

# Why Did We Lose in Iraq?



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To an insurgency that didn't even exist until after the end of major military operations?

Despite outspending the rest of the world, put together?

'We just took too much for granted. We didn't challenge our basic assumptions,'  
Gen Michael Hayden,  
Senate Intelligence  
Committee  
confirmation hearing,  
May 18, 2006.



# Not everybody accepts that we're losing

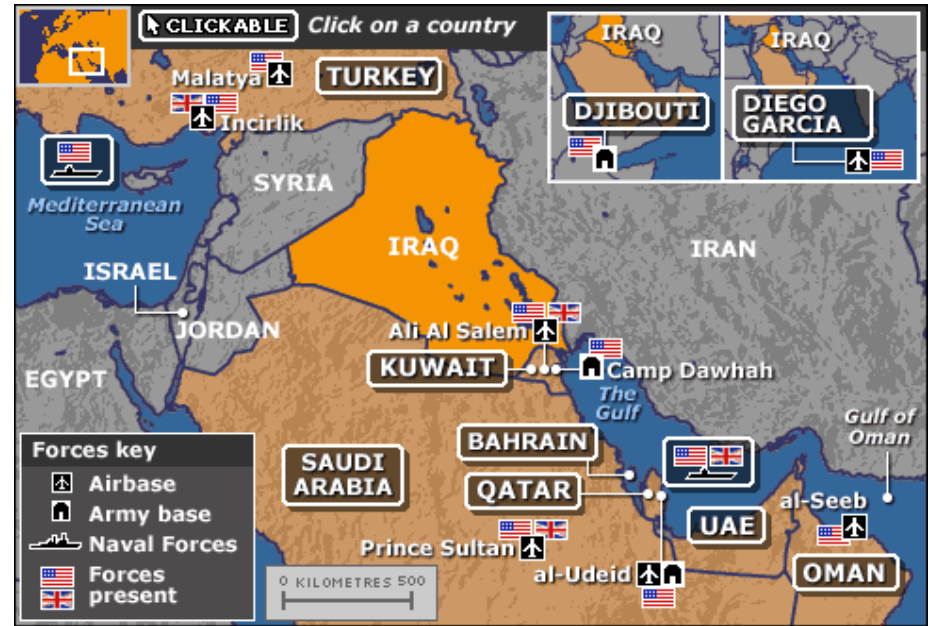
Goal	Status
Rid Saddam of weapons of mass destruction	<b>Accomplished</b>
Prevent Saddam from providing nuclear weapons to terrorists	<b>Accomplished</b>
Establish democracy (elections) in the Middle East	<b>Accomplished</b>

# But at enormous cost ... and still counting

- 2,450 US fatalities
- Overran the budget by 1,000% and spent a half-trillion dollars
- Established a Shi'ite theocracy in the south and trained a new generation of al-Qa'ida operatives
- Destroyed the myth of US military invincibility
- Abandoned by allies; leaving chaos behind

# Why did this happen?

- Was it inevitable?
- Was it poor grand strategy?
- Was it poor strategy?
- Was it poor tactics and execution?



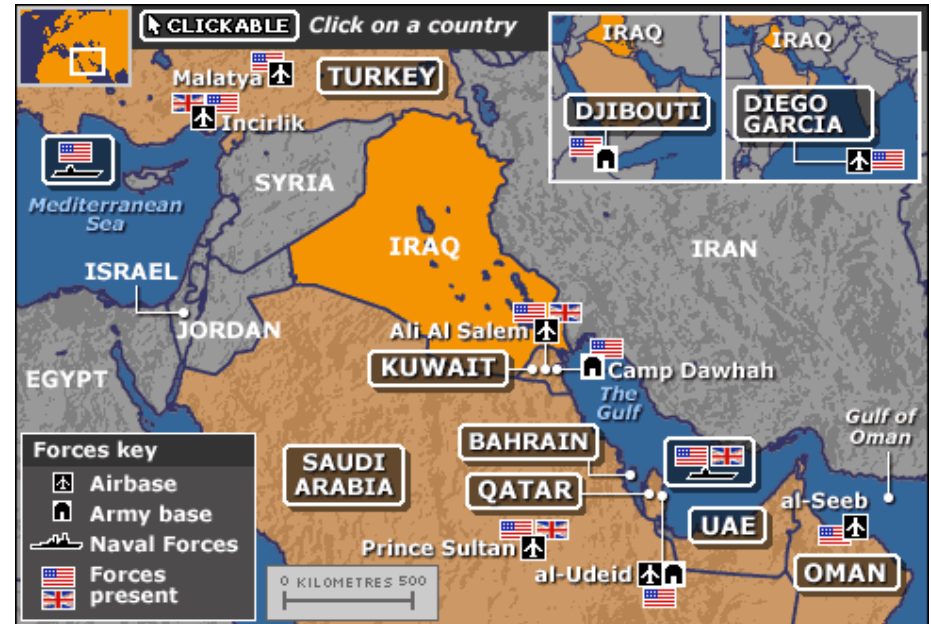
# Was it inevitable?

It was clearly a mistake to misperceive the size and motives of the insurgency, but it is not so clear that there was a solution to the problem once its scale had been fully appreciated. Most armed opposition was created by the invasion itself and would likely have arisen even had U.S. forces employed milder tactics or employed a different political strategy.

David C. Hendrickson and Robert W. Tucker,  
*Revisions In Need Of Revising: What Went Wrong In The Iraq War*,  
US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, December 2005

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# Purposes of grand strategy

- Pump up our morale
- While attacking our adversaries'
- Solidify our alliance
- And attract the uncommitted to our cause

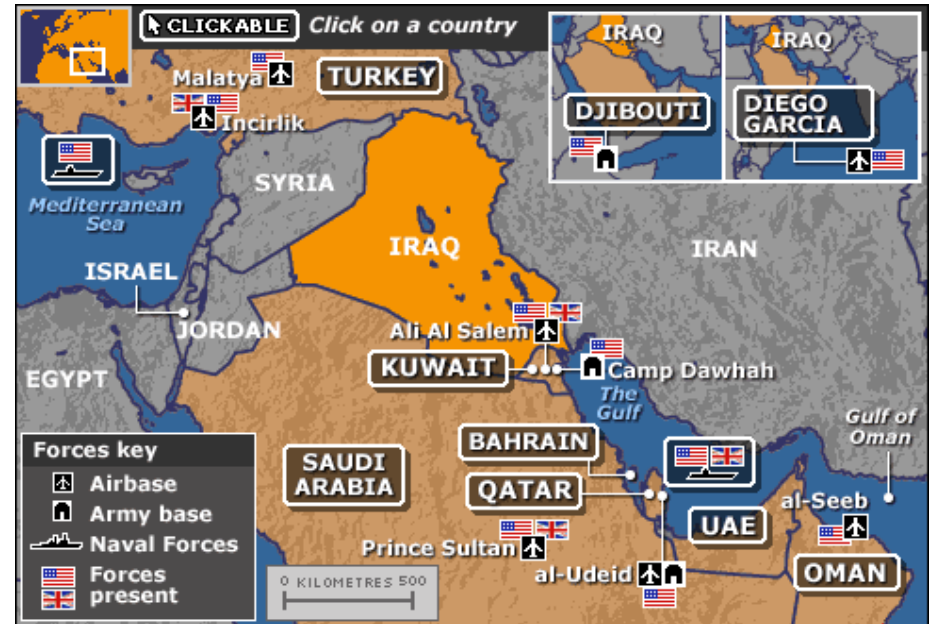
With the goal of settling the confrontation in the shortest time and with the least damage to either side (and ideally, without the need to go to war at all).

# Was our grand strategy flawed?

- Based our rationale to the US public on arguments that were known to be misleading or incorrect
- Failed to appreciate the impact of nationalism, sectarianism, and ethnic animosities - which made it impossible to attract many Iraqis to our cause
- Launched without the support of our traditional allies, particularly “Old Europe”
- Repelled many non-committed through failure to stop looting, apparent condoning of Abu Ghraib, and disproportionate use of force (Fallujah)

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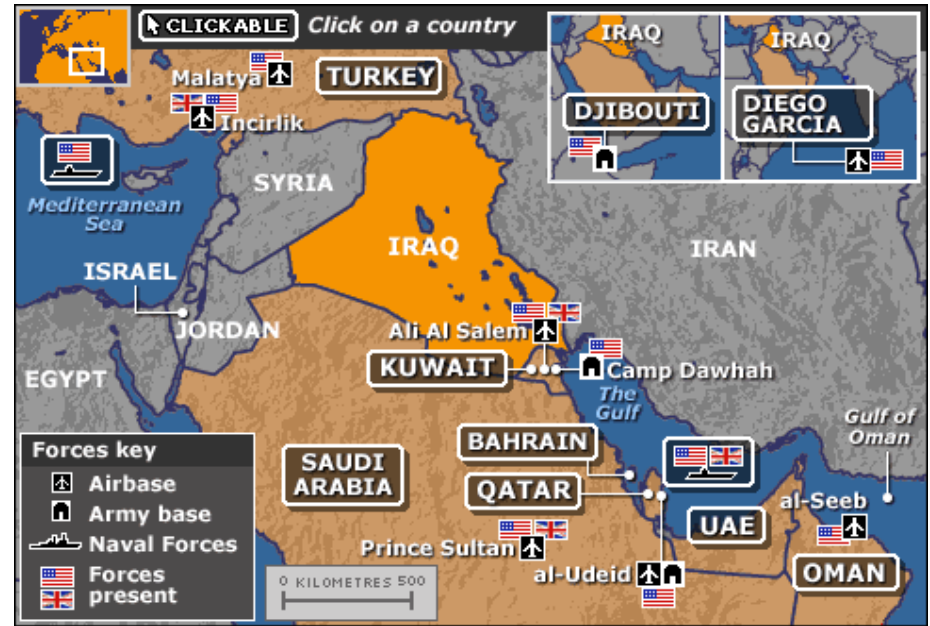
# Was our strategy flawed?

- Shortfalls in US military strength and capability to provide the personnel and skills necessary to secure Iraqi rear areas and urban areas as the Coalition advanced, and to prevent the massive looting of government offices and facilities, military bases, and arms depots during and after the fighting.
- Over-reliance on groups with limited credibility in Iraq
- Gross underestimation of the true state of the Iraqi economy & infrastructure
- Belated recognition by the US of the importance of the insurgency (“dead enders”)
- Premature push for elections, before governance mechanisms in place
- Military emphasis on short-term success (e.g., Fallujah)

[from Anthony Cordesman’s “litany” of 46 strategic, tactical and other mistakes, CSIS, April 19, 2006]

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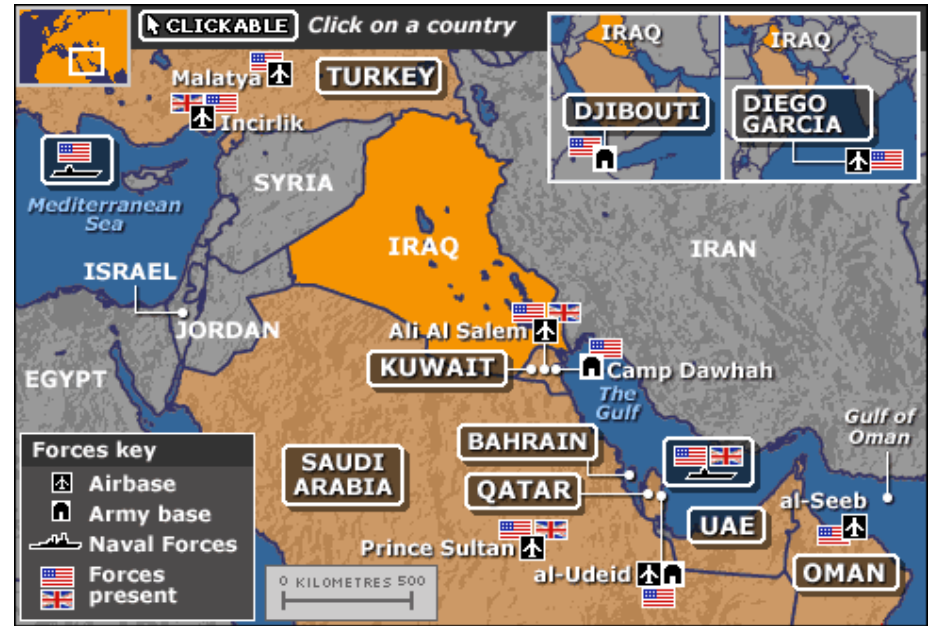


# Were our tactics flawed?

- I don't know - have to ask an expert in tactics for that

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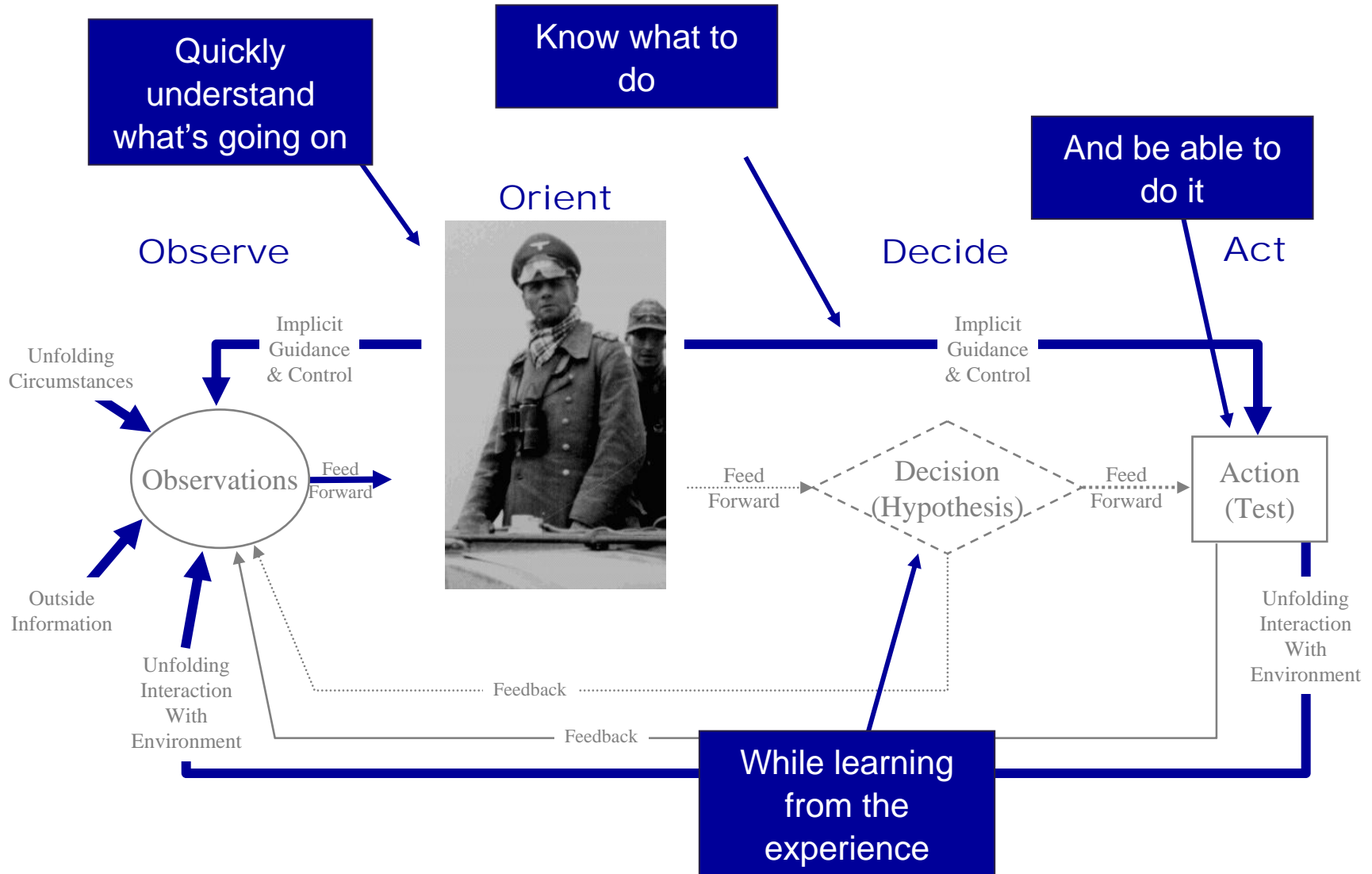
# A model for analysis



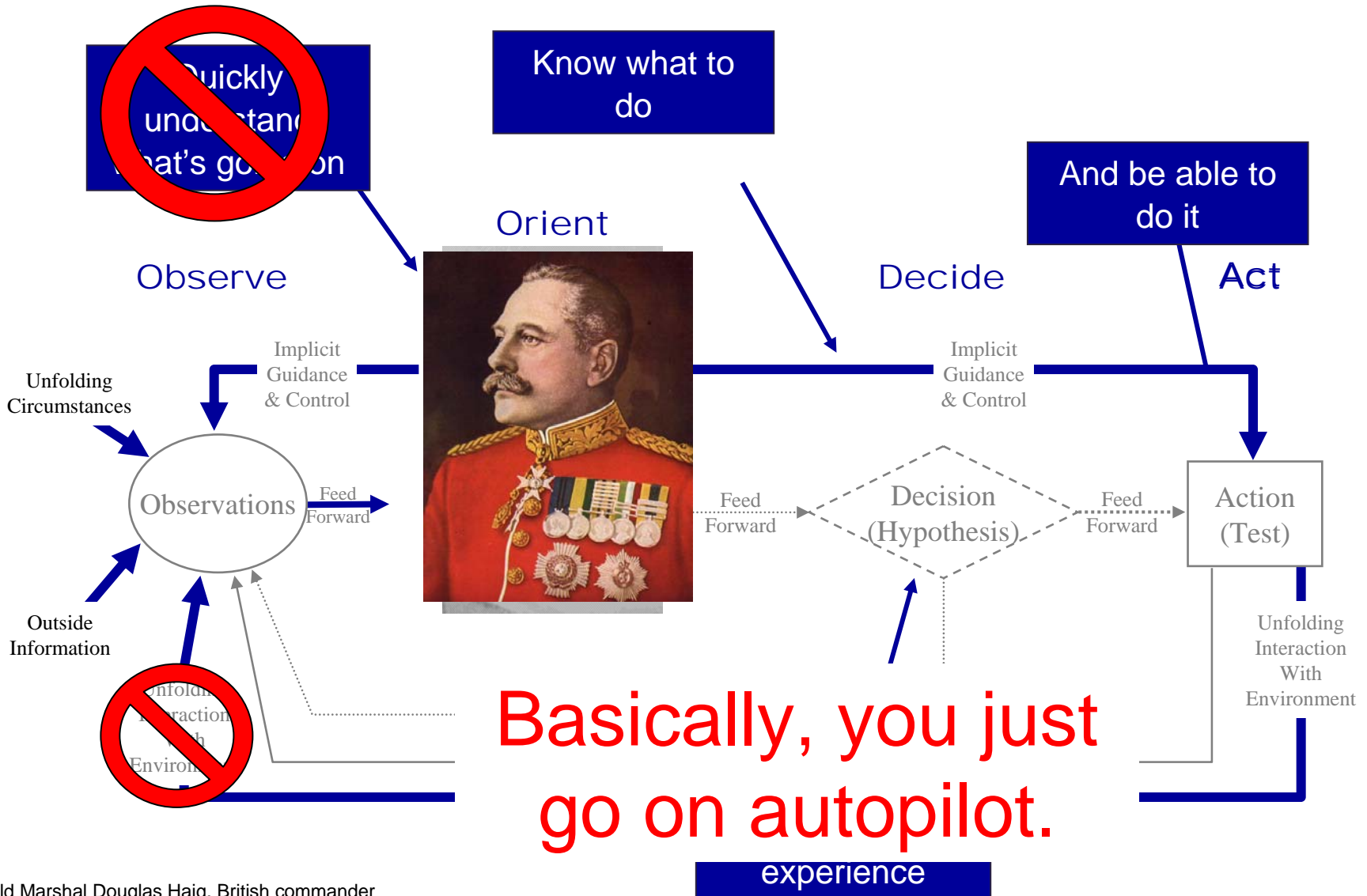
(with apologies to the late Col John Boyd, USAF)



# A model for analysis



# What happens when orientation locks?



Field Marshal Douglas Haig, British commander at the Battle of the Somme, July – Nov 1916.

# With predictable results



Berlin, May 1945



Dien Bien Phu, May 1954

# An insidious condition

Much of this concentration [of the Viet Minh forces against Dien Bien Phu], which was achieved by forced marches on the jungle tracks mostly at night, went undetected by the French, and when information was available to indicate what was happening it was discounted because it did not fit what was assumed. (231)

When matters do not go according to our plan we tend to leave the assumptions unchallenged and blame 'rogue elements' or 'foreign fighters'. (276)

Gen Sir Rupert Smith,  
*The Utility of Force*

# Blind into Baghdad



# What causes orientation to lock?

- Ideology
- Friction (many non-cooperative centers of gravity)
- Internal bottlenecks and gate keepers; serial decision & execution processes
- Internal focus
- Control systems based on mistrust

(These are not mutually exclusive.)

# Point is: Locked orientation is inevitable

- ***Unless*** senior leaders take active measures to question assumptions and to ensure they are not being told ***only what they want to hear.***
- From all descriptions, it does not appear that this was the case.

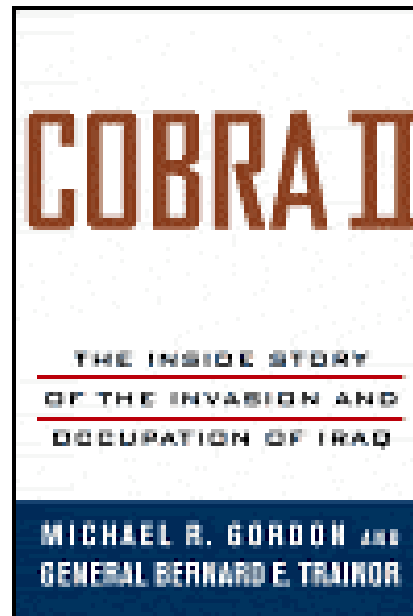
# For example,

... the U.S. intelligence community missed the significance of the Fedayeen organization. It was a striking omission given the visibility of the Fedayeen in Iraqi towns and cities and the vital importance of the Fedayeen to the regime, but understandable given the CIA's dearth of human sources ... (Gordon & Trainor, *Cobra II*, p. 62)

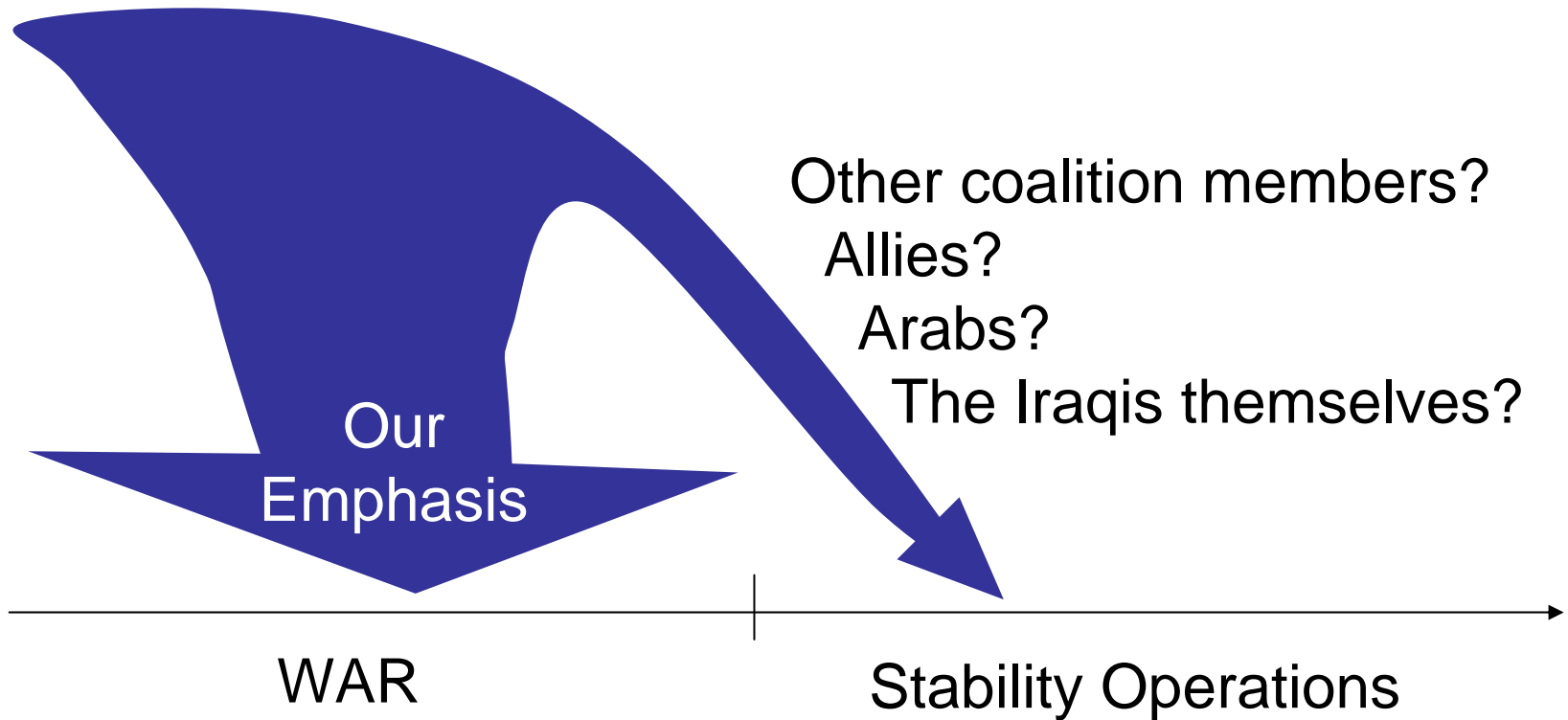


# Was Iraq inevitable?

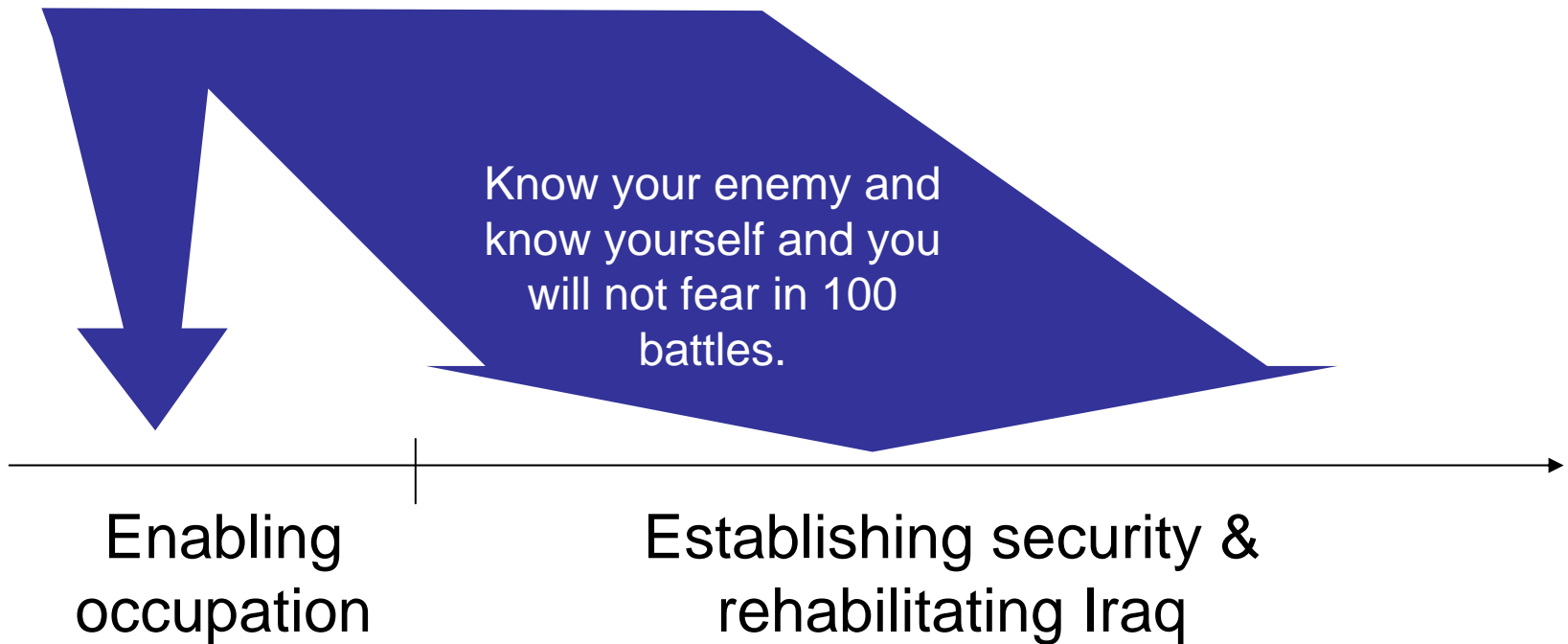
“None of this was inevitable.”



# What we did (Gordon & Trainor)



# What we should have done (Gordon & Trainor)



# The record on occupation, however, is mixed

- Japan & Germany (1940s & 50s) - successes
- Balkans (mid-1990s to present) - mixed results
- Not successful:
  - Vietnam
  - Afghanistan & Chechnya
  - Haiti
  - U.S. inner cities
  - Israel (of Lebanon, Gaza)
  - Soviet Union (of Warsaw Pact countries)

# The outcome in Iraq was inevitable.

- Unbridgeable cultural and religious divide
- Natural tendency to resist invaders & not submit to occupation
- Witches' brew of foreign fighters, fedayeen, jihadis, militias, etc.
- Failure to appreciate costs and consider alternatives
  - What other options could we have taken for \$320 BN?
  - Were our objectives essential to our national well-being or “nice-to-haves”?