Ending the War
At the peak of coalition military operations in Iraq, in 2008, the United States Government (USG) operated roughly 500 military bases and embassy locations and supplied an estimated 320,000+ soldiers, diplomats, US civil government staff, and contracted personnel in Iraq. In addition to military operations and diplomatic arrangements, the USG was executing reconstruction and development programs in every sector of society in all 18 provinces of Iraq.

With the departure of the US military, over 700 DOD* operations were transitioned to DOS* or GOD* in categories of security, communications, etc. (Brennan). Knowledge Management (KM) was one of 13 “lines of transition” tracked by the most senior USG military and diplomatic leadership in Iraq.

The KM Transition ensured that the intelligence, relationships, capacity building and reconstruction developed over the previous eight years in Iraq could continue to be leveraged by the US Mission after 2011.

Success and Failure: Explanations
Degrading degrees of success in capturing (success), sharing (partial success), and developing the culture to acquire and use (fail) critical knowledge seem connected to specific phenomena identified by social informatics research (Kling, et al.), such as temporal and spatial constraints, diverse theories and fears about knowledge among participants, and political and systemic issues in the relevant organizations. As participants would never return to Iraq to use the knowledge, they had little incentive to exert much effort (Grudin).

Combat and Librarianship
The author’s service in Iraq initially focused on libraries. Colleagues named her “Combat Librarian.” KM activities resembled combat in degree of difficulty and complexity. COL John R. Boyd’s theories of military strategy (Coram) are useful metaphors for KM activities in Iraq:

- **Observe, Orient, Decide, Act (OODA loop)**
- **Energy-manoeuvrability equation: P=W/T**

Conclusions
Key strategic resources for ongoing US diplomacy in Iraq would not have been available without a dedicated KM approach that incorporated sociotechnical principles and executed strategies and tactics with flexibility and fortitude in the face of resistance. Lessons learned can inform KM in non-combat settings.

References

