Building organizational adaptive capacity: the U.S. Army’s performance in the Iraq War and its implications for the ROK Army

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This study delves into the issues of the U.S. Army’s adaptive capacity in the Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Phase IV. The author borrows the concept of organizational adaptive capacity while arguing that adaptive capacity framework can provide coherent theoretical explanations for the U.S. Army’s unsatisfactory performance in OIF Phase IV. The author, then, tries to apply the analysis of U.S. Army’s experience to the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army. The ROK Army has tried to follow the U.S. Army from doctrine to weapon systems and the author sees that there is a possibility that the ROK Army will be faced with similar challenges that the U.S. Army had to deal with. Thus, the author argues that drawing theoretical implications and lessons from U.S. experiences should be regarded important tasks for the ROK Army.

Introduction

By observing the performance of the U.S. Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Phase IV, there have been many observers who raised questions regarding the U.S. Army’s adaptive capacity. They think that the U.S. Army, as one of the key policy instruments of its Overseas Contingency Operations (formerly known as the War on Terror), should be able to adapt itself to different missions and environments. However, the Army’s performance in OIF Phase IV was disappointing. Many observers attribute the U.S. Army’s unsatisfactory performance in the Iraq War to various sources, ranging from problems in political leadership to ineffective weapons systems.

Several explanations, from various perspectives, have been offered as reasons for the unsatisfactory performance; however they all fall short of coherent theoretical explanations. This has happened because there is no comprehensive framework that can overarch issues of military operation and organizational theory. Acknowledging this and with the intent of establishing a tentative framework for further analysis, this study borrows the concept of organizational adaptive capacity and tries to explain the U.S. Army’s unsatisfactory performance in OIF Phase IV by applying this concept.

In the meantime, the U.S. Army’s experience in OIF Phase IV might be applied to the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army in many of the cases. It is because the ROK Army has tried to follow the example of the U.S. Army, from doctrine to weapon systems. Literally, the U.S. Army has been a role model for the ROK Army. If the U.S. Army has not been able to successfully adapt to counterinsurgency and

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reconstruction operations, the ROK Army would end up in a similar situation. Thus, studying the U.S. Army’s experience in Iraq might be an important task for the ROK Army.

In this article, I will (i) provide an overview of the adaptive capacity concept; (ii) examine the issues of the U.S. Army’s performance in OIF Phase IV in terms of adaptive capacity; and (iii) draw theoretical implications and lessons for the ROK Army.

Organizational adaptive capacity

Enhancing organizational adaptive capacity is important to the military. Like business firms which need to adapt to turbulent environments, the military, and especially the Army, needs to build its adaptive capacity to guarantee its successful handling of the full range of missions: peacekeeping operations, humanitarian relief operations, guerrilla warfare and major conventional warfare. Some commentators refer to this as building a full-spectrum force. Indeed, U.S. politicians and citizens expect the U.S. Army to become a full-spectrum force. They believe that the U.S. Army should revolutionize its units in order to guarantee the successful accomplishment of its various missions. In this sense, the U.S. Army’s manifest objective of establishing a full-spectrum force is closely related to the theoretical discussion of organizational adaptive capacity.

Adaptive capacity—theoretical perspective

The definition of adaptive capacity is “the ability to cope with unknown future circumstances.” Why, then, is adaptive capacity important? It is because every organization needs to cope with unpredictable environments. Organizational adaptive capacity explicitly emphasizes the ability of organizational change. Haeckel provides some implications regarding this aspect; according to him, an adaptive organization develops a four-phase (sense–interpret–decide–act) loop. By using the four phase loop, an organization can make sense of environmental signals, and internalize them, thus changing itself into a successful organization. Kenyon B. De Greene wrote, “[t]he adaptive organization must have an ongoing capability for anticipation of organizational and environmental reconfiguration, an ongoing capability for problem-solving, and an ongoing capability for managing difficulties and crises.” Thus, the most conspicuous characteristic of adaptive capacity concept is its emphasis on the ability of reacting to contingencies and crises.

How then is the concept of adaptive capacity different from adaptation? According to Staber and Sydow, adaptive capacity is different from adaptation in that adaptive capacity sees organizational change as “a dynamic process of continuous learning and adjustment that permits ambiguity and complexity.” Thus, learning is an important aspect of organizational adaptive capacity. While quoting Argyris and Schon, they conclude that organizational capacity for double-loop learning, which also means a higher level of organizational reflexivity, can lead an organization to a higher level of adaptive capacity. Haeckel emphasizes this aspect while arguing that his adaptive loop (sense–interpret–decide–act) may or may not trigger a learning process. He wrote, “[s]ystematic learning requires more than adaptation within a given context, it requires adaptation of the context itself.”
Recently, many scholars have delved into the relations between organizational adaptive capacity and organizational learning. Their question is how we can enhance organizational learning as a way of enhancing an organization’s adaptive capacity. While agreeing on the overall importance of organizational learning in achieving strategic renewal, many theorists have different views on how organizational learning occurs. Some scholars delve into the relations between organizational culture and organizational learning and how it might facilitate effective organizational learning. They argue that establishing a culture that promotes inquiry, openness, and trust is critical for organizational learning. Other scholars are interested in the institutionalization process or mechanism in which individually acquired discoveries, inventions, and evaluations can be transformed into organizational knowledge. Thus, these scholars argue that incorporating individual findings into the organizational process or structure is crucial for organizational learning.

What, then, are the characteristics of adaptive organization? In fact, many scholars of management science emphasize different aspects of adaptive organizations. For example, Staber and Sydow argue that an adaptive organization should have the characteristics of multiplexity, redundancy, and loose-coupling. De Greene also identifies several characteristics of adaptive organizations, namely, modularity, localization of problem solving/decision making/control, and permeable boundary. These are good references for establishing a comprehensive list of an adaptive organization’s characteristics and most of them can be applied to the U.S. Army.

The U.S. Army’s perspective on changing environments

The U.S. Army has exerted significant efforts to adapt itself to changing environments. Many analysts and military planners have recognized that the paradigm the U.S. Army has worked in has shifted and real change is necessary to address this drastic shift. Since the end of the Cold War, commentators like James Burk argue that the Armed Forces have been embedded in a totally different environment. He argues that traditional concepts of military threats need to be changed because threats are posed by sub-national and non-military entities. He points out that the perceived environment is no longer favorable to the Armed Forces, public attitudes are skeptical, and public support for the defense budget is weak. In addition, new missions do not seem to be completely understood and the need for working collaboratively with other nations’ armed forces as a coalition aggravates the difficulties. Table 1 shows how the military paradigm has shifted.

While the U.S. Army fully recognized the influence of this changing environment, Thomas L. McNaugher outlined challenges writing that:

Threats range from the Soviet-like conventional forces of Iraq and North Korea to guerrilla groups in Afghanistan or terrorist cells in the United States. Missions range from fighting wars to feeding people. . . . Clearly, these challenges call for an “expeditionary” U.S. Army, an organization prepared to deploy its forces globally, perhaps speedily.”

The efforts of making the U.S. Army adaptive to the changing environment are well documented in the concept of Army Transformation. The Army Transformation concept was addressed for the first time by General Shinseki in 1999 and it was
collective efforts to address changing environments and its missions. In fact, the U.S. Army tried to reform almost in its entirety.

Figure 1 is the blueprint of the Army Transformation. As one can see in the diagram, the construct encompasses all aspects of the Army functions. For example, the U.S. Army tries to accomplish the objectives by enhancing the DOTMLPF solutions, i.e. changes in doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Armed forces variable</th>
<th>Early modern (Pre-Cold War)</th>
<th>Late modern (Cold War)</th>
<th>Postmodern (Post-Cold War)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived threat</td>
<td>Enemy invasion</td>
<td>Nuclear war</td>
<td>Sub-national and non-military</td>
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<tr>
<td>Force structure</td>
<td>Mass army</td>
<td>Large professional army</td>
<td>Smaller professional army with reserve</td>
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<td>Public attitude toward</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
<td>Skeptical or apathetic</td>
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<td>Budget disputes</td>
<td>New missions</td>
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<td>Combat leader</td>
<td>Manager or technician</td>
<td>Soldier-statesmen; soldier-scholar</td>
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<td>Civilian employees</td>
<td>Minor component</td>
<td>Medium component</td>
<td>Major component</td>
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![Figure 1](image_url)
education, personnel and facilities (DOTMLPF). The Army tries to tailor those functions to construct responsive, deployable, agile, versatile, lethal, survivable, and sustainable forces. In essence, the Army fully recognizes that there is a need to revolutionize the way new security challenges are addressed and the Army Transformation Roadmap demonstrates this aspect. Why then did the U.S. Army have trouble in OIF Phase IV despite the excellent reality check?

Organizational factors that shaped the U.S. Army’s adaptive capacity in OIF Phase IV—an assessment

According to Kenneth M. Pollack, “the reconstruction of Iraq is not doomed to fail, but Washington does not yet have a strategy that can produce a stable, pluralistic and independent Iraq.” And he continues: “the U.S. focuses upon the wrong problems and employs the wrong solutions.” Pollack’s comment on the general U.S. Iraq policy can be used as a good excuse for the Army’s unsatisfactory performance in OIF Phase IV, however, the U.S. Army cannot fully take advantage of the excuse. According to Jones et al., many nation-building missions undertaken by the U.S. military during the post-Cold War era were not satisfactory. As Figure 2 shows, the Iraq case is the most problematic one in terms of violence. Thus, one needs to find causal factors other than the political conundrum to which many people attributed the U.S. Army’s stalemate in OIF Phase IV.

In the following sections, I will discuss several organizational dimensions that might shape the U.S. Army’s adaptive capacity in the OIF Phase IV. Since I see the U.S. Army’s adaptive capacity was problematic in OIF Phase IV, the discussion in this section can be regarded as a step for defining problems. Five organizational dimensions will be used in defining problems of the U.S. Army’s adaptive capacity. They come from the theoretical discussion and U.S. Army’s perspectives for

![Figure 2](image_url)

**Figure 2.** The assessment of the US military’s nation-building missions.
changing the environment, which were the topics dealt with in the previous sections. The first two organizational dimensions are structure and culture. Much of scholarly research on adaptive capacity and organizational learning have dealt with these issues and I think that they are also crucial issues for the U.S. Army. Other organizational dimensions adopted for analyzing the U.S. Army’s adaptive capacity are human resources, weapons systems, and doctrine and networking issues. These three factors were added since, I believe, an analyst should incorporate the idiosyncrasies of the military in delving into organizational issues of the armed forces. The military has developed specific approaches for the analyses of military affairs and, in this study, they should be regarded importantly. Below, I will discuss five organizational factors which, I postulate, have affected the current status of the U.S. Army’s adaptive capacity.

Structure

Questions about structural issues might be narrowed down to two related inquiries—the first is of general in nature. That is, the U.S. Army demonstrates vulnerabilities in dealing with insurgencies, which have, by definition, amorphous characteristics. In other words, insurgencies with characteristics such as “covert networks,” often outmaneuver the Army with its traditional and/or bureaucratic structure. Indeed, this problem is not confined to the Army. It affects most traditional organizations, since organizational environments in almost every sector, public or private, pose similar challenges to those the U.S. Army faces with insurgencies, even though the failure in addressing those challenges are not necessarily lethal in the case of organizations other than the U.S. Army. In fact, early adopters in the business world, for example Nike Corporation, tried to reform their structure following the Hollow Corporation, or Boundary-less Organization model. These models have been employed to specifically deal with turbulent and competitive environmental pressures. Unfortunately, the U.S. Army has demonstrated problems in adapting its structure to heightened levels of turbulence despite the efforts of transformation.

The second problem is more specific. That is, the U.S. Army as a whole has been forced to accommodate a completely different mission—unconventional warfare operations. Indeed, OIF Phase IV was about providing security to the Iraqi people and assisting in the reconstruction of the infrastructure and the creation of a democratic government. This kind of operation is 180 degrees different from the mission the U.S. Army originally undertook. Considering the U.S. Army’s bureaucratic structure, the required change was too broad and too deep to accomplish within a short period of time.

Indeed, the U.S. Army has already acknowledged the importance of this new kind of operation and has poured a great deal of effort into embracing the new missions. However, questions remain concerning the U.S. Army’s success in changing its structural appropriateness in line with the new mission. Some commentators even argue that the Army has implicitly ignored the importance of counterinsurgency operations and the necessity of tailoring its force structure. That is, the Army has ignored or has not prepared to establish appropriate force structure that is crucial in a counterinsurgency and peacekeeping operation. It appears to be true, as the Army puts more emphasis on technology in future development plans such as Force XXI and Future Combat System plans and less emphasis on force structure. In fact, the
U.S. Army’s structure has been organized in order to emphasize strong fire power and rapid deployment since it pursues a clean war in which soldiers’ roles might be minimized and casualties can be averted. However, as we have seen in OIF Phase IV, this sort of structural characteristic is not appropriate in counterinsurgency operations. In counterinsurgency operations, the use of fire power should be restrained. A more critical mission is building trust with the target population. In order to accomplish this mission, soldiers must be motivated to connect with the target population. Therefore, the force should be organized with an emphasis on manpower and the U.S. Army failed to do this.

Culture
In regard to the U.S. Army’s culture and its relation to the situation in the Iraq war, Aylwin-Foster presented a thought-provoking issue in answering to the question, “What was the problem with the U.S. Army in OIF Phase IV?” He argued that the U.S. Army’s culture is the main cause of its problems in Iraq. That is, the U.S. Army’s culture is well-fitted to conventional warfare, but it does not fit well with unconventional operations like those experienced in OIF Phase IV. In other words, it has overly emphasized the importance of conventional warfare and this has prevented it from exerting adequate efforts for adapting the Army to unconventional operations. In the same context, Hoffman argues that the U.S. military failed to adapt adequately after the Vietnam War because of its institutional weakness, poor organizational learning, largely due to its cultural legacy—an institutional preference for conventional warfare. Hoffman sees that the U.S. Army has the opportunity to learn from its history and experience, but organizational learning is hampered by its culture. In the meantime, English argues that the U.S. Army demonstrated a non-adaptive culture “characterized by cautious leaders who try to protect their own interests by behaving insularly, politically, and bureaucratically.” Therefore, he argues that many of the leaders in the U.S. Army show a tendency toward resisting meaningful change to the system. Thus, one can argue that the reluctance to learn and resistance to change solidify the “American Way of War.” Hoffman argues as follows:

As a result, the American Way of War since Vietnam has emphasized “fighting and winning the Nation’s wars,” instead of advancing U.S. national interests in ambiguous situations including peacekeeping and constabulary functions. This has produced a mindset described as an American Way of Battles. The tension between the rising instability of a post-Cold War world and the inclination of the American military culture were manifested by a pronounced reluctance to engage in stability operations in the Balkans, Haiti and Somalia in the 1990s.

Other scholars like Jeffery Record pointed out that Pentagon planners have put undue emphasis on technology in seeking military solutions. While seeing this as a basic assumption prevalent among military planners, he argues that this might be an effective strategy for conventional warfare, but not for unconventional or post-modern warfare. That is, as a response to the conventional military primacy which enabled the United States to crush the Baathist government in Iraq, insurgencies adopt asymmetric ways of waging war, such as relying on irregular warfare and using inhumane tactics. As a result, the conventional primacy of the United States loses its advantage in such situations. Ironically, military planners still seek technology-driven
solutions in facing these new challenges because culturally ingrained assumptions cannot be changed easily.

Lewis and Aylwin-Foster shed light on a different aspect regarding the relationship between the cultural characteristics of the Army and its performance in Iraq. Conceptualizing the Army’s culture as a zero defect mentality, micromanagement, and lack of trust, Lewis claims that the Army’s culture is an important cause of the recent exodus of junior officers. Following Lewis’ argument, Aylwin-Foster contends that those cultural characteristics and the junior officers’ exodus caused deprofessionalization of the Army; that is, “junior officers’ exodus degraded the Army’s effectiveness and caused a downward spiral of increasing attrition and inexperience.” Indeed junior officers, especially captains, hold important positions since the captains, as company commanders in counterinsurgency operations, serve as a link between soldiers and senior commanders. Therefore, the higher attrition of captains means a loss of organizational knowledge, experience, and communication channels. Aylwin-Foster further argues that the deprofessionalization reinforces the Army’s zero-defect mentality and lack of trust because senior officers try to control their inexperienced subordinates more tightly in an effort to avoid errors.

Rosen et al. observed another aspect of the Army’s culture. They recognize the Army’s culture as one of hypermasculinity (exaggerated, extreme, or stereotypical masculine attributes and behaviors). This cultural characteristic of hypermasculinity is imparted during the informal socialization process, and is reinforced in social settings in the military. Actually, this cultural characteristic may not necessarily be a detrimental factor in accomplishing the Army’s mission. However, I think that this cultural trait poses an indirect impact by perpetuating the Army’s “Big War” mentality and adherence to conventional ways of waging war. In this context, Pollack quotes an American Special Forces officer, “[m]ost guys in the Army are taught to kill people and destroy things, but counterinsurgency warfare is about how to protect people and build things.” This comment exemplifies the difference between the Army’s role in conventional warfare and counterinsurgency warfare and echoes the differences of the underlying assumptions, which have to do with cultural traits.

It can be argued that no organizational aspect of the Army has received less attention than culture by military planners. Even though the Army Transformation Roadmap tries to encompass almost every organizational dimension of the Army, culture has not been fully emphasized. Thus, expansive empirical research is needed to examine the relationship between the Army’s culture and its performance in the OIF Phase IV. Nevertheless, it seems evident that some detrimental cultural characteristics of U.S. Army had a negative influence on organizational performance and adaptive capacity in OIF Phase IV.

**Human resources**

The U.S. Army has two major problems when it comes to human resource issues. The first problem is the loss of experience and knowledge resulting from the high turnover rate in the units. By its nature, counterinsurgency warfare imposes a high degree of combat stress on soldiers. If the operations take place in an urban area, the stress will spike toward a hard-to-manage level. Therefore, the Army’s policy of 12-month (or less) tours of duty is reasonable in terms of relieving these stresses.
However, there is another aspect of this 12-month tour policy. According to Pollack, “units barely have time to become proficient before they depart. The constant turnover of units means that a tremendous amount of accumulated knowledge is regularly lost.”34 It means that the Army as a whole has to continually relearn the same lessons on the battlefield.

Second, the problem is further exacerbated by the communication problems between soldiers and the Iraqi population. This may also be caused by a shortage of able personnel. Successful counterinsurgency operations require a trust-building process between the Army and the local population. In order to gain this trust, soldiers need to walk into the midst of the local population, meet with them and their leaders, recognize their security needs, gather information about the insurgents, and assure them of the Army’s capacity and willingness to provide sustainable security. However, because of ignorance of the Iraqi culture and language, soldiers cannot achieve the desired outcomes. These activities are in addition to actual combat, albeit a very important mission. The Army’s continued loss of valuable knowledge and experience, due to the exodus of junior officers and the 12-month tour policy were barriers to accomplishing this important mission.

**Weapons systems**

As worldwide urbanization continues, soldiers will have an increasing need to accomplish their missions in face-to-face street fighting. The primary combat fields of OIF Phase IV are urban environments. Combat in urban areas requires totally different weapons systems than does combat in rural and/or unpopulated areas. Indeed, urban warfare, combined with counterinsurgency operations, demands specialized weapons systems such as a better night vision system and wall-buster weapons. Nevertheless, according to Major General Scales, the U.S. military is not appropriately equipped. His argument is as follows:35

With the possible exception of night-vision devices, Global Positioning Systems, and shoulder-fired missiles, an American infantryman has no appreciable technological advantage in a close battle against even the poorest, most primitive enemy. . . . Too many soldiers and Marines die needlessly because they enter the tactical fight without adequate protection.

Major General Roger Nadeau, who heads the U.S. Army’s Research and Development Command, addressed the Army’s weapon system wish list for urban operations:

Better night-vision devices for soldiers and vehicles, sensors to allow troops to see through walls and buildings, active protection systems for vehicles that work in short-range urban environments, and even an improved bunker-busting type weapon to allow soldiers to breach walls.36

In short, considering the characteristics of urban areas, soldiers should be provided with forms of devices that can fulfill the information needs as well as weapon systems that are customized in urban battlefield.

In fact, the U.S. Army already recognizes the need for such futuristic weapons systems and, as a result, has instituted the Future Combat Systems (FCS) program. FCS is a US$120 billion project and its purpose is to make the Army a more modern and more capable force.37 The initiatives of the FCS program largely focus on
developing 18 manned and unmanned maneuvering systems and supporting systems. The U.S. Army’s foremost emphasis on this program is acquiring lighter, more lethal and more easily deployable weapons systems. After accomplishing this, the U.S. Army wants to combine these systems into a cohesive network. Therefore, as an U.S. Army official suggested, the objective of FCS is to fill the gap between current capabilities of the Army and the desired status, recognized during the OIF. Again, the difference between the FCS and current capability of the U.S. Army’s weapon systems can be identified as modernization needs. Now, the question arises whether this seemingly excellent plan will suffice the needs from real world situations.

Other factors

Some other factors that can influence the adaptive capacity of the U.S. Army are doctrine and the ability to attract outside assistance. There have been persistent arguments that U.S. military doctrine should be changed to include the heightened security environment of post-9/11. Critics see that this will require a paradigm shift regarding the “how to fight” concept. Friedman sees that the U.S. military should review its military doctrine in an effort to address the changing nature of modern threats. He describes similarities between the logistics networks of discount stores in the United States and the suicide bomber procurement networks in Iraq.

The fact is that Western intelligence agencies have no clue how this underground suicide supply chain, which seems to have an infinite pool of recruits to draw on, works, and yet it has basically stymied the U.S. armed forces in Iraq. . . . Just as you take an item off the shelf in a discount store in Birmingham and another one is immediately made in Beijing, so the retailers of suicide deploy a human bomber in Baghdad and another one is immediately recruited and indoctrinated in Beirut.38 That is a stunning metaphor and effectively delivers a message that new threats can hardly be deterred using bureaucratic ways of waging war. Friedman, then, argues that defeating terrorist network require “a major rethinking of U.S. military doctrine.”39

Also, critics like Hoffman argue that the U.S. military needs to rethink its “Big War” orientation because its relevance to the nature of today’s threats is questionable. Also, the U.S. military needs to put more emphasis on the termination process of war, or the process of winning the peace, because a war is not actually over until the termination process is properly done.40 Thus, when it comes to the problem of doctrine and its influence on adaptive capacity, the U.S. Army’s adherence to the “Big War” concept and its doctrine’s disconnectedness to post-war operations make the U.S. Army’s strategic stance inflexible.

In the meantime, some analysts argue that the Department of Defense (DoD) should have asked for cooperation from other departments when it comes to mobilizing funding and personnel, which are required in reconstructing Iraq. Rathmell et al. argue that most of the resources needed in peacekeeping and reconstruction processes were too few and were provided too late.41 Because the Bush administration and the DoD wanted to maintain a stable command and control hierarchy, they did not try to seek cooperation from other departments. As a result, many officers needed to take on responsibilities for which they were untrained
and to which they were unaccustomed. Because these new responsibilities were imposed so abruptly, the officers were not prepared. It was beyond their capacity.

**Implications for the ROK Army**

*Adaptation perspective versus adaptive capacity perspective*

In the previous sections, I pointed out several organizational issues the U.S. Army presented in OIF Phase IV. Also, I touched on the U.S. Army’s future plan in an effort to manifest the underlying assumptions the U.S. Army demonstrated as a whole. With those discussions, one may conclude that there is much to be done for the U.S. Army to enhance learning capacity and capacity for ongoing adjustment, which is crucial for accomplishing various tasks in the future environment. My observation is that, as some scholars argued, the U.S. Army did not pay much attention to learning and institutionalization of learning. This can be further supported by the facts that some scholars find the U.S. Army’s institutional preference for conventional warfare.

What, then, does this mean to the ROK Army? I believe that this is an important question since most of the ROK Army planners have been trying to follow the track of the U.S. Army. One can easily postulate that the ROK Army was likely to make the same mistakes as the U.S. Army if they had been managing the same tasks within the same context. The ROK Army will be locked in U.S Army legacies, if it makes no special efforts to cut off links from its precedents. Considering the notion of “path-dependency” this is a highly probable scenario.

At the beginning of this article, I discussed the differences between adaptation and adaptive capacity. The former emphasizes core competencies, streamlining routines, and tightening resource belts and the latter focuses on continuous learning and adjustment. With the examination of five important factors that shaped the U.S. Army’s adaptive capacity, one can argue that the U.S. Army does not fully recognize the difference between adaptation and adaptive capacity and, on average, they merely follow the adaptation perspective. Even though some people may argue that the U.S. Army has developed excellent plans in the area of weapons systems procurement by connecting them to the changing environment, which can be postulated as a result of learning, in this author’s view all of those efforts are closely related to adaptation perspective. This can be extended to the argument that the U.S. Army’s unsatisfactory performance in OIF Phase IV seems to have originated from its over-reliance on the adaptation perspective.

What perspective, then, does the ROK Army rely on? It can be argued that the ROK Army also values the adaptation perspective over the adaptive capacity perspective. Even though this argument should be supported with many relevant cases, I can provide, at least, one case; That is, the ROK military including the Army is obsessed with the acquisition of “fancy” weapons systems in an effort to attain technological superiority over North Korea. In fact, there is a long wish list of costly weapons systems contained in Defense Reform 2020. Needless to say, many people are already questioning the fiscal feasibility of the recently revised version of Defense Reform 2020. Also, it is an open question whether planners of Defense Reform 2020 did not miss important aspects other than maintaining technological superiority. As we have seen in the case of the U.S. Army in OIF, it is highly probable
that technology-intensive systems cannot by itself guarantee the process of winning the peace or smooth termination of the next war. We need to keep an eye on factors other than technological superiority because a war is not actually over until the termination process is properly done. In this context, the ROK Army needs to work on other perspectives than the adaptation perspective and I believe that the ROK Army needs to follow the adaptive capacity perspective in order not to make the same mistakes as the U.S. Army. With such a changed perspective, the ROK Army can focus on enhancing learning capacity and ongoing adjustment. In the following section, I will present implications for the ROK Army from the experience of the U.S. Army and theoretical discussions.

**Lesson-drawing for the ROK Army**

As for the organizational structure, retaining a diverse force structure should be regarded as a basic principle. Korea’s future security environment will be governed by unpredictability and the best way to cope with the unpredictability is enhancing the capacity to deal with it. As one can see in Ashby’s law of requisite variety, only variety can force down the variety due to the disturbance. Thus, variety in force structure would be important in coping with unpredictable security environments. Some of the units can comprise intensively organized manpower, while other units might be organized in a technology-intensive way. However, current organizational structures of the ROK Army are somewhat monolithic and similar to those of the U.S. Army. It is understandable, considering the fact that the U.S. Army has been the role model for the ROK Army. I believe that the ROK Army’s force structures are the products of interactions between some of the most perpetuating institutional characteristics of the U.S. Army such as the “Big War” mentality, obsession with technological superiority, and technology-driven problem-solving patterns. However, in order not to have to learn the same lessons the U.S. Army has had to learn, the ROK Army needs to retain various kinds of force structures. This would enhance the ROK Army’s capacity in dealing with unpredictability and ambiguity.

With respect to culture, the ROK Army has to review its culture. In most cases, reviewing culture does not interest military planners. As mentioned above, they are oriented toward technology-driven problem-solving patterns. That is, you need a long shopping list of weapon systems in order to cope with the turbulent security environment. However, as some commentators argued, culture is important. Aylwin-Foster and some other scholars shed light on the influence of culture. They even argued that culture is the primary source of the U.S. Army’s stalemate in OIF Phase IV. This might be risky argumentation since it may lead to cultural determinism. However, I believe that the argument should be regarded as a wake-up call regarding the current situation. As mentioned earlier, there has been intentional or unintentional negligence among planners regarding the importance of culture. In the meantime, considering cultural characteristics such as formalism and over-reliance on hierarchy that Korean society demonstrates, this would be the same or even worse in the case of the ROK Army. Thus, ROK Army planners need to initiate a review of ROK Army culture. During the review process, ROK Army planners should take some commentators’ arguments seriously that the U.S. Army should try to build trust and need to reopen the communication channels. It is because trust and openness are the most important factors of adaptive organization and it should be
applied to the ROK Army. I believe that it is a very appropriate time for the ROK army to take stock of its culture and its relationship with organizational adaptive capacity.

Regarding the human resource issues, the ROK Army needs to take some measures through which individually acquired knowledge and experience can transform into institutional memory. In the case of the U.S. Army, many junior officers got out of the Army and this led to a huge loss of organizational knowledge. According to many scholars, the junior officers’ exodus was due to the U.S. Army’s detrimental culture and ill-managed personnel policy. I do not think that the ROK Army is immune to these problems. In fact, the ROK Army has experienced a huge loss of institutional memory on a regular basis. Over 200,000 individuals, including conscripted soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and junior officers leave the service every year. As a matter of fact, they leave with acquired knowledge and experience. This problem will be exacerbated once the Defense Reform 2020 shortens the obligatory service period of drafted soldiers from 24 months to 18 months. Thus, it is evident that the ROK Army should take some actions in the realm of human resource policy in order to preserve organizational knowledge and to minimize the loss of organizational learning capacity.

When it comes to weapons systems, I argued that most of the efforts in the U.S. Army’s dealing with turbulent security environments have been exerted in the area of weapons systems development and the ROK Army has tried to learn from the U.S. Army. Thus, ensuring technological superiority over enemies has been one of the top priorities of the U.S. and ROK Armies. The U.S. Army went further by trying to acquire quick deployment capacity with the procurement of lightweight weapons systems. However, a lesson from the Iraqi battlefield is that the U.S. Army needs to retain diverse weapons systems, because some weapons systems, such as heavily armored M1A1 tanks, which are not light and readily deployable, were highly effective in the Iraqi battlefields. This is an important lesson since we may have to fight with a poorly equipped but asymmetrically benefited enemy while working on reconstruction and peace building. ROK Army planners need to incorporate the lessons in procuring future weapons systems. In fact, considering the topological characteristics of the Korean peninsula, the effectiveness of state-of-the-art weapon systems would be reduced and the ROK Army needs to prepare for this. Moreover, the recent global economic crisis imposes significant political and financial pressures for the acquisition of expensive weapons systems on the ROK Army. Thus, the ROK Army should find a smart way of equipping its forces that can guarantee the enhancement of its adaptive capacity.

Finally, I also briefly discussed doctrine and cooperation issues as the factors which have some influence on the adaptive capacity of the U.S. Army. Doctrine affects nearly every aspect of the organization, from defining threats to how to fight. Because of this, there is a need to examine what constitutes the ROK Army’s doctrine and how the doctrine has evolved over time. When it comes to doctrinal issues, the ROK Army’s position is “path-dependent” to its previous choices since it has accumulated precedents of habitual learning from the U.S. Army. In the meantime, since the U.S. Army has experienced stalemate in Iraq, examining its doctrine should be an important task for the ROK Army. If there is a need to change, it should be revised appropriately. With respect to cooperation with other departments, it should be regarded as a prerequisite. ROK Army planners need to
pay proper attention to networking issues with other departments. A war cannot be successfully ended without the whole-of-government approach and smooth inter-agency coordination. Considering the ROK Army is still working on the realization of “jointness” among services, enhancing networking capacity with other departments would be a challenging task. However, it has to accomplish it.

Conclusion
There are many research papers, government reports and monographs out there that have tried to draw lessons from the Iraq War. I believe many defense analysts of the world have read some of them in an effort to get information about what the U.S. Army is thinking that they have learned from the Iraq war and how they will react to those lessons. These will draw academic interest as well as practical attention for a while. In the meantime, the author’s academic interest, in writing this article, was to identify a link between organizational theory and the lessons learned in OIF Phase IV. With a proposed framework for the analysis, discussions were made by arguing the difference between the adaptation perspective and the adaptive capacity perspective. Practical attention was paid to applying the analysis to the ROK Army. Suggestions for the ROK Army are largely focused on the “intangibles” of organizations, such as culture, organizational learning, structure, underlying assumptions of weapon system procurement.

Suggestions and theoretical analysis presented in this article leave room for future analyses. Some analysts will want to study these issues with a heightened level of theoretical rigor while others will try to provide practical suggestions. However, the bottom line is that the arguments made in this study echo the importance of perspective change. As mentioned earlier, politicians and citizens want the Army to be an adaptive Army, a full-spectrum force. I believe that the establishment of a full spectrum force could be backed up by the facilitation of theoretical and practical studies on building organizational adaptive capacity.

Notes
6. Ibid. Staber and Sydow introduce adaptation perspective as follows: “Organizations following this approach tend to adopt a ‘lean and mean’ strategy, focusing on their core competencies, streamlining routines, and tightening resource belts,” 408.
7. Ibid. Double-loop learning occurs while questioning the existing norms, values, and objectives of an organization. It is different from single-loop learning which connotes mere correction of deviated behaviors or consequences. Organizational reflexivity means the ongoing interplay between organization and environment, 410.


11. Multiplexity is defined as “the number and diversity of relations among actors in organizations or inter-organizational networks,” Staber and Sydow, “Organizational Adaptive Capacity,” 416. Redundancy means resource slack which was regarded as the target of reduction in traditional organization theory but is considered positively from an adaptive capacity perspective. Loosely-coupled organization designates a set of organization which is the aggregation of relatively independent parts. Staber and Sydow, “Organizational Adaptive Capacity,” 417.


15. This is a whole system approach when it comes to discussing organizational change. This approach is helpful because it prevents the coexistence of new and old systems. Indeed, organizational change needs to be dealt with as a whole rather than in a case-by-case manner.


18. Ibid. According to Pollack, the Bush administration focused on the insurgency not the failed-state.


20. The author discussed these two issues in the same section because what doctrinal issues and networking issues with other departments have in common is that they are, in essence, about the way of doing business.

21. Jorg Raab and H. Brinton Milward, “Dark Networks as Problems,” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 13, no. 4 (2003): 413–39. Rabb and Milwar used this term to designate the network used for criminal or immoral ends. They also emphasize that the social problems posed by covert networks cannot be contained within the boundaries of one organization. Therefore, they argue that collaboration among overt networks is essential to solving problems because the problem is bigger than any single organization.

22. ‘Hollow Corporation’ is a concept describes a company that outsourced almost everything. In a highly competitive business world, many leading companies have adopted this business model. This concept is closely related to the concept of ‘Boundary–less Organization.’ If a company’s core tasks are taken place elsewhere due to outsourcing, one cannot tell what is inside or outside of the company.


24. In this sense, the Army’s future plan of building “Objective Forces” could be challenged because the plan unvaryingly seeks technology-driven, light and readily deployable units.


34. Ibid., 37.
37. The U.S. Army explains the objective of the FCS as “Lessons learned in Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Global War on Terrorism have shown that a joint, combined arms, network centric force has the ability to both rapidly defeat an enemy in battle and act as a key element in follow-on peacekeeping efforts. The Army is using these lessons to fundamentally transform into a faster, more agile force with superior situational awareness and power projection capability,” http://www.fcs.army.mil/index.html.
42. Path-dependent situation is that new initiatives are invariably limited by previous decision sets. That is, when the ROK Army follows the U.S. Army’s track, the choice is self-reinforcing and it has long-lasting influence.
43. In 2008, *Joong Ang Ilbo* published an interesting article which used a metaphor of “a spoiled student” for Korean military. He used the metaphor because the Korean military resembles a student who did not make sincere efforts to study hard while he keeps on asking for better books and other supplies, Min-Suk Kim, “Disappointing Defense Reform Plan revision,” *Joong Ang Ilbo*, November 26, 2008.
44. Defense Reform 2020 is a South Korean Government’s force modernization plan mainly written by the Ministry of National Defense of Korea. It officially went public on September 13, 2005.

**Notes on contributor**

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