbreak of civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. His battalion trained in preparation for the possibility of being dispatched to war at any time. Nagl recalled, "Despite the fact that the fight we were preparing for had numerous similarities to the war in Vietnam, we were writing the book as if for the first time."⁴

His response to this sense of discomfort can be seen in the January 1996 edition of *ARMOR*, a newsletter about military armor. Nagl jointly authored an article entitled "Training a Divisional Cavalry Squadron for Operations Other Than War" in which he cast doubt on the U.S. Army's posture that it could "accomplish national military objectives in any level of conflict," including OOTW, as long as clear intent of the commander was in place and soldiers with sufficient combat skills.⁵ Nagl believed that success in OOTW "necessitates certain changes in our training." While describing that his unit prepared an original Tactical Standard

² Thomas E Ricks, "The COINdinistas" *Foreign Policy*; Dec 2009, No. 176, p. 63.

³ For example, see: First Lieutenant John A. Nagl, *A Tale of Two Battles: Victorious in Iraq, an experienced Armor task force gets waxed at the NTC*, *ARMOR* (May-June 1992) and Captain John A. Nagl, *Why the OPFOR Wins*, *ARMOR* (March-April 1995). In addition to these, Nagl has written articles for *ARMOR* about the development of new light tanks and anti-tank combat during World War II.

⁴ John A. Nagl, *Knife Fights: A memoir of Modern War in Theory and Practice* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), p. 27.

⁵ Captain John A. Nagl and Captain Tim Huening, "Training a Divisional Cavalry Squadron for Operations Other Than War (OOTW)", *ARMOR* (January-February 1996). Nagl's unit was later dispatched to Bosnia, but Nagl was transferred before this.

Operation Procedure as a set of implementation guidelines needed for OOTW missions,⁶ Nagl concluded that “Operation Other Than War are increasingly likely to be the situations which American units face” and said:

The OOTW TACSOP and training in OOTW tasks... are ways to give our soldiers the edge they deserve so that they do not have to fight and win one hundred battles, but can subdue the enemy without fighting at all.⁷

Nagl, who at the time was the commander of Apache troop, became aware of the importance of MOOTW around 1995, and he raised concerns as a commissioned officer in the field that the U.S. Army was not paying enough attention to the execution of MOOTW.

In 1996, Nagl returned to All Souls College at Oxford University to pursue a doctorate degree, and unlike his master’s thesis, he was interested in past guerrilla warfare, from ancient times to the modern era.⁸ Nagl recalls that he focused on the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* written by Thomas E. Lawrence, an officer with the British Army who played an important role in World War I.⁹

Lawrence’s book spurred on Nagl’s interest in COIN, a military action that is part of MOOTW. Nagl then decided to conduct a comparison study on the use of COIN in the Malayan Emergency by the British in the 1950s and in the Vietnam War by the United States.¹⁰

The results of his research found that while the British Army flexibly transitioned to COIN operations from attacks on insurgents, the U.S. Army was unable to transition to COIN operations because of its unique organizational beliefs and organizational culture. Nagl believed that this was caused by a failure to learn from past mistakes. The title of Nagl’s doctoral dissertation, “*Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*,” can be traced back to Lawrence’s analogy of trying to eat soup with a knife in describing the slow nature of operations against insurgents as a nuisance.

Nagl’s focus on the Vietnam War was heavily influenced by the suggestions of his instructor Professor Robert O’Neill, who served in the Vietnam War as a commissioned officer in the Australian Army. O’Neill also researched communist guerillas during the Cold War, and in particular Vo Nguyen Giap.¹¹ O’Neill’s experience and suggestions had a large influence on Nagl’s decision to pursue studies that differed from his master’s thesis.¹² Nagl’s doctoral dissertation was published in 2002 as a book, which placed him at the center of attention both

⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

⁸ Nagl’s master’s thesis was on the military and economic relationship of Japan and the United States after World War II. Nagl, *Knife Fights*, p. 38.

⁹ Nagl, *Knife Fights*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁰ Nagl, *Knife Fights*, p. 31.

¹¹ For example, see Robert O’Neill, *General Giap – Politician and Strategist* (Westport: Praeger, 1969).

¹² See the following for Professor O’Neill’s influence on Nagl’s studies. Carter Malkasian and Daniel Marston, “Lessons for Iraq and Afghanistan”, in Daniel Marston and Tamara Leahy eds. *War, Strategy, and History: Essay in Honour of Professor Robert O’neill*, (ANU Press, 2016), pp. 242-243. Downloaded from <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1dgn5sf.20>> (accessed on May 15, 2017).

inside and outside the military as a COIN researcher.¹³ It can be said that Nagl's interest in COIN began with his experience preparing for intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina and took shape during his time at graduate school.

In this manner, the reason why Nagl held an interest in MOOTW was because of his problem recognition regarding the type of threats America would face in the future. Nagl discussed the future of warfare in his graduate thesis for the Commanding and General Staff School (CGSS), which is one of the curriculums of the United States army officer's education.

When Nagl enrolled in CGSS in 2000, he studied how the United States should prepare for future enemies under the theme "Asymmetric threats to U.S. national security to the year 2010."¹⁴ Nagl believed that states and non-state actors such as terrorists unhappy with regimes and globalization based on America's ideals of freedom and democracy would become America's enemies in the post-Cold War period. Because Nagl considered, "Few states will again give the U.S. the opportunity to use its [conventional arms] strength against their weakness when a conflict of interest erupts."¹⁵ Nagl thought that America's future enemies would likely cause threats using asymmetric means and ways differing from conventional warfare. Nagl focused on the point that even with weapons used in conventional warfare, as was the case with Vietnam, using asymmetric tactics such as guerilla warfare or terrorism could cause damage to the United States despite its vast military power. In such cases, the means available for use would spread to the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction and cyberwar, which would increase the asymmetric nature of means and cause the threat level to become even more serious.¹⁶

In this manner, Nagl insisted:

It does suggest that the U.S. carefully evaluate what it often considers to be its great strength from the perspective of an opponent unable to challenge the United States conventionally, but nonetheless determined to pay whatever price is necessary to achieve its ends.¹⁷

¹³ John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons From Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife* (Westport: Praeger, 2002). Herbert R. McMaster, who played an important role in the Gulf War and successfully stabilized Iraq's security, praised the book and referred to it prior to his dispatch to Iraq. Nagl, *Knife Fights*, p. 92. At the request of the publisher, the title of Nagl's doctoral dissertation was changed to the subheading. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁴ Nagl was not the first to come up with the term "asymmetric nature of conflict". This term was used in the concept of Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) around the 1980s. For example, see page 40 of Akira Kato, *Gendai Senso-ron Post Modern no Funso LIC* [Modern War Theory – LIC as Post Modern Conflict], Chuko Shinsho, 1993.

¹⁵ Major John A. Nagl, *Asymmetric threats to U.S. national security to the year 2010* (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Master of Military Art and Science thesis, 2001), p. 30. This thesis was selected for the highest award of the CGSS. Yet the curriculum of the CGSS focused on the "reproduction of the Gulf War." Nagl recalls that he wrote a letter to the head of the CGSS stating the need to change the curriculum to include "difficult wars such as Somalia and Bosnia," but he never received a response. Nagl, *Knife Fights*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁶ Nagl, *Asymmetric threats to U.S. national security to the year 2010*, pp. 41-45.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Nagl was concerned that pursuing enemy attacks based on conventional warfare, like in the Vietnam War, would result in the same failure being repeated when it came to addressing asymmetric threats. He recalled that at the time he believed combating insurgents who seek to disrupt order would be an urgent task facing America, instead of conventional warfare.¹⁸

Another point of deep interest garnered from this thesis is Nagl's recommendation regarding the force structure on the army based on the unique aspects of MOOTW missions. Nagl said in this monograph:

The United States Army, the proponent for OOTW doctrine, currently adheres to the policy that all combat units are fully able to perform peacekeeping missions and that there is no need to create specialized peacekeeping units. This author [Nagl] disagrees with both contentions.

This is because he thought:

It is also unreasonable to expect—as the Army currently does—these troops to perform six months peacekeeping tours and then retain combat skills to the standards expected of troops on call to fight mid-intensity conflict,

and MOOTW is simply in an ad hoc manner.¹⁹ To respond to asymmetric threats, Nagl stated the need to reconsider force structure for conventional warfare carried over from the Cold War and to create a specialized unit separate from units used for conventional warfare.²⁰

Based on the above, Nagl had come up with two visionary outlooks during the 1990s. The first outlook involved his interest in asymmetrical threats and his efforts asserting COIN as an effective means to combat these threats. Nagl examined the problems of the Vietnam War together with the fact that future threats will be asymmetric in nature, allowing him to emphasize the importance of COIN, which had not really been an area of focus after the Vietnam War. Nagl pointed out that the direct approach included to attack the enemy was deeply entrenched within the U.S. Army, and it should be noted that he re-evaluated COIN for its indirect approaches.

Second, Nagl cited the need for balance between the military's expected role and burden after observing the aspects of war in the future. Nagl pointed out that if tank units had gotten out of their vehicles to conduct patrol duty in Kosovo-Bosnia, they would be “neglecting

¹⁸ Nagl, *Knife Fights*, p. 25, 30. Also refer to Nagl, *Asymmetric threats to U.S. national security to the year 2010*, p. 30.

¹⁹ Nagl, *Asymmetric threats to U.S. national security to the year 2010*, p. 67.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64. Later, Nagl lobbied for the establishment of the Permanent Advisor Corps and a new command level with the Army Adviser Command, and Nagl came up with the format for these at this time. See below. John A. Nagl, “Let's Win the Wars We're In”, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, National Defense University Press, Issue 52, (1st Quarter, 2009), pp. 20-26. Dr. John A. Nagl, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army, Retired, “INSTITUTIONALIZING ADAPTATION It's Time for an Army Advisor Command”, *Military Review*, (September-October 2008), pp. 21-26.

their hard-won and perishable tank gunnery and maneuver skills.”²¹ In other words, if units responsible for conventional warfare are also asked to carry out MOOTW missions, Nagl was concerned that this could result in a weakening of the entire army’s combat capabilities in conventional warfare. This came before the criticism of Gian P. Gentile, who would later join the COIN dispute.²² Nagl was among the first to understand the dilemma that the mission of the U.S. Army expanded after the Gulf War even though the budget and personnel for national defense had been cut back.

Interest in MOOTW within the U.S. Army

The U.S. Army’s top brass generally did not pay close attention to COIN, despite Nagl insisting on its importance. This begs the questions: how did the U.S. Army view future threats based on changes in domestic and international environment in the 1990s and how did it attempt to respond? Various perspectives are likely needed to analyze the organizational viewpoint of the U.S. Army, but this research elected to check the details of the U.S. Army’s field manual and its field manual on operations specifically.

The U.S. Army has various field manuals defining operations and combat standards. Among these, FM100-5 Operations (below, FM100-5) serves as a keystone of the U.S. Army’s field manuals.²³ In other words, FM100-5 represents the guidelines, or doctrine, of authorized military actions at the very root of the U.S. Army, and it expresses beliefs supported by the majority within the U.S. Army.

After the Vietnam War, FM100-5 was revised three times: in 1976, 1982 and 1986. Particularly, the revised edition of 1986, which advocates for the AirLand Battle doctrine with a focus on war against the Soviet Army in Europe, was highly appraised within the U.S. Army as having been a contributing factor behind victory in the Gulf War.

However, Gordon R. Sullivan, former Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, believed that the manual needed to be revised in order to respond to the changing international environment following the collapse of the Soviet Union.²⁴ As a result, the 1993 edition of FM100-5 advocates the full dimensional operation concept that can respond to all levels of warfare, from small scale to large scale, and introduced OOTW as a new concept with focus on responding to Low Intensity Conflict. Considering this, the U.S. Army was undoubtedly attempting to respond to new changes in the environment.

Nevertheless, although it advocated the need for OOTW, such efforts by the U.S. Army

²¹ Nagl, *Asymmetric threats to U.S. national security to the year 2010*, p. 67.

²² COIN opponents cited the problem that COIN would result in a weakening in conventional warfare combat capabilities. Gian P. Gentile, “Let’s Build an Army to Win All Wars”, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, National Defense University Press, Issue 52, (1st Quarter, 2009), pp. 27-33. For a discussion about the COIN dispute and approaches of the U.S. Army, see Shigeo Kikuchi, ‘*Shuhenbu eno Sensou*’ *Shuketsu eno Bei Rikugun no Taiou – Post Vietnam to Post Iraq/Afghanistan* [The U.S. Army’s Response to the End of Peripheral Wars – Post Vietnam and Post Iraq/Afghanistan], NIDS Security Studies, Vol. 15 No. 2. February 2013, pp. 65-81.

²³ FM100-5 became FM3-0 in 2001 to maintain consistency with joint publication numbers. Nevertheless, FM3-0 occupies the same status within the operations manuals of the U.S. Army as F100-5.

²⁴ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *FM100-5, Operations*, June 1993, p. 1-1.

were not enough. The 1993 version of FM100-5 dedicated eight pages to OOTW, which was less than 5% of the total number of pages; moreover, OOTW was only mentioned in the second to last chapter and the part on COIN was limited to just a few lines of text.²⁵ A majority of FM100-5, much like the 1986 edition, was based on state against state warfare, focusing on methodology and commentary about operations during conventional warfare, such as offense, defense and retrograde operations, and logistics activities to support operations.

Although the chapter on OOTW contained the same wording as the COIN manual to follow later, the basic posture demanding victory over enemies was at its root. The manual stated, “for those operations other than war that involve our forces in direct combat, the principles of war apply,” which indicates the principles of MOOTW are simply an adaptation of the principles of war.²⁶ Although it can be said the U.S. Army understood the need for MOOTW, as Walter Kretchik commented, “the overall emphasis remained war.”²⁷

The viewpoint of emphasizing preparation for conventional warfare was seen in the definition of versatility, a new tenet for operations added to the 1993 edition of FM100-5.²⁸ Sullivan said:

We can expect to operate across the entire continuum of military operations anywhere in the world— from fighting forest fires to fighting a heavily armed enemy, from building roads to assisting refugees, from conducting counterdrug operations to conducting counterinsurgencies. Our doctrine must take into account this breadth of operations.

And Sullivan added:

Flexibility is crucial in a strategic environment that is still changing...Doctrine must be specific enough to be useful in a particular case, yet adaptable to the wide range of possible operations we face²⁹.

However, Sullivan, who recommended the revision to the manual, believed that versatility could be obtained through repeated training for conventional warfare. The thought that “maintaining the warfighting edge” is needed for considering all operations across the continuum, from large-scale war to MOOTW, focuses its main point on to fight and win the nation’s wars. Sullivan insisted,

²⁵ COIN was only touched upon in a few lines of text as one action cited in Foreign Internal Defense (FID) in Chapter 13 of FM100-5. This was the same with the 2001 version of the FM3-0 operations manual. Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine*, p. 261.

²⁶ FM100-5, 1993, p.13-2, pp. 13-3-13-4.

²⁷ Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine*, p. 227.

²⁸ Versatility is a capability required for the army to fulfill various types of missions, and as an element that should be emphasized by the army in the future, it was newly added to the tenets of AirLand Battle doctrine “leadership, agility, deep battle and synchronization” in the 1986 edition of FM100-5. Of the articles appearing in *Military review* (December 1993), refer in particular to: Frederick M. Franks Jr., *Full-Dimensional Operations: A Doctrine for an Era of Change* as well as James R. McDonough, *Versatility: The Fifth Tenet*.

²⁹ Gordon R. Sullivan, “DOCTRINE- A Guide to Future”, *Military review* (February 1992), p. 8.

Our training must retain its battle focus if we are to maintain the [warfighting] edge. As we shift away from clearly defined general defense plans, however, it becomes more difficult to focus on specific battle scenarios. This new reality places a premium on versatility. Our training must include deployment operations, responding to unanticipated contingencies and fighting in a variety of climates. We must consider the entire operational continuum—from “peacetime engagement” such as disaster relief to high-intensity war.³⁰

Ultimately, within MOOTW there was no change in the belief that “Victory is the objective, no matter the mission. Nothing short of victory is acceptable,” which is achieved through attacks on the enemy.³¹

This viewpoint of Sullivan was shared by a majority within the U.S. Army. Having persevered with reform following the defeat in the Vietnam War, and achieved victory in the Gulf War, the U.S. Army was convinced it had overcome its failures in Vietnam,³² and it believed that moving forward with preparations for conventional warfare was the right choice. As Kretchik pointed out, the belief that “warfighting meant dominating land warfare and land warfare meant dominating any MOOTW situation” was the same with the later operations manuals.³³

Nagl’s Criticism of the U.S. Army

Of course, Nagl did not completely refute the methods of conventional warfare, such as those used during the Gulf War. Rather, he viewed conventional warfare as being effective only “as long as the enemy chooses to fight the United States symmetrically.”³⁴ Nagl felt skeptical about the U.S. Army’s posture of not attempting to face asymmetric threats head on, despite the lessons learned from the Vietnam War.

Nagl’s criticism of the U.S. Army can be organized into two critiques. The first critique involves escaping from the organizational culture of the U.S. Army. Nagl defined organizational culture as “the inherent beliefs held by an organization,”³⁵ and he believed it was an important element for organizations intending to learn from past failures. The term organizational culture can be said to have a similar concept to strategic culture.³⁶

Nagl cited “central management” and “firepower-focused” as traits of the U.S. Army’s

³⁰ Gordon R. Sullivan, “A TRAINED and READY ARMY: The Way Ahead”, *Military review* (November 1991), pp. 3-4.

³¹ FM100-5, 1993, p. 2-6.

³² Colin L. Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey*, (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 149. For reference, see President George H.W. Bush, Radio Address to United States Armed Forces Stationed in the Persian Gulf Region, March 2, 1991. <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=19355>> (accessed on May 29, 2017).

³³ Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine*, p. 249.

³⁴ Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons From Malaya and Vietnam*, p. 211, note 71.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5. Quoted from James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), p. 91.

³⁶ Strategic culture is related to the argument on the way of war. Refer to the following for America’s approach to the way of war. Thomas Mahnken, *Technology and the American Way of War Since 1945*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army’s Way of War*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

organizational culture, but among these traits he emphasized the tendency that “the United States Army viewed its task as the absolute defeat on an enemy on the field of battle.”³⁷ Because of this, Nagl believed that the army relied on “massive fire power” as a means to achieve victory. The fact that the U.S. Army stated during the Vietnam War, “on the answer to insurgency: ‘Firepower’” substantiates this tendency³⁸.

In contrast to the British Army’s flexible organizational reforms, the U.S. Army was fixated on the ways of conventional warfare. After the Vietnam War, the assertions³⁹ of Harry G. Summers Jr. that the army should fight with more conventional warfare ways was supported by a majority in the U.S. Army; this was in direct contrast to the views of Andrew J. Krepinevich, who insisted on the importance of COIN.⁴⁰ The victory in the Gulf War served to further reinforce these convictions within the U.S. Army.

In response, Nagl criticized the U.S. Army’s pursuit of conventional warfare rooted in “a Jominian emphasis on defeating enemy army in the field” based on attrition warfare emphasizing firepower.⁴¹ Later, Nagl continued to consistently criticize the army’s lean toward “enemy centric” tendencies.⁴²

Another of Nagl’s criticisms was about the need for rebuilding the professional military ethics. After hearing a commissioned officer with MOOTW experience give a lecture at the United States Military Academy in which they stated “There is nothing there worth one of them dying for,”⁴³ Nagl felt a gap between the role demanded of the military by society and the posture within the military itself, and he believed there was disorder occurring in the specialized awareness of the military. During the 1990s, some army officers believed that risking their life in a MOOTW mission would not be of interest to the United States.⁴⁴ They

³⁷ Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons From Malaya and Vietnam*, pp. 49-50.

³⁸ Remarks of William C. Westmorland, Military Assistance Command Vietnam. Ibid., p. 200.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 31, note 11. For Summer’s assertions and criticisms, see Takeshi Fukuda, *Beikokuryu no Senso Hoho to Taihanran (COIN) Sakusen – Iraq Sensou-go no Beirikugun Doctrine wo Meguru Ronso to Sono Haikei* [U.S. Style Way of War and COIN Operations – Disputes about the U.S. Army Doctrine After the Iraq War and Background], Reference, November 2009, pp. 82-85.

⁴⁰ The view asserted by Summers that military rationale was not attained with politics was shared broadly within the army and in particular among those who served in Vietnam. Colin Powell is a well known example. See the following on the background to the Powell Doctrine. David Fitzgerald, *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 88-89. In contrast, Nagl believed that military operations outside of a political goal have no meaning. As a similar argument, refer to: Frederick W. Kagan, *War and Aftermath*, Dr. Lieutenant Colonel Brian M. De Toy eds. *Turning Victory Into Success: Military Operations After the Campaign* (Leavenworth: U.S. Army Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004). See also the following for a discussion on approaches to political and military relations: Naoaki Hidani, *Shinjidai no Seigun Kankei* [The New Era of Political and Military Relations], (Takashi Kawakami eds. *Atarashii Senso Toha Nanika* [New Warfare], Minerva Shobo, 2016, Chapter 5).

⁴¹ Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons From Malaya and Vietnam*, p. 192, 198. Jomini refers to Antoine-Henri, Baron Jomini, a military figure and scholar from the 19th century.

⁴² Nagl asserted that it is more important to be population centric rather than enemy centric in COIN. Nagl, “Let’s Win the Wars We’re In”, p. 21, 23.

⁴³ John A. Nagl, et al., *ARMY PROFESSIONALISM, THE MILITARY ETHIC, AND OFFICERSHIP IN THE 21st CENTURY* (U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute, 1999), p. 1. <<https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=282>> (accessed on January 17, 2017).

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

also feared that the American public would criticize the army when casualties or injuries were incurred. As a result, the army had a strong tendency to overemphasize force protection rather than execution of MOOTW missions. The trend that "...the army decided that The United States should no longer involve itself in counterinsurgency operations" was related to draft avoidance during the Vietnam War.⁴⁵

Nagl analyzed the cause at a social, military organization and individual soldier level together with Don M. Snider and others. They concluded:

Since the Gulf War, the serious mismatch between a military structure too large and resources too small, when combined with an unusually high operational tempo for MOOTW, has severely eroded the trust and commitment of individual officers and soldiers toward both the Army and the society it serves.⁴⁶

They asserted that, therefore, the value in executing MOOTW missions was not seen, and this resulted in an extreme over emphasis on force protection.

Nagl analyzed this problem as the changes surrounding the environment of the army causing intellectual disorder concerning the basic mission of the military and ethical disorder concerning the spirit of military personnel of self-sacrifice. For example, Nagl pointed out that the casualty averse attitude within the army is more evident in higher ranking commissioned officers in the army than the mindset of commissioned officers in the field or the American public.⁴⁷ Nagl and others recommended that the intellectual and ethical disorders with the military associated with these changes in environment should be resolved by the army's top brass.

Differing Views: The Essence of War

Both Nagl and the U.S. Army recognized the need to address various contingencies, including MOOTW, based on their awareness of future threats. However, the army's top brass believed that various aspects of MOOTW could be addressed using conventional warfare capabilities, whereas Nagl saw this as difficult at best. This illustrates the differing views both had on the importance of COIN. Nagl searched for the cause of these differing views by examining organizational culture, but this difference can be more accurately attributed to how both viewed war as a social phenomenon.

Nagl did not consider MOOTW to be an extension of conventional warfare. Based on the difficulty of conducting MOOTW, he considered the situation surrounding asymmetrical

⁴⁵ Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons From Malaya and Vietnam*, p. 207. Regarding this point, refer to the remarks of Tommy R. Franks who served as Commander of the U.S. Central Command during the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Donald P. Wright, et al, *A Different Kind of War*, (Combat Studies Institute Press, US Army Combined Arms Center, 2010) p. 194.

⁴⁶ Nagl, et al, *ARMY PROFESSIONALISM, THE MILITARY ETHIC, AND OFFICERSHIP IN THE 21st CENTURY*, p. 6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

threats in the Post-Cold War period as “the new old warfare of insurgency and terrorism,”⁴⁸ and he believed there was a need to understand the fact that guerrilla warfare would continue to transform under new environments.

Specifically, Nagl recognized the following three aspects. First, insurgents unsatisfied with the economic disparity and cultural erosion caused by regimes friendly to the United States would become the enemy. Second, challenging the United States will require the use of asymmetric ways and means instead of symmetric conventional warfare. Third, enemies using asymmetric ways and means cannot be defeated with conventional warfare, which requires destruction of the enemy. Because of this, Nagl insisted on the importance of COIN as a way to expand popular support of countries receiving assistance to ensure stability and promote independence by the military.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Army was aware of new threats in the Post-Cold War era but deemed that the essence of war would remain unchanged in the future as well. Because of this, it believed that the various actions in MOOTW, too, would not change from the basis of conventional warfare. This viewpoint can be confirmed from Sullivan’s assertions.

Given the changes taking place in the environment surrounding the military after the Cold War, Sullivan was concerned about the frequent occurrence of regional conflicts after the fall of the Soviet Union, the position of the military domestically, and, in particular, the contraction in budget. Therefore, he believed there was a need to respond to various types of missions in order to appeal the need for the army’s organizations. However, war is waged between humans, even if there were environmental changes domestically or internationally after the Cold War, so Sullivan thought:

The root causes of war, the nature of war, and the essence of fighting power—these are several of the immutable elements concerning war.

And he considered:

The nature of war, even in “operations other than war”—peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, or enforcement of sanctions—remains a contest of wills where one group attempts to force its will on others.⁴⁹

Sullivan’s assertion states that the human factor is more important in war than weapons and advanced technology. However, if both large-scale war and MOOTW can be simplified as a battle for exerting one’s will on the enemy, both war and MOOTW can be viewed as contiguous. In fact, in full dimensional operations, MOOTW and war are viewed as the same

⁴⁸ Nagl, *Asymmetric threats to U.S. national security to the year 2010*, p. 60.

⁴⁹ Gordon R. Sullivan, *LAND WARFARE IN THE 21st CENTURY* (U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute, Feb 1993), pp. xxvi-xxviii. <<https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=247>> (accessed on November 25, 2016).

based on the intensity of fighting.⁵⁰

Thinking of it this way results in the following two points. First, as long as preparations are made for large-scale conventional warfare, the army will be able to cope with MOOTW, too. If there is no difference in the essence of war and MOOTW, even when preparing for a large-scale war between states of the greatest intensity, an army will be able to cope with all situations of lesser intensity. In other words, this is naturally attributed to the viewpoint of “the greater [larger] also serves for the lesser [smaller].” Versatility, the new tenet of FM100-5, can be explained by Sullivan’s assertion that training based on conventional warfare is adequate.

The second point involves the fixation on attacking enemies on a battleground. If both war and MOOTW are a collision of human will, the presence of the enemy on this battleground becomes essential. As a result, the main interest of the army will only be how to eliminate or defeat the enemy. Sullivan said, “One way a nation might use its military force is to compel its adversary, sometimes by resorting to or threatening violence, to do its will.”⁵¹

The fact that at the time the U.S. Army emphasized decisive victory is indicative of this. According to the 1993 edition of FM100-5, to attain decisive victory:

The Army must maintain the capability to put overwhelming combat power on the battlefield to defeat all enemies through a total force effort. It produces forces of the highest quality, able to deploy rapidly, to fight, to sustain themselves, and to win quickly with minimum casualties.⁵²

Sullivan also emphasized:

Success on the next battlefield is seen as resulting from an ability to execute full-dimensional operations; that is, to strike simultaneously throughout the entire depth and width of the battlefield, day and night, in all types of weather -using every available tool to overwhelm and destroy an enemy quickly and with few casualties.⁵³

In this manner, the U.S. Army showed an interest in “achieving quick, decisive victory [over the enemy] on and off the battlefield anywhere in the world” and suggested that “its

⁵⁰ FM100-5, 1993, p. 2-1. This approach was carried over to full spectrum operations adopted in the subsequent operations manual.

⁵¹ Sullivan, *LAND WARFARE IN THE 21st CENTURY*, p. xiv.

⁵² FM100-5, 1993, p. 1-5. The pros and cons of the term decisive victory were debated within the School of Advanced Military Studies, an educational institution for carefully selected lieutenant colonels and lieutenant commanders of the army. For example, refer to the following: Major John M. Pemrs, *Quick Decisive Victory -Wisdom or Mirage?* School of Advanced Military Studies Monograph, Second Term AY 92-93, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

⁵³ General Gordon R. Sullivan, “From the Editor” *Military review* (December 1993). Sullivan used this term following victory in the United States invasion of Panama in 1989. FM100-5 mentions this operation in addition to the Gulf War as examples, Sullivan recalled that the invasion of Panama was “an ideal form of 21st century war.” COL John R. Dabrowski, PhD eds. *An Oral History of GENERAL GORDON R. SULLIVAN*, U.S. Army Military History Institute, pp. 177-179.

primary focus is warfighting.”⁵⁴ Clearly, this indicates the exact opposite concept of COIN during the Vietnam War.

Why did a majority of the U.S. Army, including Sullivan, consider conventional warfare and MOOTW to have the same essence? The author believes that this was because the complex social phenomenon of war was overly simplified. They viewed the essence of war as a collision between the will of people. However, this assumes a trinitarian war involving states, or in other words, government, military and population, during the time of Clausewitz, as pointed out by Martin van Creveld.⁵⁵ Conventional warfare exists on this plane, but doubts remain as to whether MOOTW really does too. This is because symmetry is in no way guaranteed during MOOTW.

Conventional warfare dictates that symmetrical states using symmetrical armies battle according to certain rules, but in MOOTW the actors, means and ways of threats are asymmetrical. Rather, in COIN, insurgents pursue asymmetry. For example, terrorists actively try to blur the lines between population and soldier. Attention is redirected to the population, which makes it possible for groups with very little military power to claim victory.

Conventional warfare is a battle between symmetrical military forces on a battlefield, with the victor able to exert their political purpose on the loser. However, the asymmetrical nature of MOOTW does not result in the symmetry of military versus military or population versus population. Therefore, attacks on enemy forces and claiming victory over the enemy’s will cannot be discussed in the same manner as conventional warfare. Victory on the battlefield does not directly correlate to victory of the war.

Given this point of symmetry, even if conventional warfare and MOOTW are viewed contiguously based on intensity of fighting, the essence of both is clearly completely different. The war of Clausewitz’s time, or conventional warfare, is simply “one of several formats of war,” as pointed out by Creveld.⁵⁶ Consequently, COIN in MOOTW should have been viewed as a separate format of war.

In this regard, it can be said that the problem is simplifying all war as having the same essence as conventional warfare and viewing this contiguously. During the restoration of security in Afghanistan and Iraq, it can also naturally be said that the U.S. Army directly faced the same result, “it is also irrelevant,” as with the Vietnam War.

⁵⁴ FM100-5, 1993, p. iv, v. The emphasis on victory on the battlefield is the same in the 1982 edition and 1986 edition of FM100-5, although the wording is different. Refer to the following: Headquarters, Department of the Army, *FM100-5, Operations*, August 1982, p. 1-1. Headquarters, Department of the Army, *FM100-5, Operations*, May 1986, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Martin van Creveld, (Supervisor of translation: Tomoyuki Ishizu) *The Transformation of War*, Hara Shobo, 2011. p. 83.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

Conclusion

Barry McCaffrey, the commanding general of the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) during the Gulf War, said:

I fear the Majors of Desert Storm for this very reason: it cemented for yet another generation of officers the concept of conventional attrition-based warfare as the ‘American way of War.’⁵⁷

However, Nagl, who experienced the same Gulf War, explored ways of war against new threats based on his own experiences and observations beginning in the 1990s.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Army was fixated on conventional war to combat threats to Europe after the Vietnam War, and then it led the victory in the Gulf War of 1991. Later, the top brass within the U.S. Army introduced MOOTW; however, they believed preparations based on conventional warfare would be adequate because such preparations continued to focus on and pursue victory on the battlefield. Frederick Kagan referred to this problem:

...he [Clausewitz] did say, ‘War is an extension of politics by other means.’ But that’s not actually the part of Clausewitz that the Army likes. In my experience and study, the part the Army likes is the one that says the way you win is to find the enemy’s army, attack it with your army, crush it decisively, and move on to the next thing. Pursue the strategy of overthrow and you will achieve whatever it is that you want to achieve.⁵⁸

The U.S. Army’s failure in security operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have laid concealed since the 1990s.

Certainly, COIN has been around since the reflection on the Vietnam War and continued to be discussed during the LIC studies of the 1980s,⁵⁹ so it was not necessarily a new concept. Nevertheless, Nagl identified the warfare of the future in the 1990s and held an interest in MOOTW, unlike the U.S. Army’s top brass who emphasized conventional warfare. This point is deserving of attention.

In 2005, Sir Rupert Smith created a stir in *The Utility of Force* in terms of future approaches to military power. Nagl, too, through the Post-Cold War issue of how to prepare for asymmetrical threats, contributed to the changing mindset towards not only the traditional role of forces, attacking enemies in conventional warfare, but also the role of security for maintaining a regime.

⁵⁷ Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons From Malaya and Vietnam*, pp. 211-212, note 72. McCaffrey praises the U.S. Army’s efforts after the Vietnam War as the reason for success in the Gulf War, but he does not mention COIN.

⁵⁸ Kagan, *War and Aftermath*, pp. 35-36.

⁵⁹ For COIN researchers and military figures within the U.S. Army in the 1990s, refer to: Conrad Crane, *CASSANDRA IN OZ Counterinsurgency and Future War* (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2016).