

**A Reevaluation of the Combined Action Program as a
Counterinsurgency Tool**

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	4
METHODOLOGY	9
COMBINED ACTION PROGRAM: HISTORY AND ESTABLISHMENT	11
COMPARING THE CAPS	14
PRIOR EXPERIENCE OF THE LOCALS	14
DURATION OF THE PROGRAM	18
STRUCTURE OF THE CAP	20
SIZE OF THE PROGRAM	22
MORALE	25
COMPARING THE INSURGENCIES	27
GEOGRAPHIC CONDITIONS	27
GOALS OF THE INSURGENCY	30
INSURGENCY TO GOVERNMENT FORCE RATIO	31
LEVEL OF STATE SUPPORT	32
INSURGENT USE OF TERRORISM	34
CONCLUSION	36
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAP	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY	40

When discussing the goal of his book *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, author David Galula stated that when it comes to counterinsurgency operations “There is clearly a need for a compass, and this work has as its only purpose to construct such an instrument, however imperfect and rudimentary it may be.”¹ Like Galula, this desire for an effective counterinsurgency “instrument” was the precise reason that the United States Marine Corps developed and implemented the Combined Action Program (CAP) during the Vietnam War and during Operation Iraqi Freedom.² In both wars, the US Marine Corps was facing a tenacious and dedicated insurgency whose members were committed to the task of expelling the forces of an outside actor (the United States). Despite the Marines’ development of doctrine during World War II and Korea, the enemy they now faced looked more like the situation they had seen years before during the “banana wars” from 1915-1935 in Central America.³ Mao Tse-tung famously stated that “the guerrillas must move among the people as a fish swims in the sea,” indicating the importance of what he called the “hope of ultimate victory”—the support of the population.⁴ In an effort to counter local support for the insurgencies in Vietnam and Iraq, the CAP intermixed local forces with US Marines into small combat units that not only fought together but also lived and worked together amongst the local population.⁵

¹ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 1964), xiii.

² The time period for the Combined Action Program during the Vietnam War for this work will be from 1966-1971. The time period for the Combined Action Program during OIF will be during the deployment of the 1st Marine Division from February-September 2004.

³ Michael E. Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoon* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 1989), 15.

⁴ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 44.

⁵ CAP is sometimes the abbreviation for the Combined Action Platoon which is a unit operating under the prescriptions of the overall Combined Action Program. For the purpose of this paper, the CAP refers to the Combined Action Program.

The outcomes of the two uses of the CAP were far from similar. Concerning Vietnam, US Marine Corps Lieutenant General Lewis Walt stated “Of all our innovations in Vietnam none was as successful, as lasting in effect, or as useful for the future as the Combined Action Program.”⁶ Although there are some opponents of his statement, the overwhelming opinion amongst Vietnam War literature is very supportive of the CAP and its achievements.⁷ On the other hand, the use of the CAP in Iraq has experienced less raving reviews. According to Colonel Phillip C. Skuta, Battalion Commander of 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division under whom one of the Combined Action Platoons was implemented, “There were tactical successes, unquestioned, well-documented. However, it was an operational and, more specifically, a strategic failure.”⁸ Additionally, author Bing West states in his book *The Strongest Tribe* “The Combined Action Platoon plan failed because the real government with a monopoly on the employment of street-level violence was the insurgents.”⁹ Although his conclusions on why the CAP failed will be challenged in this work, it is his conclusion of failure that speaks quite loudly about the outcome in Iraq. Although many of the participants in the CAP on the tactical level in Iraq would fight this claim of failure, for the purpose of this study, this is the unfortunate, but accepted conclusion.

The purpose of this paper is to determine what factors lead to the successful implementation of the CAP and to ask if this program could be used as an effective counterinsurgency tool in future conflicts. Since the CAP succeeded in Vietnam and failed in Iraq, a thorough comparison between the two uses will yield insights into the

⁶ Lewis W. Walt, *Strange War, Strange Strategy* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970), 105.

⁷ Michael Peterson is an opponent of this statement. Authors like John Nagal, Al Hemingway, and Bing West are supportive.

⁸ Colonel Phillip C. Skuta, USMC. Personal Interview. 2 October 2008.

⁹ Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe* (New York: Random House, 2008), 50.

critical characteristics of success or failure. It is the hypothesis of this paper that internal factors of the CAP are what are most influential in the Combined Action Program's outcome. If this is correct, then major differences between the characteristics of the successful Vietnam CAP and the unsuccessful Iraqi CAP will be found. In order to evaluate this hypothesis, this work will first begin by contrasting five characteristic of the CAP itself. This is based on the assumption that major differences between the Combined Action Program's characteristics would indicate that the CAP is only successful if implemented in a certain manner (size, time, structure, etc.). Additionally, this work recognizes the existence of a strong counterhypothesis in the form of factors related to the insurgency. If major differences between the Vietnam and Iraqi insurgencies are found, it would lead one to have less confidence in the hypothesis above, and that is it external factors, in fact, that are the most influential. As a result, this work will briefly compare the insurgencies of Vietnam and Iraq which will be a comparison based on the assumption that major differences between insurgency characteristics would indicate that the CAP is only applicable against certain types of insurgencies like the Viet Cong. It is recognized that major differences in both types of characteristics (insurgency and CAP) would cause the findings to be inconclusive. It is the conclusion of this study that the Combined Action Program can be a useful counterinsurgency tool for future operations against an insurgency provided that the local forces receive training before being put in a combat environment and that the duration of the program is longer than a single unit tour (6-7 month).

Review of the Literature

The literature on the Combined Action Program's use in Vietnam is extensive, yet various authors' conclusions on the successfulness of the program are not always unanimous. The results of the CAP in the 1970s have received both negative and positive evaluations with the majority of authors siding with the latter. However, when exploring the topic of future applications, the opinions become much more mixed with some writers proposing that the CAP was only useful against the Vietnamese insurgency.¹⁰ The literature on the Combined Action Program's use in Iraq, however, is very limited due to its relatively recent advent and additional security restrictions. There are, however, a few first hand accounts that offer insight into the recent operations. As the Iraq war continues and counterinsurgency remains at the forefront of many scholars' minds, further research on the CAP will inevitably be conducted. Nevertheless, an extensive look at previous literature on both wars is invaluable when gathering support and data for this project.

The idea of first analyzing an insurgency before developing any counterinsurgency tools can be found extensively in David Galula's book, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. The author describes how knowledge of key characteristics about geography, the causes, goals, and tactics of the insurgency can be invaluable when formulating a counterinsurgency strategy. By looking at the Vietnamese and Iraqi insurgencies' characteristics, the goals and structure of the CAP can be adjusted to counter these features.¹¹

Further exploration of insurgent characteristics can be seen in the RAND study "War by Other Means." In the section entitled "Eighty-Nine Insurgencies: Outcomes and

¹⁰ Michael E. Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoon: The US Marines' Other War in Vietnam* (Westport, CI: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 125. An example of this view.

¹¹ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*

Endings,” author Martin C. Libicki first classifies 89 insurgencies by their result (government wins, insurgents win, ongoing). From here, the author delves into several major characteristics of the insurgencies like size, goal, organization, structure, etc. His conclusions support the idea that those insurgencies that are successful possess many of the same characteristics.¹² The characteristics that are explored and the manner by which he classifies each characteristic will be used extensively in this paper and will be discussed further under the methodology section.

One of the best books on the Combined Action Program is Michael E. Peterson’s *The Combined Action Platoons: The US Marines’ Other War in Vietnam*. This book includes chapters on the history, structure, and operations of the CAP during the 1970s. Additionally, this work offers a great analysis on the future use of the CAP in which the author advises against this course of action stating “the CAPs originated in the Vietnam war and were unique to that war.”¹³

As mentioned previously, one of the controversies surrounding the use of the CAP in Vietnam is whether or not it was actually successful at counterinsurgency operations. Some critics of the program argue that despite high reenlistment rates and territory retention, that any success of the CAP was linked to its inactive location or superior leadership. Opponents of the CAP argue that without a hard charging Non Commissioned Officer (NCO) in some cases, the CAP would have fallen apart. The majority of this argument is, of course, speculative, but it is at the heart of Major Brooks R. Brewington’s article “Combined Action Platoons: A Strategy for Peace Enforcement.”

¹² David C. Gompert and John Gordon IV. *War by Other Means* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2008).

¹³ Michael E. Peterson. *The Combined Action Platoon: The US Marines’ Other War in Vietnam* (Westport, CI: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 125.

Despite Brewington's position that the extent of the success of the CAP in Vietnam was only a result of its inactive location or strong NCO leadership and not the overall effectiveness of the program, itself, he is a strong proponent of the program for the future.¹⁴

John A. Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* examines the reasons behind the only limited success of the CAP in Vietnam. Although maintaining that areas in which the CAP was deployed were highly successful, the author cites Westmoreland's "search and destroy" mentality as the force that fought against the CAP expansion. The author goes on to suggest that if the CAP program had been instituted earlier in the war, then perhaps the war would have ended differently. The author quotes US Marine Corps Major General John Grinalds stating "There was too little CAP, too late."¹⁵

A final Vietnam-focused resource which provides the reader with a look into the decision-making process behind the implementation of the first CAP is Lewis Walt's *Strange War, Strange Strategy*. Lieutenant General Walt was the Commander of the III Marine Amphibious Force in I Corps. It was under his command that the idea to integrate the traditional marine rifle squads into the Vietnamese Regional Forces platoons occurred and thus, the CAP was born. In his book, Lieutenant General Walt discusses the situation and decision-making process surrounding the implementation of the CAP. Additionally, he offers his analysis of the success and supports the future use of the CAP.¹⁶

¹⁴ Brooks R. Brewington "Combined Action Platoons: A Strategy for Peace Enforcement." Command and Staff College 1996 <<http://www.stormingmedia.us/75/7512/A751284.html>> (26 Sept 2008).

¹⁵ John A. Nagal. Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 158.

¹⁶ Lewis W. Walt, Strange War, Strange Strategy

Although Iraqi CAP resources are limited, Jason Goodale and Jon Webre's article "The Combined Action Platoon in Iraq" and Phillip Skuta's article "Introduction to 2/7 CAP Platoon Actions in Iraq," both published in *The Marine Corps Gazette*, offer first hand accounts of the actions and missions of the CAP in Iraq in 2004.¹⁷ Goodale and Webre's article outlines the implementation of the CAP in Iraq and offers a short analysis on what they feel was a successful CAP.¹⁸ Interviews with authors of both articles have yielded invaluable insights and analysis into the situation in Iraq.

An interesting article entitled "The Combined Action Platoon--Seeds of Success in Iraq" by Capt. Matthew Danner, USMC, first begins by analyzing the theory and current US strategy towards counterinsurgency. Next, Capt. Danner, being the leader of the 3rd Battalion, 4th Regiment, 1st Division's CAP, offers insight into his experiences in the Iraqi town of Haditha. He concludes with a section of his paper citing personality, location, actions, and command integration as keys to employment.¹⁹

The Strongest Tribe by Bing West is a very insightful account of the US strategy in Iraq from the beginning of the war until early 2008. The author, a veteran of a CAP in Vietnam, offers key observations on the overall failure of the CAP in Iraq.²⁰ Email correspondence with the author has revealed that the CAP is based off of the idea that the locals want to be protected by the US forces. Bing West has stated that since al-Qaeda was so entrenched in Iraqi society in 2004 and 2005, the CAP requirement of local desire to be protected was nonexistent. As a result, the CAP program ultimately failed.

¹⁷ Phillip C. Skuta, "Introduction to 2/7 CAP Platoon Actions in Iraq," *Marine Corps Gazette* 89, no. 4.

¹⁸ Jason Goodale and Jon Webre. "The Combined Action Platoon in Iraq," *Marine Corps Gazette* 89, no. 4.

¹⁹ Matthew Danner, "The Combined Action Platoon Seeds of Success in Iraq." *American Veterans*, n.d. <http://www.americans-working-together.com/american_veterans/id16.html> (26 Sept 2008).

²⁰ Bing West. *The Strongest Tribe* (New York: Random House, 2008), 50.

Although Pirnie and O’Connell’s study *Counterinsurgency in Iraq (2003-2006)* does not offer any insight into the CAP in Iraq, it does offer superior accounts of the history of the war and the situation at the time of the CAP implementation. Pirnie and O’Connell outline the main causes of the war in Iraq and the overarching goals of the US government. Additionally, the authors describe each of the armed groups operating in Iraq. Finally, the authors conclude with recommendations on building more effective counterinsurgency capabilities.²¹

Finally, one reference which provides important insights into the US military’s opinion towards the execution and use of the CAP is *The US Army and US Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. This publication dedicates an entire subchapter to the situation in which this program should be implemented, the goals that should be pursued using this program, the factors which can contribute to success, the structure in which the program should be deployed, and the missions that should be conducted using the CAP.²²

As one can see by the references listed above, there are numerous works describing almost every aspect of the CAP. One area where there seems to be a gap in literature is in answering the question of why the CAP program succeeded in Vietnam but not in Iraq. Although some authors, such as Bing West, have briefly weighed in on why the Iraqi CAP failed, there seems to be a lack of literature on how the situation in Iraq was different than the situation in Vietnam. In a sense, no one has approach the CAP topic to determine which factors (the characteristics of the insurgency, the size of the

²¹ Bruce R. Pirnie and Edward O’Connell. *Counterinsurgency in Iraq (2003-2006)* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2008).

²² US Army and US Marine Corps. *Counterinsurgency Field Manuel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

CAP program, the time of implementation, etc.) impact the success or failure of the CAP. This paper seeks to fill this gap.

Methodology

Before outlining the method by which this study was conducted, one must first outline some specific definitions. Firstly, the term “failure” in terms of the CAP refers to the phenomenon whereby CAP units, although they may have experienced some tactical battlefield successes, were unable to strategically alter the war and were eventually replaced in favor of other tactics. By contrast, “successful” CAP units were ones that fulfilled their assigned missions as well as assisted in achieving strategic goals at the divisional level. Both parts of this definition are key because as one will see in this paper, some CAPs in Iraq achieved the first part, yet are still considered failures because of their lack of strategic impact and eventual replacement by other tactics. For this work, the CAP in Iraq refers to the program established by the 1st Marine Division. This does not include any of the replacement programs like Military Transition Teams (MiTTs).

This study first begins by outlining the history and development of the Combined Action Program’s use in Vietnam and Iraq. This is done through extensive surveying of primary sources like the Standard Operating Procedures of the CAP in Vietnam and secondary sources like those mentioned above in the literature analysis. It is important to first examine the history of the program in order to fully understand the purpose and mission behind its use and implementation.

The next section of this paper compares and contrasts the characteristics of the two uses of the CAP. This section, due to security restrictions on much of the Iraqi information as well as its relatively new expiration, is done primarily through personal

interviews and individual memoirs. The interviews include veterans from both Vietnam and Iraq, and incorporate the views of both officers and enlisted Marines. In addition, the interview subjects spanned all levels of military analysis from small unit leadership at the tactical level to operational and strategic leadership at the battalion level. It must be stated that the author has no military experience in this field, and thus, this paper is based solely on the observations and accounts of others. The CAP will be compared on five separate characteristics ranging from size and structure, to morale and experience of the locals. Although some degree of reservation is always present when making conclusions based off a small number of cases, this paper will look at the dozens of different CAPs in Vietnam and at least two of the CAPs from Iraq. This section of the paper will be most contributive to CAP literature for it almost entirely primary and new information.

The final section of this study focuses on the comparison and contrasting of the two insurgencies facing the CAP in Vietnam and Iraq. This is done exclusively using the data and characterization of Martin C. Libicki's study "Eighty-Nine Insurgencies: Outcomes and Endings," guidance from counterinsurgency expert Seth Jones, and David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. In his study, Libicki looks at several characteristics which may affect the success or failure of an insurgency. Examples of these characteristics can include insurgent goals, force size, insurgent competence, insurgent popularity, insurgency structure, use of terror, outside support, etc. Within the analysis of each characteristic the study classifies each insurgency in one of the 4-5 options. For example, when looking at the characteristic of insurgent goals the study gives the following options: secession, overthrow, Marxist, Islamist, and independence-seeking. Although Libicki looks at over a dozen characteristics, due to

page constraints, this study will look at five of the most important characteristics suggested by authors such as David Galula and Mao Tse-tung. Additionally, this paper will use the same classification method within each characteristic that Libicki's study follows in order to compare the two insurgencies.

Combined Action Program: History and Establishment

From its establishment during the Revolutionary War, the United States Marine Corps has had to fight for its survival not simply against the enemy but against budget cuts prescribed by the United States government. Countless times throughout its existence, the Marine Corps has been faced with extinction, replacement, or absorption into the Army. However, as General Krulak states in his book *First to Fight* "Viewed more philosophically, it may be said that the unending struggle for survival has done much to strengthen the Marines' character."²³ Two virtues which have been established in the Corps as a result of constant budget cut threats are that of ingenuity and frugality. Archibald Henderson, one of the most famous Commandants in the history of the Marine Corps, prided himself on the fact that the Corps often has the smallest budget yet still achieved the same or more than the other services. This "fighting on the cheap" was possible through Marine ingenuity and the ability for Marines to solve a problem even if they did not have the materials to do so.²⁴ It would be out of this ingenuity during a time that an increased number of troops was desperately needed in Vietnam that the CAP was born.

When the Marines landed in South Vietnam, their immediate responsibility consisted of the three enclaves of Phu Bai, Da Nang, and Chu Lai. The total area of

²³ Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), 15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 141-143.

responsibility (AOR) of the Marine forces consisted of the provinces of Quang Tri, Thua Thein, Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai (collectively referred to as the I Corps).²⁵ This I Corps area was directed by Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force, Lieutenant General Lewis Walt, United States Marine Corps. The idea of the CAP originated from Lt. Col. William W. Taylor's 3rd Battalion of the 4th Marine Regiment of the 3rd Marine Division. He was responsible for a main air base in Phu Bai, the Northernmost section of the I Corps area.²⁶ Taylor's tactical area of responsibility (TAOR) continued to grow to a size of 10 square miles which made it very difficult for his three rifle companies to defend.²⁷ As a result, the battalion staff began to worry about the vulnerability of the area to attacks from the nearby villages.²⁸ As their request for more troops was denied, the battalion searched for a way to bolster their defensive posture. The answer came from Capt. John J. Mullen, Jr., a 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines civil affairs officer who proposed the use of the local militia platoons similar to the way they were used in Haiti, Nicaragua, and Santo Domingo during the "banana wars" from 1915-1935.²⁹ The plans were laid out by the 3rd Battalion's chain of command and in August 1965, Lt. Col. Taylor integrated four Marine rifle squads with six local militia platoons. This first of these combined units was commanded by 1st Lieutenant Paul R. Elk whose fluency in the language and extensive knowledge of counter-guerrilla warfare made him the perfect candidate. 1st Lieutenant Elk's unit's success in the Phu Bai province demonstrated that if the Marines provided the militia

²⁵ Lewis W. Walt, *Strange War, Strange Strategy*, 1.

²⁶ Michael E. Peterson. *The Combined Action Platoon: The US Marines' Other War in Vietnam*, 23.

²⁷ Keith F. Kopets "The Combined Action Program: Vietnam." *Small Wars Journal*. 2005. <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/kopets.htm>> (26 Sept 2008).

²⁸ Michael E. Peterson. *The Combined Action Platoon: The US Marines' Other War in Vietnam*, 23.

²⁹ Al Hemingway, *Our War was Different* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 3.

with leadership and direction while the militia provided the Marines with knowledge of the local terrain and enemy, then they could combine to form an effective fighting force. Lieutenant General Lewis Walt saw the success of Elk's unit and, as a result, expanded the program to the Da Nang and Chu Lai areas.³⁰

The establishment of the CAP in Iraq has received far less documentation than its counterpart in Vietnam due mostly to the security constraints and the inability to interview such top decision-makers as General James N. Mattis, the 1st Marine Division Commander during Iraqi CAP implementation. However, the relative success of the CAP's use in Vietnam inevitably made an impact on its employment against the Iraqi insurgency. The CAP in Iraq was established as a direct order of 1st Division Commander General Mattis in early 2004. He required that every battalion within his division have a CAP-capable platoon able to stand up once they were established in country. Where General Mattis got the idea to establish the CAP is purely speculative without talking to him directly; however, many of the Marines who were involved in the CAP cite General Mattis's high respect for author and Vietnamese CAP platoon commander Bing West as a possible source of influence.³¹ Through interviews, this paper has found that CAPs were implemented in Iraq under the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines in the city of Hit and under 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines in the city of Haditha. Further implementation of CAP by other battalions within the 1st Marine Division is not found in unclassified documents and is unknown to those participants in the two CAPs mentioned above.³²

³⁰ Keith F. Kopets "The Combined Action Program: Vietnam."

³¹ Jason Goodale. Personal Interview. 2 October 2008.

³² Matthew Danner, "The Combined Action Platoon Seeds of Success in Iraq."

Comparing the CAPs

The CAP is a program that proved successful in Vietnam, and may be used in the future. But before CAP is used again, it is important to understand why the CAP failed in Iraq. This paper believes that the differences in outcome stem not from differences in the insurgencies but from differences in how the two CAPs were deployed. Once these differences are found, the isolated factors can be adjusted so that success will be more likely in any future deployment. This study will be looking at five specific factors including: prior experience of the locals, duration of the program, structure of the CAP, size of the CAP, and morale. This study hopes to find the factors that affect the success or failure of the CAP so that changes can be made to the Iraqi model.

Prior Experience of the Locals

From its inception, the CAP was intended to create a unit by which combat-oriented missions could be conducted by joint forces. The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in Vietnam states: “The mission of the Marine element of the Combined Action Program is to support Popular Force Platoons, through integrated operations, in carrying out the Popular Force missions and to train the Popular Force soldier so that they can carry out their missions unaided.”³³ The same was true in the case of the Iraqi CAP. Although there was no official SOP passed down to the CAP commanders in Iraq, they were expected by their battalion officer to establish a CAP by which joint coordinated missions could be conducted and eventual turnover to the local forces could occur.³⁴ In Vietnam, the first part of the mission set forth before them was achieved in relatively

³³ United States. Marine Corps. Force Order 3121.4B: Standing Operating Procedure for the Combined Action Program. III Marine Amphibious Force Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. 22 June 1968. Marine Corps University Library Archives.

³⁴ Jason Goodale. Personal Interview. 2 October 2008.

little time. The first joint action platoon was established on 1 August, 1965, and by 29 November 1965 they had seen major combat with the Viet Cong.³⁵ This was due, in part, to the previous training of the Vietnamese militia called the Popular Force (PF). Often, the PFs attended regional boot camps which provided them with basic military training.³⁶ Although they lacked any tactical skills, their prior experiences had provided them with some basic military skills like weapons familiarization.³⁷ These basic skills allowed for the performance of CAP patrols and battles with the VC soon after the CAPs were established in a given hamlet or village. Further training with the PFs, which was done on a daily to weekly basis, allowed the Marines to learn terrain familiarity and VC tactics from the PFs, while the PFs would learn things like radio procedures and detection of booby-traps from the Marines.³⁸ However, this type of training was not required in order to conduct patrols, and thus combat with the Viet Cong occurred regularly. Although the mission of the CAP in Vietnam required eventual turnover to the PFs, the Marines' "oft-stated goal of working themselves out of job" rarely occurred--the best example was that of Lima 6 in Binh Nghia in 1967.³⁹ Despite this fact, the CAP was considered largely successful because it could often quiet local hot spots and hold large areas. A veteran CAP member in Vietnam, Fred Caleffie, stated:

New CAPs were normally established in areas that needed security or where VC controlled areas. You were more than likely to have heavy enemy contact until they realized you were there to stay. After you established a rapport with the local village, gather intel and demonstrate to them you were there to protect them, things normally got easier. The enemy either started skirting the area or left all together.⁴⁰

³⁵ Michael E. Peterson. The Combined Action Platoon: The US Marines' Other War in Vietnam, 24-25.

³⁶ Fred Caleffie. Personal Interview. 11 October 2008.

³⁷ Charlie McMahon. Personal Interview. 12 October 2008.

³⁸ Fred Caleffie. Personal Interview. 11 October 2008.

³⁹ Michael E. Peterson. The Combined Action Platoon: The US Marines' Other War in Vietnam, 34.

⁴⁰ Fred Caleffie. Personal Interview. 11 October 2008.

This success was, in part, due to the fact that the Marines did not have to set up an extensive training program before conducting patrols with the PFs because they already had the basic skills required for this mission. Although the further training with the Marines inevitably improved and honed their skills, the joint patrols could be conducted relatively quickly after the CAP establishment due to the basic military foundations of the PFs.

Although the CAPs in Iraq had the same basic mission as the CAP in Vietnam, the lack of prior training amongst the Iraqis hindered the achievement of the mission. One of the major mistakes of the invasion that had huge ramifications on this aspect of the CAP was the abolition of the Iraqi army. After its disintegration, many of the ex-soldiers turned to the insurgent groups and militias, leaving what would come to be called the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) and later the Iraqi National Guard (ING) with few highly-trained members.⁴¹ As a result, CAPs like the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines (2/7) had very little to work with as far as prior experience was concerned. The 2/7 CAP was in charge of setting up a CAP in conjunction with the 503rd ING which consisted of four companies stationed in Baghdad, Rawah, Hit, and Haditha. Those members of the 503rd that had previous experience were made officers while the rest of the 1,100 member brigade had no experience whatsoever. As a result, the 2/7 CAP was forced to establish an extensive training regimen for the members of the 503rd before any combat-oriented missions were possible. This training consisted of a rotating two week course in which 50-75 ING members would come to the CAP headquarters to be trained in fire and movement procedures, weapons familiarization, hand to hand combat, and urban warfare

⁴¹ Bruce R. Pirnie and Edward O'Connell. Counterinsurgency in Iraq (2003-2006), 65.

tactics. Although the Marines conducted joint patrols with the ING, because of the Marines lack of confidence in the ING's combat skills, the patrols were often routine checkpoint inspections where combat was highly unlikely; patrols that were likely to result in direct confrontation with the enemy were conducted solely by the Marines. Because of the lack of training amongst the ING troops, the 2/7 CAP could not effectively establish the mission of joint combat patrols and was forced to serve more of a training command function.⁴² Had the ING had more members with prior military backgrounds, the 2/7 CAP would have been more likely to achieve its mission of conducting joint combat patrols.

One example that supports the importance of prior training is that of the 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines CAP (3/4), call sign Viking. The 3/4 CAP was established in the police station in the town of Haditha, Iraq in 2003. It consisted of approximately 16 Marines and 100 policemen (the structure of the CAPs will be discussed further in a following section). According to the 3/4 CAP Commander, Capt. Matthew Danner, many of his Iraqi force had served in the military or police force before the US-led invasion. Because of this, the 3/4 CAP was not forced to establish a stringent basic training regimen like the 2/7. Danner states:

Other than literacy classes we sponsored, there was no formal instruction. The IPs (Iraqi Police) learned from watching us and participating in missions with us. We showed them how to take care of the weapons, how to move, how to establish an [Observation Post], how to report, and how to fight. They picked it up quickly. By the middle of our time there, a patrol would typically consist of a Marine fireteam with 5-6 cops. By the end, a patrol would commonly be Iraqi-pure with Marine overwatch, or would include just a Marine buddy-pair.⁴³

⁴² Jason Goodale. Personal Interview. 2 October 2008.

⁴³ Matthew Danner. Personal Interview. 15 October 2008.

Because the police forces involved in the 3/4 CAP had prior training, it was not forced to become a make-shift training command like the 2/7. Clearly, a CAP is more likely to achieve its mission of joint combat patrols if the local forces involved have basic military/police skills.

Duration of the Program

One variable that has a profound impact on the success or failure of the CAP is the duration of the program itself. The CAP in Vietnam was established in August 1965 and continued to operate through 1971. Additionally, the length of tour for any given CAP Marine was a minimum of six months with some extending as long as 13 months. This gave the Marines sufficient time to establish the CAP, familiarize the unit with the AOR, and conduct combat raids. In addition, each individual CAP Marine was based off of his own rotation; thus, when it came to the end of a tour, only a single individual would rotate out of CAP versus the entire unit.⁴⁴ This allowed the PFs and the Marines to form close relationships as the more established Marines could introduce new members and continue the cycle. The PFs did not have to worry about establishing ties with whole new units, just individuals. In summary, the tour duration of 6-13 months was sufficient not only to establish the CAP, but also to establish strong ties with the locals.

When asked if they could change something about their CAP experience in Iraq, both the commanders of the 2/7 CAP and the 3/4 CAP stated that the tour should have lasted at least a year.⁴⁵ “The biggest problem is duration. We were in place for only six months. We were gone for a couple of weeks in the middle to fight in Fallujah... We had to leave when the battalion left in July. There were genuine attempts to remain in place,

⁴⁴ Al Hemingway, *Our War was Different*, 5.

⁴⁵ Jason Goodale. Personal Interview. 2 October 2008. ; Matthew Danner. Personal Interview. 15 October 2008.

but that was not practical even though we all volunteered.”⁴⁶ In both cases, the standard tour length was 6-7 months long with each unit rotating as a whole. Additionally, the CAP mission, in the case of the 2/7, was not even established until May 2004, three months after the 2/7 had been in country. As a result, the 2/7 CAP only had 4 months to try to get the ING ready for combat patrols. This proved impossible due to the aforementioned lack of training on the part of the ING forces. Additionally, the idea of establishing the CAP was contained within the 1st Division. It was a brainchild of General Mattis, and the replacement units were under no obligation to continue the CAPs, which as a result were abandoned.⁴⁷ If the CAP had been recognized as a strategic asset and applied to all units deploying to Iraq, then the life of the CAP could have been extended past a single tour duration. In the end, both the 2/7 and the 3/4 CAP commanders agree that a longer tour of duty would have resulted in greater success in Iraq, and a strategic level implementation of the CAP could have extended the programs duration further. As a result, this study concludes that the CAPs are most likely to be successful if the tour of duty of the CAP Marines is longer than 6 months, and the mission can be carried on by subsequent replacing units.

Currently, the United States Army is operating on 12-15 month tours in Iraq.⁴⁸ Although morale and readiness concerns may be the reasoning behind the much shorter 7 month long deployments of Marines, if the CAP is to be successful, it would be necessary to take up the Army model of at least 12 months. Additionally, every division within the Marine Corps needs to designate CAP units and their locations in country before

⁴⁶ Matthew Danner. Personal Interview. 15 October 2008.

⁴⁷ Phillip Skuta. Personal Interview. 2 October 2008.

⁴⁸ Barbara Starr. “U.S. commander: Iraq tours of duty may be cut 3 months.” CNN. 19 February 2008. <<http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/02/19/iraq.duty/index.html>> (1 December 2008).

deploying. This would facilitate communication and turnover with those units already in theater and those units about to deploy. Without these changes or ones similar, another deployment of the CAP in Iraq would be at risk for failure like its predecessor.

Structure of the CAP

Another major difference between the CAP in Vietnam and the CAP in Iraq was the structure of the CAP platoons. In Vietnam, the structure of the CAP was pretty much standardized across the board. Typically, a CAP platoon was commanded by a USMC squad leader whose executive officer (XO) was a PF platoon commander. The Marine Corps forces included twelve riflemen, one grenadier, and one Navy corpsman. The PF regulars rounded out the platoon with 34 members.⁴⁹ One benefit of this structure was the presence of equivalent members. For example, the Commanding Officer (CO) of the platoon was a USMC officer who had an approximate counterpart within the PF in the form of his XO. As a result, if there was breakdown in communication or a problem arose within the platoon, then the CO and XO could work together to reach a mutual decision involving both parties. In the end, the common 50-man structure of the CAP platoon seemed to satisfy the needs of the mission.

Unlike the standard Vietnamese CAP, the two Iraqi CAPs did not have similar structures. In fact, the platoon commanders were given very little guidance outside of the order to establish a CAP platoon.⁵⁰ Often, the structure of the CAP reflected the individual needs of the platoons that comprised the unit in order to achieve the mission. For example, the 3/4 CAP, as mentioned before, had to do very little training. Additionally, the Marines were tasked with integrating with approximately 100 police

⁴⁹ Michael E. Peterson. The Combined Action Platoon: The US Marines' Other War in Vietnam, 136-137.

⁵⁰ Jason Goodale. Personal Interview. 2 October 2008.

officers. This resulted in only 16 Marines and 1 Navy corpsman being assigned to the CAP.⁵¹ On the other hand, the 2/7 CAP was responsible for integrating with 1,100 members of the ING. Additionally, as mentioned previously, these Iraqi nationals lacked training and thus the Marines had to establish a basic training environment. As a result, the number of Marines was much larger. At its core was a standard size rifle platoon (35 Marines) with additional logistics support, communication operators, interpreters, and a human exploitation team.⁵² Given the difference in their size and situation, it is not surprising the CAPs in Iraq were not of standard structure. In the case of the 2/7, if they were given only 16 Marines like the 3/4, they would not have been able to establish the program that they did. In the reverse, if the 3/4 CAP was given the assets of the 2/7 CAP, there would be almost as many Marines as Iraqi Police. In the end, if the CAPs in Iraq were expected to have a standard structure, they should have had a standard mission with guidance from their common chain of command. Although the CAPs in Iraq did differ from the CAPs in Vietnam in terms of their structure, it is feasible that differently structured units could still achieve the same mission, making this factor seems less important than the factors mention above that require change in order to succeed. Capt. Danner, CO of the 3/4 CAP stated “I had an opportunity for more resources, but didn’t want them. Like the Marine Corps itself, much of what made us strong was our ability to do more with less stuff.”⁵³ The CAP commander himself believes the assets, personnel and resources he retained were sufficient to achieve the mission. However, it could be argued that a standard CAP structure in Iraq could have facilitated implementation and spreading of the program, increased interoperability between the CAP units, and

⁵¹ Matthew Danner. Personal Interview. 15 October 2008.

⁵² Jason Goodale. Personal Interview. 2 October 2008.

⁵³ Matthew Danner. Personal Interview. 15 October 2008.

extended specialized training with pre-deployed CAP units. As seen in the two implementation of the CAP in Iraq, however, the situations were very different. In these two cases, it would not have made sense to deploy the same amount of Marines to operate with the 100 police in Haditha as one did to work with the 1,100 members of the ING in Hit. In the end, it is other factors like prior experience of the locals and tour duration that have an acknowledge need for change if the CAP is to succeed. The structure, on the other hand, requires a sense of flexibility based on the scope of each individual situation and, thus, does not require standardization in Iraq.

Size of the Program

A fourth factor that contributed to the overall outcome of the CAP was its size. Originally, the CAP in Vietnam stood only 6 platoons strong in 1965. A year later, the number had grown to 38. By early 1967, 31 platoons were operating in Da Nang, 13 in Phu Bai, and 13 in Chu Lai, bringing the total to 57. At its peak in 1970, the number of CAP platoons had reached 114 and were operating in all five province in the I Corps.⁵⁴ At its max, the CAP represented 2,200 Marines, or approximately 2.8% of the total Marine forces deployed in Vietnam. Despite its relatively small numbers, however, the CAP in Vietnam is accredited with securing over 800 hamlets in the I Corps, and protecting over 500,000 civilians.⁵⁵

What was even more important than troop levels, however, when looking at the size of the CAP, was its level of implementation. Within the theory of war ascribed to by the US Marine Corps, there are three levels by which activities of war can be classified. The highest level is strategic, which is defined as “the art of winning wars and securing

⁵⁴ Keith F. Kopets “The Combined Action Program: Vietnam.” Small Wars Journal, 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

peace. Strategy involves establishing goals, assigning forces, providing assets, and imposing conditions on the use of force in theaters of war.”⁵⁶ The lowest level is classified as tactical. “Tactics refers to the concepts and methods used to accomplish a particular mission in either combat or other military operations. In war, tactics focuses on the application of combat power to defeat an enemy force in combat at a particular time and place.”⁵⁷ Finally, the operational level of war refers to the nexus between the highest and lowest level. “The operational level includes deciding when, where, and under what conditions to engage the enemy in battle—and when, where and under what conditions to *refuse* battle in support of higher aims.”⁵⁸ The CAP in Vietnam was undoubtedly a strategic level asset. There were no short term goals or battle plans of the CAP in the I Corps. Often times CAPs were asked to clear certain areas or attack certain targets, but the goal of the CAP, itself, was to provide overall security for the area by incorporating PFs.⁵⁹ The CAP was not intended as a “quick fix” for the troop shortage in the I Corps; instead, it was seen as a key strategic tool to expanding control in the I Corps.⁶⁰ From 1965-1967, the Marine forces in Vietnam were commanded by Lieutenant General Walt who was a supporter of the program and pushed for its strategic expansion throughout the I Corps and even the whole of Vietnam. However, U.S. Army Commander General Westmoreland’s “search and destroy” strategy would dominate the Army ideology and prevented Army units from adopting the CAP. Despite this Army opposition, the CAP was an “integral part of the Marine Corps’ war in the I Corps area.”⁶¹ This strategic level

⁵⁶ U.S. Marine Corps. Warfighting: MCDP 1 (Washington D.C.: Department of the Navy, 1997), 28.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁹ John A. Nagal. Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife, 157.

⁶⁰ Keith F. Kopets “The Combined Action Program: Vietnam.” Small Wars Journal, 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

of implementation and support by the highest levels of the Marine Corps chain of command inevitably contributed to the longevity and success of the program throughout the length of the war.

The CAP in Iraq was instituted on a much lower level than the CAP in Vietnam, which many people argue contributed to its failure.⁶² As mentioned previously, the CAP in Iraq resulted from a directive from the 1st Division Commander General Mattis. He required that all battalions under his command designate a platoon that could be set up as a Combined Action Platoon once they arrived in country. Outside of this directive, however, the CAP received no other guidance from the upper levels of the Marine Corps forces in Iraq. Individual CAPs, like the 2/7 and the 3/4, received supporting units like logistics, communications, etc., from the battalion level, but further guidance was not provided.⁶³ This lack of strategic and upper level integration, which contributed to the failure of the CAP in Iraq, can best be seen in the second battle of Fallujah in 2004. According to the 2/7 battalion commander, 10,000 troops were needed for the Fallujah operation which created a vacuum in Western al-Anbar province. As units were moved out of cities like Haditha and Hit in order to fight in Fallujah, the insurgents moved into the cities the Marines had vacated. If more troops were available to fight in Fallujah without leaving the rest of al-Anbar open to infiltration, the CAP may have been established more easily and operated more effectively.⁶⁴ On top of the shortage in troops, the small number of CAPs (only two are known to have been set up) indicates the low priority and lack of importance Marine Corps leadership attached to the CAPs program in Iraq. In Vietnam, the CAP was viewed with strategic importance and supported at all

⁶² Phillip Skuta. Personal Interview. 2 October 2008.

⁶³ Jason Goodale. Personal Interview. 2 October 2008.

⁶⁴ Phillip Skuta. Personal Interview. 2 October 2008.

levels of the chain of command. In Iraq, the CAP lacked this importance and as a result lacked the guidance and support of the upper levels of leadership. Because of this lack of strategic support, “[The CAP] went away when General Mattis went away, when the 1st Marine Division went away.”⁶⁵

Morale

Throughout history, famous authors have cited morale as a key to military success. No less an authority on military campaigns than Carl Von Clausewitz has argued:

An army that maintains its cohesion under the most murderous fire; that cannot be shaken by imaginary fears and resists well-founded ones with all its might; that, proud of its victories, will not lose the strength to obey orders and its respect and trust for its officers even in defeat; whose physical power, like the muscles of an athlete, has been steeled by training in privation and effort; a force that regards such efforts as means to victory rather than a curse on its cause; that is mindful of all these duties and qualities by virtue of the single powerful idea of the honor of its arms—such an army is imbued with the true military spirit.⁶⁶

Of the five factors that this paper has examined concerning the CAPs, morale seems to be the most similar factor between the CAP in Vietnam and the CAP in Iraq. Interviews conducted for this study revealed that the morale in CAP platoons in Vietnam was generally high for a variety of reasons. One was the benefit over the alternative. One Marine stated “I didn’t know what CAP was but knew it had to be better than being a rifleman in a line company.”⁶⁷ A Marine corporal stated “Many of the men came from line infantry units where their actions were closely regulated, so the freedom of action and ability to operate on our own was a welcome change.”⁶⁸ Another reason for high morale was a result of doing something they saw as beneficial. “Morale was very high

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 187-188.

⁶⁷ Fred Caleffie. Personal Interview. 11 October 2008.

⁶⁸ Larry Scroggs. Personal Interview 26 October 2008.

and we felt we were helping the Vietnamese people, versus service in a line unit [where] you just kill NVA and VC and walk away.”⁶⁹ This perception of doing something beneficial was often the reason cited when discussing morale levels in the Iraqi CAPs, as well. The 3/4 CAP commander stated that his Marines “felt special and they could see everyday that what they were doing really had a positive effect.”⁷⁰ In conjunction with this high level of morale, however, was a healthy suspicion of the local population in both Vietnam and Iraq. One CAP Marine who was wounded in Vietnam said “You have to remember that everyone you saw could be a VC, even the kids, because there were no uniforms. You did not trust anyone and you had to be constantly on guard for booby-traps in and around the village.”⁷¹ The same was true for the CAPs in Iraq. In the case of the 2/7 CAP, its affiliate unit, the 503rd ING was experiencing an intelligence leak. It turned out to be the Iraqi intelligence officer of the 503rd who had close interaction with the 2/7 but was now working for the insurgency. As a result, the 2/7 was forced to take additional security precautions such as distributing ID cards, outlawing personal vehicles on the base, and limiting access of the Iraqi forces to the command and control (C2) center of the headquarters of the 2/7 CAP.⁷² In the end, the status of the morale in Vietnam and Iraqi CAPs was very similar. Most units experienced high levels of morale due to a feeling of accomplishment, while still maintaining a healthy suspicion of the enemy. Because of the similarity in the morale of the units, this factor appears not to go far in explaining why the CAP succeeded in Vietnam but failed in Iraq.

⁶⁹ Charlie McMahon. Personal Interview. 12 October 2008.

⁷⁰ Matthew Danner. Personal Interview. 15 October 2008.

⁷¹ Rick Schelberg. Personal Interview. 3 October 2008.

⁷² Jason Goodale. Personal Interview. 2 October 2008.

Comparing the Insurgencies

David Galula states that “Since counterinsurgency exists solely as a reaction to an insurgency, the counterinsurgent’s problems and operations can be best understood in the light of what prompts them.”⁷³ In short, counterinsurgency tools cannot be evaluated or compared without first looking at the adversary. The major counterhypothesis to the findings in the previous section is that it was the differences in the insurgencies that caused the outcomes to vary. In this section, this paper will compare the insurgencies of Vietnam and Iraq over five characteristics. These characteristics include: geographic conditions, goals of the insurgency, insurgency to government force ratio, level of state support, and insurgent use of terrorism. At the conclusion of this section, this paper will look at the overall similarity or differences between the insurgencies. If the insurgencies are similar, then this would suggest that it was, in fact, the differences in the CAPs that caused them to differ in outcome and not the differences in the enemy.

Geographic Conditions

Counterinsurgency expert David Galula explains that because a fledgling insurgency is initially weak in comparison to its government adversary, it must rely on the complexity of the geography for help. He goes on to state that if this geographic assistance is not there then “[the insurgency] may well be condemned to failure before [it] starts.”⁷⁴ As a result, this paper found geography to be one of the most important factors when comparing the two insurgencies. In order to facilitate comparison, this study will classify the overall geographic factor into two categories: simple or complex. If the geography is considered favorable for the counterinsurgency, this study will classify it as

⁷³ David Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice, 29.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

simple because it is easier to control the insurgency. If on the other hand, the geography is considered unfavorable for the counterinsurgency, this study will classify it as complex because it is difficult to control the insurgency.

Galula offers eight sub-factors by which the geography can be evaluated. These include: location, size, configuration, international borders, terrain, climate and population. Vietnam is located in Southeast Asia and is bordered by Cambodia, China, Laos, and the Gulf of Tonkin. During the time of the war, South Vietnam was bordered by North Vietnam and was separated by no physical barrier which benefited the insurgency. When it comes to terrain, the only major barrier is the mountainous territory in the far North, and this only accounts for a small part of the 4,639 km border.⁷⁵

However, several accounts of the war in Vietnam have cited the massive overgrowth as a barrier or difficulty to movement of the US forces. Galula, himself, cites the paddy fields of Tonkin as an example of rugged terrain.⁷⁶ Focusing on size and configuration, South Vietnam is approximately the size of the state of Washington and lacks any archipelagos or major peninsulas making it difficult for counterinsurgents to compartmentalize the country.⁷⁷ When it comes to climate, the country experiences a vicious monsoonal season from May until September.⁷⁸ Finally, Vietnam has a current population of 86,116,560 which ranks 15th in the global community and a GDP per capita around \$2,600 ranking it in the bottom 26% globally.⁷⁹ The large population, low GDP per capita, rugged terrain, porous borders, and lack of compartmentability, combine to create

⁷⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. "Vietnam." World Factbook. 6 November 2008. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vn.html#Geo>> (11 November 2008).

⁷⁶ David Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice, 24.

⁷⁷ Anthony James Joes, The War for South Vietnam 1954-1975 (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2001), 1.

⁷⁸ Central Intelligence Agency. "Vietnam."

⁷⁹ Central Intelligence Agency. "Vietnam."

a large obstacle to the counterinsurgent. In fact, out of the eight sub-factors, only one sub-factor, climate, would be favorable to a counterinsurgent in Vietnam.⁸⁰ As a result, it can be concluded that Vietnam has complex geographic conditions.

When it comes to Iraq, this country is almost completely landlocked with a coastline of only 58 km. It is bordered by Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey.⁸¹ Iraq has a total land area of 432,162 sq km and ranks 66 of 258 on the CIA list of major geographic entities.⁸² On one hand, Iraq is similar to Vietnam in that it has no major land masses that can be easily cut off from the rest of the country during a counterinsurgency campaign. On the other hand, Iraq obviously has a much different terrain than Vietnam. However, its massive amount of desert would still favor the insurgents who have lived in such an environment as compared to the soldiers from the United States. Additionally, the Iraqi climate is plague by two major difficulties—heat and dust storms. Although the heat does not occur year long, during the summer months, temperatures have been reported to reach over 48°C (118.4°F). In addition, winds of over eighty kilometers an hour accompanied by dust storms over a thousand meters in height ravage the Iraqi countryside from April to early June and again from late September through November.⁸³ Finally, the population of Iraq is 28,221,180 with a GDP per capita is around \$3,700.⁸⁴ Given its size, extensive border with other sunni Islamic states, difficult terrain, large population, and underdevelopment, Iraq, like Vietnam, possess

⁸⁰ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, 24. Galula claims that harsh climate actually favors the counterinsurgent for they have better logistical and operational facilities.

⁸¹ Central Intelligence Agency. "Iraq." Iraq possesses a land boundary that is 3,650 km long, 1840 km of which borders other sunni Islamic states.

⁸² Central Intelligence Agency. "Iraq."

⁸³ "Iraq Climate." *Iraq*. 10 Nov 2004.

<http://www.photius.com/countries/iraq/climate/iraq_climate_climate.html> (11 November 2008).

⁸⁴ Central Intelligence Agency. "Iraq."

geographic conditions that favor an insurgency. As a result, Iraq's geographic conditions can also be classified as complex.

Goals of the Insurgency

The second factor for comparison between the two insurgencies has to do with the cause or goal of the insurgency.⁸⁵ To many scholars, the cause of an insurgency is one of the key pillars to its success. Galula states:

With a cause, the insurgent has a formidable, if intangible, asset that he can progressively transform into concrete strength. A small group of men *sans* cause can seize power by a lucky plot—this has happened in history—but then a plot is not an insurgency. The lack of an attractive cause is what restrains a priori apolitical crime syndicates from attempting to assume power, for they realize that only criminals will follow them.⁸⁶

Mao Tse-tung's philosophy would support Galula's view of a unifying cause as an imperative to victory:

In a war of long duration, those whose conviction that the people must be emancipated is not deep rooted are likely to become shaken in their faith or actually revolt. Without the general education that enables everyone to understand our goal of driving out Japanese imperialism and establishing a free and happy China, the soldiers fight without conviction and lose their determination.⁸⁷

For the purpose of this study and in order to facilitate comparison between the two conflicts, this paper will be following the methodology and classification of the Libicki study. For the variable of goal of the insurgents, Libicki offers five classifications: secession/autonomy, overthrow, Marxist, Islamist, and independence/majority rule. On a side note, Libicki does state that nationalism is often times an important subtext to insurgencies, however he does not make it one of the classifications because it often

⁸⁵ For the purpose of this paper, goal and cause will be considered one in the same.

⁸⁶ David Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice, 12.

⁸⁷ Mao Tse-tung, On Guerrilla Warfare, 88-89.

secondary to Marxist or Islamist movements.⁸⁸ When it comes to the conflict in Vietnam, the United States would have never become involved in the region had it not been for one thing—communism. The United States had been in a Cold War with the USSR since the conclusion of World War II; yet, it was not until the fall of China to Mao Tse-tung that the United States became worried about what would later be coined “the domino effect.” North Vietnam became increasingly closer with China and their goal of a united, communist Vietnam became clear.⁸⁹ Thus, this paper classifies the goal of the Viet Cong insurgency as Marxist. The insurgency in Iraq is much different than the Viet Cong when it comes to overarching goals. First of all, the Iraqi insurgency at the time of the CAP implementation had no central leadership and no declared goals outside of the expulsion of US forces in Iraq. However, the sunni Arab insurgents feared that the Kurds and Shi’a Arabs would ally against them with the support of the United States. Additionally, the sunni population as a whole feared a loss of identity due to the fact that they no longer were in power in the Iraqi government.⁹⁰ In an effort to preserve the sunni Islamic identity and power in Iraq, the sunni insurgents took up arms against what they perceived as the pro-Shi’ite United States. Thus, this paper concludes that the goal of the insurgency in Iraq was Islamist-based. As a result, the goals of the Vietnam and Iraqi insurgencies differ.

Insurgency to Government Force Ratio

The third factor Libicki cites as a critical influence is the force ratio between the insurgents and the government. His study suggests that “the greater the government-to-

⁸⁸ David C. Gompert and John Gordon IV. *War by Other Means*, 382.

⁸⁹ John A. Nagal. *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 118-124.

⁹⁰ Bruce R. Pirnie and Edward O’Connell. *Counterinsurgency in Iraq (2003-2006)*, 27.

insurgent force ratio, the lower the odds of an insurgent victory.”⁹¹ He classifies the force ratio into four categories: Over 9:1, From 3:1 to 9:1, From 1:1 to 3:1, and Under 1:1. By 1966, the troop levels in Vietnam were approximately 389,000. According to a declassified CIA document written in the same year, the US forces in Vietnam estimated the Viet Cong strength at around 100,000 guerillas.⁹² This would put the force ratio at 3.89 to 1. Even if this study were to account for the maximum amount of US troops in country in 1968 (537,000), the ratio would only be 5.37 to 1.⁹³ Thus, the force ratio in Vietnam would fall into the category of 3:1 to 9:1. When looking at the situation in Iraq one year after the invasion, the coalition estimated the insurgents to number 20,000.⁹⁴ By July 2004, the number for coalition troops in Iraq numbered 133,000 yielding a force ratio of 6.65 to 1.⁹⁵ Thus, the Iraq war would also fall under Libicki’s 3:1 to 9:1 category. In summary, both the Vietnamese and Iraqi force ratios fall in the category of 3:1 to 9:1 as prescribed by Libicki.

Level of State Support

The fourth factor of comparison concerns the type of outside support, if any, that each insurgency received. Galula goes as far as to cite outside support as one of his four conditions for a successful insurgency. Libicki classifies outside support into three categories: state support, non-state actor support only, and no support. Chinese support for North Vietnam and subsequently the Viet Cong is not a secret. From 1956-1963, total

⁹¹ David C. Gompert and John Gordon IV. War by Other Means

⁹² United States. CIA. Indochina Division. The Strength of the Viet Cong “Main Force Support Personnel”. 2 December 1966. SECRET. Declassified July 16, 1975.
<<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/star/images/041/04116211002.pdf>>

⁹³ Dennis M. Simon. “The War in Vietnam, 1965-1968.” Southern Methodist University August 2002.
<<http://faculty.smu.edu/dsimon/Change-Viet2.html>> (11 November 2008).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26. The Iraqi government disputes this claiming there were upwards of 40,000 insurgents at this time.

⁹⁵ “Coalition Troops in Iraq.” BBC News 20 July 2004.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3873359.stm> (11 Nov 2008).

aide from China to North Vietnam was 320 million yuan.⁹⁶ By 1964, the Chinese had promised the North Vietnamese support “by all possible and necessary means” should they be attacked by the United States. As China’s relationship with the USSR continued to deteriorate, relations with North Vietnam became more important. By 1965, the Chinese had increased their support of North Vietnam to include: the dispatching of Chinese engineering troops, the use of Chinese anti-aircraft artillery troops to protect key North Vietnamese targets and Chinese engineering troops, and military and other material support.⁹⁷ Thus, the insurgency in Vietnam clearly enjoyed state support from the Chinese government. When it comes to Iraq, the insurgents are receiving support, mostly monetary, from several sunni groups throughout the Middle East. However, it is the state support of Syria that has given insurgents not only a place to hide, but it has also provided them a passage into Iraq by which they can transport arms, bombs, and replacement troops. Although this claim of state sponsorship by Syria may be contested, it is the position of the United States government that Syria plays a major role in the Iraqi insurgency. In October 2003, Ambassador Cofer Black spoke in front of the United States Foreign Relations Committee stating:

There is no doubt that many past Syrian actions are in direct conflict with U.S. interests in the region and that the current posture of the Syrian government towards terrorism continues to be wholly unacceptable. As a state sponsor of terrorism, Syria has repeatedly shown an unwillingness to fundamentally change its behavior regarding support for terrorism. While we continue to have hope for eventual improvements in Syrian attitudes, policies and actions, we see little at this time to indicate that Syrian support for terrorism is diminishing... Syria took a series of hostile actions toward Coalition forces in Iraq. Syria allowed military equipment to flow into Iraq on the eve of and during the war. Syria also permitted volunteers to pass into Iraq to attack our service members during the war. In the

⁹⁶ Chen Jian, “China’s Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-1969,” *The China Quarterly* 142 (June 1995): 359.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 371-377.

period following the conclusion of major military action, foreign fighters have continued to transit into Iraq from Syria. While the situation on the Syrian border has improved in recent weeks, it is still a major source of concern for us.⁹⁸

In 2007, Iraqi national security advisor Mowaffak al Rubaie stated that Syria was responsible for harboring and supporting Islamic insurgents who were responsible for the deaths of Iraqis and Americans alike.⁹⁹ Although the state support of Syria to Iraqi insurgents is not as transparent as the state support of China with the Viet Cong, this paper believes there is enough evidence to classify the Iraqi insurgency as state supported.

Insurgent Use of Terrorism

The final characteristic of comparison between the insurgencies is that of the insurgents' use of terrorism. Libicki's study suggest that those groups which engage in indiscriminate terror usage often times indicate an insurgency's weakness. He classifies the use of terror into four categories: indiscriminate, mutual atrocities, selective, and little to none. It is important to note that when he use terms like indiscriminate and selective, Libiki is not talking about the types of killings but instead the use of the terrorism. For example, if an insurgency uses a suicide bomber in a market place, the killing is indiscriminate because it does not target any specific person. However, if this suicide bombing tactic is only used once, then the use of the terrorism by this insurgency would be classified as little to none. In Vietnam, nothing speaks louder about the Viet Cong's use of terrorism during their insurgency than the rise in assassinations and kidnappings of civilians from 1957-1965. From 1957-1959, there were 1,012 total assassinations and

⁹⁸ Cofer Black. "Syria and Terrorism". US Department of State. 30 October 2003. <<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/2003/25778.htm>> (1 December 2008).

⁹⁹ Christopher Isham. "Iraqi Official Says Syria Supporting Insurgents." ABC News 11May 2007 <http://blogs.abcnews.com/theblotter/2007/05/iraqi_official_.html> (11 November 2008).

kidnappings performed by the Viet Cong. By 1965, over 14,000 total assassinations and kidnappings were occurring in Vietnam by the Viet Cong.¹⁰⁰ To put this in perspective, a little over 24,000 civilians were killed in the first two years of the war in Iraq as a result of attacks by both the insurgents and US and allied forces.¹⁰¹ Although the kidnappings and assassinations were selected or targeted individuals, this paper classifies the rampant and massive use of assassination and kidnapping by the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War as an indiscriminate use of terror. When it comes to the insurgent use of terrorist tactics in the war in Iraq, there is no denying its widespread presence. This is particularly visible in the rampant use of the improvised explosive device (IED). According to a study by the RAND Corporation, “Since their introduction in late 2003, IEDs have become the single largest cause of casualties of both security forces and civilians in Iraq.”¹⁰² This statement supports the view that the use of terror by the insurgents in Iraq is indiscriminate. Clearly, the use of terror in Iraq would fall in the category of indiscriminate violence.

After comparing the two insurgencies across five important characteristics, this study has found that the Viet Cong and Iraqi insurgencies are similar in four of the five characteristics using the various classifications laid out by Libicki’s methodology. The area in which they differ is in the goals of the insurgency. Because the two insurgencies do differ in this characteristic, it may cause some to believe this characteristic difference maybe the deciding factor as to why the CAP failed in Iraq but succeeded in Vietnam. However, Libicki’s study suggests that this difference in goals will have little effect on

¹⁰⁰ John A. Nagal. Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife, 136.

¹⁰¹ “Survey: 25,000 civilians killed in Iraq war.” CNN 20 July 2005.

<<http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/07/19/iraq.bodycount/index.html>> (11 November 2008).

¹⁰² Bruce R. Pirnie and Edward O’Connell. Counterinsurgency in Iraq (2003-2006), 33.

the success of the CAP. In Libicki's study, the won-lost record is mixed for insurgencies with Marxist or Islamic goals. The only goal that indicates an overwhelming win ratio is that of independence from colonial rule. Because neither the Marxist nor Islamic goals seem to affect the success or failure of a counterinsurgency, this paper hypothesizes that it would have little effect on a tool of the counterinsurgency like the CAP. As a result, this study concludes that, given the high degree of similarity between the two insurgencies (4 out of 5 characteristics examined) and the relatively insignificant differences in goals, the reason for the difference in CAP outcomes in Vietnam and Iraq is not due to differences between the insurgencies. As a logical consequence of this finding, this study concludes that it may be possible to successfully employ a CAP approach against more than just the Vietnam insurgency.

Figure 1. Comparison between the Viet Cong and Iraqi Insurgency

	Viet Cong	Iraqi Insurgency
Geographic Conditions	Complex	Complex
Goals of the Insurgency	Marxist	Islamist
Insurgent to Government Force Ratio	From 3:1 to 9:1	From 3:1 to 9:1
Level of State Support	State Support	State Support
Use of Terrorism	Indiscriminate	Indiscriminate

Conclusion

Because of the small number of cases examined in this study, it would be impossible to make broad, sweeping conclusions based off of the findings described

above. However, this study does offer insights into many of the factors that those involved felt contributed to the success or failure of their CAP. When looking at the comparison between the Vietnamese and Iraqi insurgencies, they are similar on 4 out of the 5 factors. As mentioned previously, the finding of this study concerning the difference in goals (Marxist vs. Islamist) is that it has very little impact on the outcome of a counterinsurgency, let alone the CAP.¹⁰³ As a result, this study concludes that the failure of the Iraqi CAP as compared to the Vietnamese success is not due to differences in the insurgencies and is instead due to differences in the CAPs themselves.

Once again, due to the small number of cases being examined in this study, it would be impossible to single out one factor that contributed the most to the CAP failure in Iraq. On the one hand, the lack of training of the ING contributed greatly to the inability to achieve the goal of standing up joint operational combat units. On the other hand, had the CAP been given more time to be established, perhaps they could have overcome the initial set back of the training deficiencies and eventually achieved their goal. To have more time to get established, however, the CAP would have had to have been seen as a strategic tool that would have had to be continued after a certain unit (such as the 1st Division) departed the theater of operations. Additionally, if there had been more troops in Iraq during the early part of 2004, then the CAP could have been established earlier than May 2004 because the CAP Marines would not have had to be pulled out to fight in the second battle of Fallujah. In the end, it seems that the shortcomings of the Iraqi CAP were a result of a compounding of all the factors listed above. Although structure of the CAP and morale are important to consider, this paper

¹⁰³ This conclusion is based on the Libicki study that found Marxist and Islamic based insurgencies had mixed outcomes, and their goals showed little relation to their success rate.

finds that the other three factors of previous training of the locals, duration of program, and size of the program are more critical.

The original hypothesis of this work stated that the “Combined Action Program can be a useful counterinsurgency tool for future operations against an insurgency provided that the local forces receive training before being put in a combat environment and duration of the program is longer than 6 months.”¹⁰⁴ After conducting the study, it is clear that there are some major shortcomings and/or limitations inherent in this statement. The first limitation stems from the fact that, while the Vietnamese and Iraqi insurgencies were very similar and therefore it was not likely differences in the insurgencies caused the CAP to fail in Iraq, it would be unwise to state that a CAP could be effectively used for every type of insurgency. The limited number of cases studies does not allow us to draw definitive conclusions with respect to how valuable CAPs are as a counter-insurgency tool in fighting all kinds of insurgencies, some of which may vary substantially from the Vietnamese and Iraqi insurgencies.

Additionally, the hypothesis only focuses on the prior training of the locals and the duration of program. It ignores the importance of size and strategic level implementation. It would be unwise to state that a CAP *will* succeed against an insurgency given only that the locals have prior training, that the duration of the program lasts longer than 6 months, and that the size of the program and troop levels are large enough to support a strategic level implementation. However, it is possible to say that the CAP will be more likely to succeed if the above prescriptions are followed.

¹⁰⁴ See page 3 of this study.

Suggestions for Future Implementation of the CAP

Although the CAP failed in Iraq, it should not be abandoned altogether as a counterinsurgency unit formation and tactic. Today, there are units like the Military Transition Team (MiTT) which operate very similarly to the CAP by eating, sleeping, and living amongst local forces. However, the main mission of the MiTT is more focused on the training and transition and not on joint combat patrols.¹⁰⁵ Because of the MiTT's lack of focus on combat, it may be beneficial to reexamine the CAP as a viable counterinsurgency tool in the months and years ahead. President-elect Obama stated in an op-ed piece during the summer of 2008 that he would like to pull the troops out of Iraq by the summer of 2010.¹⁰⁶ As a result, now more than ever, the history and effectiveness of the CAP program needs to be considered and understood. Since the initial CAP failure in 2004, the Iraqi Army has been through extensive basic training led by the US Army and Marine Corps. As a result, if the CAP were to be reinstated before the drawdown begins, then a small number of Marines could be supplemented with local forces just as Lieutenant General Walt did with the PFs out of necessity in Vietnam. However, just as the findings of this study suggest, the CAP would have to be implemented on a strategic level in order to succeed. Additionally, the length of deployment of Marines needs to be extended past 7 months to at least 12 months in order to improve the chance of success. In the end, the CAP has proven to be successful in the past, and with some changes, it could be successful again in the future.

¹⁰⁵ Jason Goodale. Personal Interview. 13 November 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Barack Obama. "My Plan for Iraq." *New York Times* 14 July 2008
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