



# Battlefield Victories and Strategic Success: The Path Forward in Iraq

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*This article is dedicated to the 2d Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82d Airborne Division, paratroopers who set out daily to accomplish their duty to help the good people of Iraq achieve a better life. Their courage, selflessness, care for their comrades, and compassion for the innocent people of Iraq were inspirational for all to see. The author also thanks Major Andrew Ulrich, Captain Matthew Adamczyk, Colonel James Klingaman, Lieutenant Colonel John Kem, Lieutenant Colonel David Anders, Colonel Jeffrey Bailey, Mr. Steve Traver, Major Thomas Earnhardt, Lieutenant Colonel Carmine Apicella, Major Randall Weisner, Dr. Kori Schake, Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, Colonel H.R. McMaster, and Mr. Lawrence Kaplan for their helpful comments on earlier drafts.*

PHOTO: 2-325th Infantry at an awards ceremony in Tal Afar in December 2005. (U.S. Army)

THE ARMY is going through a period of introspection regarding its counterinsurgency (COIN) practices and their effectiveness in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> Opinions vary on this topic, but I doubt three years ago anyone could have predicted the current situation in which we find ourselves. Hence, the time is right for a critical conversation.

My task force—2d Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82d Airborne Division—recently returned from its second short-notice deployment to Iraq in less than a year and a half. We served in Baghdad and Mosul from December 2004 to April 2005 and in Tal Afar from September 2005 to January 2006. Fate put us at the center of the insurgency in northern Iraq both times.

Originally deployed to secure the dangerous Airport Road in Baghdad, we were ordered to Mosul with no notice after the 22 December 2004 Mosul dining-facility bombing. We found ourselves in significant battles with the enemy immediately on arriving in Mosul. Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), chiefly the police force, had collapsed after synchronized insurgent attacks on police stations on 10 November, and the security situation was so serious that several battalions, including my own, were sent to reinforce Multi-National Force, Northwest (MNF-NW).

Attached to the 25th Infantry Division's (25th ID's) Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), we battled our foe throughout the month of January, ultimately prevailing and setting the conditions in our zone for the first-ever free national elections in Iraq, on 30 January 2005. Through aggressive combat operations and with the help of useful information from locals, we defeated insurgent cells and secured the streets, thereby averting a potential strategic defeat. (As late as December 2004, political leaders were seriously contemplating not holding elections in Mosul.)<sup>2</sup>

Four and a half months after redeploying from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF II), we were sent back to Iraq and attached to the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) to help liberate and stabilize the insurgent safe haven of Tal Afar, in Ninevah province. Tal Afar has been the focus of considerable media coverage over the past year.<sup>3</sup> In early 2005, while coalition forces in the north focused on defeating the insurgency in Mosul, enemy fighters took control of

the dense urban terrain of Tal Afar, a city just 40 miles from the Syrian border and a staging base for terrorist training and safe passage throughout Iraq. By spring 2005, Islamic extremists led primarily by former regime elements had established a tight grip on the city. They took over schools and mosques and intimidated, kidnapped, or murdered those cooperating with the coalition or Iraqi Government. With unfettered freedom of movement, the insurgents created a sanctuary for the ideological indoctrination of uneducated, unemployed teenage youths and a training base from which to launch attacks on coalition and Iraqi forces. All of this inflamed sectarian tensions, stimulating widespread violence and chaos.

Coalition forces sent in the 3d ACR to conduct Operation Restoring Rights (ORR). After shaping operations and a final assault, the city was liberated. Our battalion task force moved into the violent Sarai neighborhood and transitioned to stability operations within 72 hours. What set this operation apart from earlier ones in Tal Afar and other areas across Iraq was the highly developed and well-resourced phase IV (post-assault/stability) dimension of the campaign plan. My paratroopers were committed to living and operating in the same neighborhoods we liberated.

As ORR unfolded, U.S. forces worked closely with the ISF throughout the 3d ACR sector obtaining actionable intelligence from the local population to defeat insurgent cells; enabling secure, widely participated-in elections; and in general helping northwestern Iraq enjoy a more stable life. Although by U.S. standards Mosul and Tal Afar remain dangerous places to live, conditions are emerging which favor lasting peace throughout Ninevah province.

## Defeating the Insurgency

Our COIN tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) were consistent with the current administration's direction to "clear, hold, build." We addressed—

- Establishing security by gaining situational awareness, developing intelligence, and dominating the battlespace.
- Affiliating with the local populace.
- Developing the ISF.
- Strengthening civilian institutions.



We pursued these aims concurrently, although security was the first among equals.

## Security

The central task of COIN forces is to secure the populace from the insurgents. When locals perceive COIN forces as working in their best interests, they tend to provide more useful information regarding terrorist activity. Additionally, once the population accepts COIN forces and decides it will no longer host the insurgency, stability and victory are close at hand.<sup>4</sup> However, there is no doubt that before any meaningful affiliation can occur, friendly forces

***No amount of money or kindness, and no number of infrastructure programs, will facilitate winning over the populace if COIN forces cannot provide security to the population.***

must demonstrate their competence, particularly the ability to secure the population from the enemy with precision operations and fires (when necessary) while minimizing collateral damage. No amount of money or kindness, and no number of infrastructure programs, will facilitate winning over the populace if COIN forces cannot provide security to the population. Without security, nothing else matters.

**A nuanced, balanced approach.** Kinetic/offensive operations occupy one end of the COIN spectrum; at the other end are economic and social incentives and programs to sway the populace and eliminate the conditions causing the insurgency. Given our mistakes over the first three years in Iraq, the soft operations seem to be gaining in popularity. Some now suggest we can neutralize and defeat insurgencies primarily by addressing sewage, water, electricity, and trash removal (SWET) deficiencies and by providing medical and other types of humanitarian support. Such initiatives are essential to the political, economic, and social reconstruction of Iraq and help COIN forces affiliate with the local populace, but we should not delude ourselves: these soft operations alone will not stabilize Iraq. What we need is a balanced and nuanced approach built upon situationally aware COIN forces exercising sound judgment as they pursue operations across the full spectrum.

**Convince the people.** COIN forces must be able to convince the people that they can provide security. Without that, locals will not associate themselves with—or even be seen in the presence of—security forces, since doing so invites terrorist violence on themselves and their families. Once security is established, however, locals can see that COIN forces offer a better vision for the future than the insurgent forces do. In Ninevah Province, initially in concert with ISF units, and thereafter with the ISF in the lead and us in support, coalition forces provided security and assistance to facilitate the emergence of increasingly competent civilian authorities.

**Work deliberately.** To achieve dominance, we used a deliberate approach.<sup>5</sup> We began by attempting to understand the zone's pre-2003 history. We studied tactical problem sets, sought to understand our enemy and the population harboring him, and looked for patterns in the places, tactics, and techniques of attacks. What was the nature of the insurgent forces in our zone? Was the enemy monolithic, or was he made up of varying elements (religious

**...our own actions largely played into the attack locations our enemy chose. With that understanding came opportunity.**

extremists, foreign fighters, criminals working for money)? What was his source of strength? What were his vulnerabilities? Where did he strike? Who was he targeting and why? Where were his infiltration routes? Where did he meet, train, and live? How was he financed?

To answer these questions, we needed intelligence sources. We directed our intelligence toward those priority intelligence requirements and found that the enemy repeated his attack patterns until he was made to pay in blood for his deeds. We also noticed a correlation between where we traveled and where we were attacked. As we studied our enemy and attempted to determine his likely places of attack, we recognized that our own actions largely played into the attack locations our enemy chose. With that understanding came opportunity.

**Know the people.** To dominate the zone, we had to gain access to the populace. In both Mosul and Tal Afar, to enhance the *perception* of security we lived in combat outposts in neighborhoods, not in a forward operating base. The first two weeks in zone, we saturated our battlespace, putting 100 percent of our combat forces out in the area of operations (AO) to conduct constant patrols. We employed a combination of dismounted, mounted, and mixed (mounted and dismounted) reconnaissance patrols and tasked them with specific information requirements: Who are the local leaders? What is their perception of security? Their vision for the future? What is the status of basic services? Who are the people fomenting violence or otherwise intimidating the locals?<sup>6</sup> To show good faith, we issued claims cards for U.S. damages inflicted during the ORR main attack. These gave us opportunities to interact with locals and gain situational awareness while also making some amends for collateral damage. This effort showed our respect for the people of Tal Afar, and it was generally well received.



U.S. Army

Leaders from the 2-325th Infantry and 3d ACR discuss local concerns with citizens during a security patrol in Tal Afar in September 2005.

To facilitate claims, we set up a civil-military operations center (CMOC) in our zone.<sup>7</sup> After our dismounted patrols inspected damaged dwellings and issued claims cards, locals brought the cards to the CMOC for processing. Part of the processing included taking a photo and acquiring basic contact information from the claimant. We used this data to establish the basis of our population census.<sup>8</sup> Ostensibly, our intent was to reduce fraudulent claims, but we also gained a database to query as we interacted with locals.

COIN forces must determine who is supporting the enemy and who is actively fighting them. The census helped us gain situational awareness because it documented identities, afforded a means of cross-checking stories and histories, and provided pictures of suspected insurgents that we could use to test the veracity and accuracy of our intelligence sources.<sup>9</sup> After we had established the credibility of an intelligence source, we could then ask him to identify insurgents from among the census photos and to provide detailed witness statements of violent acts by those insurgents. Altogether, the census enhanced our targeting and thus our ability to defeat insurgent cells.

We recommend combining the baseline biometrics of the census database with more advanced biometrics programs (such as iris scans and fingerprinting), higher level intelligence, and other

command and situational awareness databases so that Soldiers can query a single database during combat patrols and obtain an electronic report on locals that includes all of their previous interactions with COIN forces. Of course, this is invasive, and it intrudes on civil liberties, but given the good this tool can do for securing the local population, those with nothing to hide should welcome it. Indeed, classical political philosophy is replete with writers who would be sympathetic. Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, and others have advanced the idea that the first responsibility of government is security.

**Gauging success.** One of the lively contemporary topics in the COIN literature involves metrics; in other words, how do we know if we are succeeding? Here, rather than focus on process variables, we looked at end-state conditions: How safe and secure is the zone as measured by the number of enemy attacks over time? Are the trends decreasing or increasing? Are the Iraqi Security Forces progressing? How specifically have they progressed (or regressed) since our arrival in zone? What is the status of civilian institutions in our zone? Have they improved or gotten worse? And finally, what is the status of civic participation in our zone? Are locals taking more or less responsibility for their neighborhoods?

Related to the first variable, security, beyond the number of successful enemy attacks we calculated

the percentage of attacks we responded to with effective precision targeting. Once COIN forces establish dominance over a zone and affiliate with the local populace, they will often garner the situational awareness needed to prevent many attacks or to respond precisely when they occur. No zone in Iraq will probably ever be violence-free, but if we have the local populace with us, COIN forces will often be able to glean information in the immediate aftermath of successful enemy attacks to help track down the perpetrators. If a coalition force is experiencing a large number of enemy attacks and cannot figure out who is executing them, it's a telltale sign that the struggle to win over the support of the local populace has yet to be won.<sup>10</sup>

**Intelligence operations.** Experience has shown that effective targeting should be, in the main, driven by intelligence garnered by troopers interacting respectfully and empathetically with the populace. That is not to say that other means should be excluded. Indeed, this approach should be augmented by all other intelligence means available, including technological ones.<sup>11</sup> But COIN forces that rely primarily on technical means are doomed to fail because of operational fragility. If innocent civilians are mistakenly identified and targeted, security declines precipitously. Mistakes invariably happen

in war, but they occur more frequently when units rely primarily on technical intelligence and do not cross-check information with a population that generally knows best regarding insurgent activities.

**IED threat.** The enemy's main weapon is the improvised explosive device (IED). We dedicated a maneuver force solely to address this threat. Team Delta (our heavy weapons company), significantly reinforced, was able to degrade the enemy's ability to attack us successfully with roadside bombs. Summarized generally, our approach included multiple intelligence-gathering means, defensive electronic countermeasures, persistent surveillance over notorious trouble spots, a constant presence (both mounted and dismounted) throughout our zone, mobilization of the populace into neighborhood IED watches, holding local leaders responsible for their streets, and offensive operations to deny the enemy the sanctuary to plan, coordinate, and emplace IEDs. The approach worked. During both deployments, higher headquarters solicited our TTP for their lessons learned network, and during OIF III, Multi-National Coalition, Iraq (MNC-I) headquarters solicited our TTP for its "best practices" section of its website. By dedicating a counter-IED force instead of requiring all company teams to put assets against this mission, we were able to neutralize the

enemy's greatest strength economically while the preponderance of the task force focused on offensive operations (intelligence-gathering operations and precision raids) and helping the Iraqis. Despite being committed to two of the most dangerous cities in Iraq, we did not have a single KIA from an IED in the eight months we were deployed to OIF II and OIF III.<sup>12</sup>

**Drive-by shootings.** In Mosul, we were plagued early on by drive-by shootings. Several of our casualties, including both of our KIAs, came from such enemy attacks. However, we neutralized this threat and destroyed the insurgent cell that was perpetrating them through a series of actions we called "chokehold operations" and "baited ambushes."



Two White Falcon troopers, 2-325th Infantry, attempt to aid a wounded insurgent after a successful U.S. ambush in Mosul, February 2005. His vehicle burns in the background from exploding RPG rounds and small arms cook-offs, enemy ordnance that was destroyed in the vehicle.

Once the enemy established a pattern by conducting several drive-by shootings in the same place, we would set up a two-step ambush. First we would execute the “chokehold,” cordoning off all traffic on the busy road where most of the drive-bys had occurred. After we had stopped all vehicles in the chokehold, we systemically went from vehicle to vehicle checking for contraband and listening for tips on terrorist activities. We captured a few terrorists in the chokehold, confiscated their contraband, and developed several intelligence sources. The real tactical value, however, came with the accompanying “baited ambush.”

Once the enemy figured out that we were using the chokehold, he countered with drive-by shootings at our chokehold security positions, but this was a fatal mistake. Anticipating his move, we had established ambush positions along his infiltration/exfiltration routes and we killed him as he sought to get away. This technique ultimately was decisive. In a series of successful baited ambushes in February 2005, we killed over half a dozen enemy fighters who had initiated drive-by shootings in our zone. After that, there were no more drive-by attacks.

**Mortar threat.** In both Mosul and Tal Afar, the enemy liked to use mortars to inflict casualties. To counter that threat, we saturated the zone with patrols to deter enemy mortar use and followed up aggressively on tips from locals indicating locations of caches. The latter led to successful raids in which we destroyed enemy mortar systems. Before periods when the risk of enemy mortar attacks was high (on an election day or while we executed an air medical evacuation), we conducted an analysis of craters left by previous mortar attacks. Based on this information, we could estimate the likely enemy mortar positions and occupy those positions first. It became a battle drill for us. The theory was that the enemy would have to literally knock us out of the way to fire his mortars, and that wasn’t going to happen. This technique worked. After we adopted this TTP, we did not sustain a single casualty due to mortar fire, nor did we have any civilian casualties from mortars.

**Shape the environment.** As operations proceed, units must integrate all assets at their disposal, including information operations (IO) personnel, civil-affairs teams, psychological operations (PSYOP) support, and public affairs officers and

elements. Because the population is the center of gravity, these means of influence can help you beat the enemy by exposing his fraudulent, morally bankrupt vision for the future, so that the people choose to support the nascent government and COIN forces. Aggressive use of IO clarified our intent and overcame the enemy’s propaganda efforts. Even using tactical PSYOP teams to broadcast helped calm locals by keeping them informed that the loud noises they were hearing were simply routine training exercises with ISF. This prevented the enemy from claiming successful attacks on COIN forces or, even worse, asserting that we (or the ISF) were attacking the populace. COIN forces must constantly stay on the offensive, kinetically and non-kinetically, to retain the initiative and the support of the locals.

**Know the terrain.** Situational awareness and precise operations are key. Units should consider adopting a standardized set of graphic control measures, including naming conventions for specific buildings in the battlespace. This approach proved invaluable to the 3d ACR during ORR in Tal Afar. Every building in a city of 250,000 was labeled, which enabled rapid targeting, successful integration of attack aviation, and quick resolution to population-control challenges.

We also developed a “White Falcon Fighting-Position Book” that included digital photos of all outpost and patrol base fighting positions, with standard range card information, landmarks, and locations of significant activities appended. Thus, anyone could immediately achieve situational awareness upon assuming duty. We turned these over to U.S. and Iraqi forces upon our departure, along with a standing operating procedure on how to create fighting positions in new locations.

**Evacuation.** Another successful TTP we employed in Tal Afar was to evacuate citizens prior to combat. In large cities, this technique might not be possible, but where practicable, evacuation facilitates stabilization. Before the main assault, the 3d ACR commander directed the evacuation of civilians from the main battle area, an initiative that minimized civilian casualties and enabled coalition forces to take the initiative unfettered. As a result, we destroyed many IED and weapons caches, identified insurgent defenses and “safe houses” used before the assault, and were able to control repopulation. With the help

of tips from locals, we caught terrorists trying to infiltrate back into the populace. Even though the evacuation was disruptive, in the end, the populace appreciated the effort.<sup>13</sup>

**Affiliate with the populace.** Affiliation begins with security and includes SWET and similar initiatives. Helping Iraqis, the people we were sent to protect, was not only the morally right thing to do, but it also stimulates intelligence-gathering operations, significantly enhancing situational awareness. The *perception* of security is inextricably tied to *actual* security.<sup>14</sup> If the locals feel safe, they are more apt to provide targetable information on terrorists. We actively pursued interaction with the people to make them feel safe and help us achieve security dominance. After the decisive phase of ORR, we filled out claims cards for locals whose houses and property had sustained damage, and we processed several hundred thousand dollars worth of claims. In many cases, we received information that was targetable, and our intelligence increased daily as a direct result. Moreover, we dedicated U.S. dollars to water system and electricity projects, rubble removal, storefront refurbishments, school renovations and the like. These were all efforts that relied on local hires, which helped the unemployment situation. Although we didn't please everyone, our projects were generally well received.

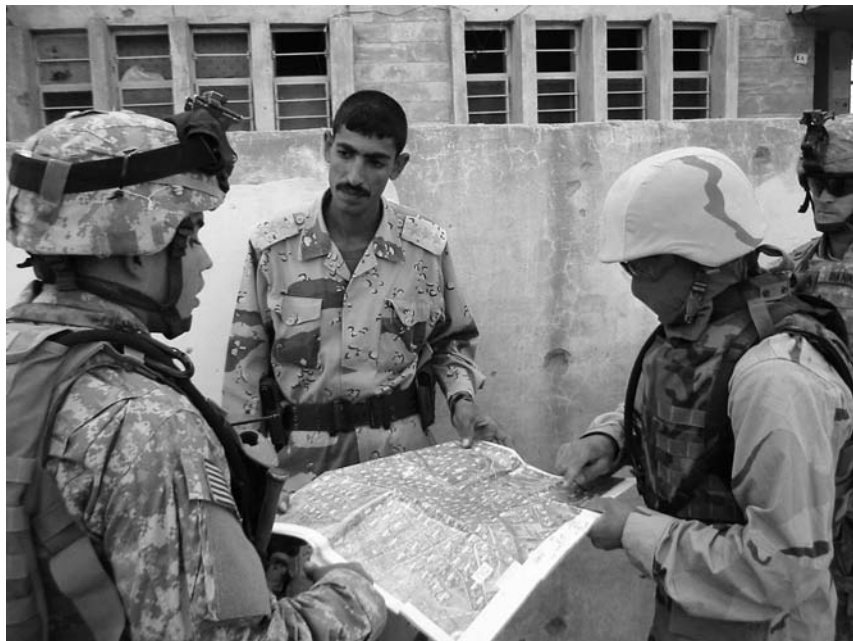
**Develop the ISF.** U.S. forces must make development of local security forces a high priority concurrent with ongoing operations. This means embedding support cells with Iraqi battalion task forces, integrating with the Military Transition Teams (MiTTs), and forging partnerships at the company level.

Professionalization begins with values indoctrination. To earn the respect and trust of the populace, local security forces must practice sectarian impartiality and political neutrality; thus, codes of conduct must be promulgated, disseminated, and enforced as the founda-

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tion for impartiality and the discipline that underpins it. We were all familiar with the Ranger Creed and how it helps inculcate values in ranger students, so we used a similar code to help indoctrinate the Tal Afar Iraqi police. Our values-first approach paid off: we had few instances of inappropriate behavior from our ISF partners.<sup>15</sup>

After imparting a baseline of professionalism, the partner unit must pursue basic soldier competencies. Local security forces have to be able to account for and care for their people and equipment; and they must secure, logistically support, and sustain themselves at all times. Training should include marksmanship; small-unit drills and other collective tasks; and COIN competencies, especially those that focus on developing intelligence and affiliating with



Lieutenant Brian Barnett, 2-325th Infantry, reviews the plan of an Iraqi lieutenant whose unit is preparing for a security patrol in Tal Afar in November 2005.

U.S. Army

the local populace.<sup>16</sup> To accomplish many of these tasks, we set up a training range on the outskirts of Tal Afar.

The partner unit must help the local ISF get organized by showing them how to set up a tactical operations center and a planning section for future operations, and how to track logistics status and significant activities in zone. In all instances, partner units need to show their Iraqi counterparts “what right looks like.” By colocating a battalion support cell with the ISF, we established what amounted to a joint coordination center to enhance our COIN, humanitarian, and government support operations. Joint patrols and other operations must be the norm until ISF self-sufficiency enables coalition forces to depart. This necessitates joint planning, rehearsals, the teaching of good practices, enforcement of standards, and discipline.

**Civilian institutions.** Strengthening civilian institutions is vitally important. We worked with emerging Iraqi leaders, including the mayor and his elected city council, to help them develop a functioning and responsive government.<sup>17</sup> The nascent governing entity must provide basic services to bolster its legitimacy with the people. To be embraced, the government must be caring, competent, and willing to solve basic problems.<sup>18</sup> Toward that end, we took an interest in the civil service. The water and electricity departments were key—they must be effective and impartial in the distribution of service. This was a huge challenge in Tal Afar, as the existing waterworks suffered from war damage and over 20 years of Baathist neglect. We did not, however, take over the waterworks and do the job for the Iraqis. It’s fine for coalition forces to help, but true success—establishing the Iraqi Government’s legitimacy—means that the government has to take the lead in solving such problems.

Related to this, ordinary Iraqis need to be mobilized and organized to participate in all aspects of collective civic responsibilities, including security efforts. Stabilization efforts in Ninevah were relatively easier than in places like Baghdad, which has 3 times more inhabitants than Mosul and 12 times more than Tal Afar. A city the size of Baghdad poses a much more difficult challenge and can only be stabilized, in my estimation, by combining the methods described herein with aggressive efforts to mobilize and organize the populace to resist

and report insurgent intimidation and activity. The closest analogy I can think of is the “neighborhood watch” often used in the United States. Organizational efforts like these might be built along family or tribal lines (although we should be careful not to rely solely on such potentially self-interested groups). Whatever the mechanism, Iraq needs community/neighborhood leaders ready to reject violent means and embrace peaceful and conciliatory methods.

Successful democracies are built on the rule of law. For Iraq, much work is needed on an almost nonexistent judicial system. Impartial judges must be appointed and then held accountable for their work. This will undoubtedly pose a security issue as terrorists target such judges. Still, we must remain committed to helping. Ultimately, too, the United States should get out of the detainee-holding process. Iraqis should hold convicted terrorists while U.S. forces assist by drafting codes of conduct and helping police enforce compliance with them.

Finally, coalition forces should facilitate the growth of capitalism. We have to cultivate entrepreneurs. Many already exist in Iraq, but they are reluctant to come forward out of fear for themselves or their families. Here again, the perception of security is key: as it grows, so will the economy. One engine of growth will be reconstruction, which can mean big money for localities. In sum, comprehensive progress along social, political, and economic lines is possible by tying together progress in the security environment, impartiality in the distribution of government services, and direct U.S. aid.

**Final reflections on security.** History put us in Mosul and Tal Afar when decisive battles were raging, and in both, coalition and ISF elements succeeded: three peaceful elections took place in 2005, the last two of which were widely participated in by all ethnic groups in Ninevah. More hard days lie ahead, but as a direct result of successful COIN and reconstruction efforts by U.S. units and their ISF brothers-in-arms, Ninevah has a good chance for lasting peace. Our battalion task force is proud to have been a part of bringing that about. Like all units, we made mistakes, but, on balance, we believe we were effective in defeating the enemy and in linking our battlefield successes with political, economic, and social lines of operation.

Our experiences varied widely in these two cities





U.S. Army

**U.S. and Iraqi partnership and a successful election day, 15 December 2005 in Tal Afar. Two leaders take a break to enjoy the peaceful and historic moment.**

only 40 miles apart. In Mosul we experienced almost daily direct-fire contact, but in Tal Afar we had considerably fewer gun battles. Among the challenges I had to deal with in Tal Afar was “catastrophic success.” At least until recently, my paratroopers had been primarily trained to fight. They got to do that often in Mosul, and, by most accounts, they found it professionally rewarding.<sup>19</sup> The circumstances in Tal Afar were different. There, our dominance over the zone and constant stream of actionable intelligence on insurgent activities coming from the populace resulted in more preemptive raids than reactive gunfights. Despite this overwhelming success, my Soldiers at times peppered me with comments about their desire to be back in Mosul in direct-fire contact with our enemy. My response was, “*You’re not supposed to be in direct-fire contact with the enemy.*” Tips from local nationals will often enable COIN forces to capture terrorists *before* they are able to attack, precluding direct-fire engagements. Ironically, from these varying experiences in Iraq, I found that engaging the enemy in direct-fire engagements was hard, but from a leadership standpoint, the absence of that was harder.

Overall, the key lesson we learned about security in a counterinsurgency is that by dominating your zone, you are truly able to secure the population—and that’s the Holy Grail of COIN pursuits.

When you dominate, the enemy is less able to harm or intimidate locals, there are fewer gunfights in which civilians can be caught in the crossfire, and there are fewer accidents because you will know and control your zone better. Consequently, civilian casualties from enemy attacks, collateral damage, and counterinsurgent accidents will decline.<sup>20</sup> In the four months we were in Tal Afar, we caused no civilian deaths, a fact the locals knew and tremendously appreciated. They thanked me often during my patrols through the town. Their confidence in us and the security environment led to more helpful tips on terrorist activities, which enabled precision raids before terrorists could finalize their battle plans. Like many facets of COIN operations, success bred more success.

## Training and Organizing for Success

Units must make COIN a priority during home-station training; it cannot be a secondary effort. Mission-essential task lists (METLs) must reflect the challenges and missions expected overseas, and resources must be allocated accordingly. Of course, this implies managing training risks, because conventional METLs must not atrophy. In the 82d Airborne, we must be able to conduct an airborne assault followed by mid-intensity conventional offensive operations, and then quickly and seamlessly transition to COIN and peacekeeping tasks.

We had four months between OIF II and OIF III deployments. In that time we worked and trained on—

- The paratrooper essential-task list, which included marksmanship, physical fitness, medical skills, small-unit drills, airborne proficiency, and leader development.
- Theater-specific tasks and issues, including understanding the populace; terrain and language familiarization; cultural awareness; according basic dignity and respect; enemy problem sets with enemy cell development; detainee packet development and tactical questioning to foster an effective intelligence-gathering approach; and driver’s training.
- COIN situational training exercises and field training exercises (STXs and FTXs). These scenario-driven exercises reinforced effective practices and made troopers more comfortable with risk assessment and mitigation and rules of engagement.

**...the most important dimension of [STX and FTX] training was teaching and developing our thinking and decisionmaking processes so that paratroopers could become confident in their personal COIN approach.**

They also put our leaders and paratroopers in situations where they had to think fast and make difficult decisions quickly. Immediately after a critical event in an exercise, we hot-washed the results of the leader's or trooper's estimate of the situation and his decisionmaking process and discussed what he should have done. Although we certainly reinforced standards, the most important dimension of this training was teaching and developing our thinking and decisionmaking processes so that paratroopers could become confident in their personal COIN approach. To make training more realistic, we rented civilian vehicles, populated the training site with livestock, committed a company to simulate an insurgent cell and civilians on the battlefield, incorporated attack aviation and combat engineers, worked counter-IED operations, and required units to work with "indigenous" security forces.

Given competing demands on time, in the future we need to ensure that all collective training events incorporate as many force multipliers as possible—engineers, artillerymen, PSYOP and civil affairs teams, Air Force personnel, tactical human intelligence personnel, medical augmentation support, and military police—so that we train as we will fight in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Battalions would also benefit by being able to tap into a pool of Iraqi/Afghani role players for training. Even a handful of individuals would significantly enhance STXs/

FTXs. The same goes for equipment: battalions need help getting access to theater-specific equipment such as Warlock electronic countermeasures equipment, SIGINT assets, vapor trace/X-Spray, and up-armored HMMWVs.

We need to continue to pay attention to the fine points, too. For example, company supply sergeants should participate in logistics training exercises to become more familiar with SOPs and battle drills for logistics package operations. Crater-analysis training should be incorporated into FTXs. Home-station medical training must also be as realistic as possible.

When developing COIN training scenarios, we must ensure our enemy situation approximates the anticipated GWOT threat. We plan to have the exercise design cell create an insurgent cell, provide role players to fill the various parts, and make company and task-force intelligence sections do link analysis and intelligence training concurrently with COIN STXs. Every trooper must be capable of quick thinking and sound judgment.

While our training prepared us for most of the challenging circumstances during OIF, we can do better, and we are fervently committed to doing so. We need to sustain our strengths, improve our weaknesses, and build other capabilities for different deployments and missions (for example, Afghanistan).

**Organizing for COIN.** To win the GWOT, we need organizational reform to help our forces. In addition to altering METLs, we should upgrade



COL H.R. McMaster, commander, 3d ACR, addresses White Falcon troopers in Tal Afar, September 2005.

U.S. Army

and enhance home-station training areas to better reflect Central Command's area of responsibility (AOR). We need to resource the Secret Internet Protocol Router Network down to battalion level for classified email and Internet traffic and should provide deploying task forces with Small Extension Node communications capabilities when possible. We also should forge closer habitual relationships with CA and PSYOP units on post.

We should sustain tactical intelligence team augmentation for deploying battalion task forces and have an intelligence analyst at the company level and an interrogator with the battalion S2 section. Now that the cold war is over, it's time to revisit the distribution of our intelligence assets. We no longer need huge ACEs at corps and division.<sup>21</sup> This made sense when we were preparing to fight the Soviets on the open battlefield, but, in a COIN fight, units are responsible for given areas and, over time, intelligence tends to come from the bottom-up, not vice versa, as it did during the cold war. Companies and battalions plainly need more intelligence analysts. We should redistribute our intelligence assets.

We should also exploit technology fully to augment and support our intelligence operations, including standardizing software for personal cameras to enhance relaying data between units and acquiring surveillance cameras to mount in sector to facilitate monitoring areas of interest and enemy attack sites. We should widely publicize them through aggressive IO. We should also purchase decoy surveillance cameras and place them throughout the AO to complement persistent surveillance.

Battalions also need a small CA staff section (S5). Currently, we are building one "out-of-hide" when we deploy, but we should form one during training so it will be more effective in combat. While in Tal Afar, our task force—through our Air Force Joint Tactical Augmentation Cell (JTAC) element—had the ability to downlink from a Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicle right into our TOC, a capability that provided real-time situational awareness of actions on the objective. These practices were quite helpful and should be proliferated throughout the force. We have not established habitual relationships with deploying JTACs, and need to do so (although modularity should resolve this shortcoming).<sup>22</sup>

Technology that enhances situational awareness must be pursued. The Force XXI Battle Command

Brigade and Below system has been helpful in improving our command and control capabilities. The proliferation of UAVs has also been helpful, and we are excited about the prospect of future-generation UAVs with expanded capabilities. The ability to see through walls is something worth pursuing. It will enhance our precision in operations and ultimately provide better protection for our troops.

Finally, because there are many recurring COIN tasks for which we do not have doctrine, units need to supply an alternative guide. Our battalion developed and published a tactical SOP (TACSOP) that codified our COIN TTP. Derived from our experiences, this TACSOP will fill the void until doctrine catches up. We remain a learning organization, and so our TACSOP is a working document that we will continually update in the light of new experience and knowledge.

## Strategic Success

It's been widely claimed that in Vietnam, the U.S. military did not lose a single battle. Yet, in the end, our strategic objectives were not realized. As painful as it is to admit it, we lost. Let that not be our fate in Iraq. Commanders must constantly be searching for ways to translate battlefield successes into strategic contributions by effective linkage across all military, political/institutional, economic, and social lines of operations.<sup>23</sup>

There is a clear opportunity now in northern Iraq to achieve greater levels of stability and to integrate Sunnis into the fabric of this nascent nation—both important steps toward achieving our strategic objectives. Given the high voter turnout in Ninevah province, it appears Sunnis will be appropriately represented in the new government. That development and an improved ISF offer opportunities for meaningful negotiations with almost all factions of the insurgency about quitting the fight. This should set the conditions for a lasting peace—one that isolates Al-Qaeda and extremist factions.

To make that happen, the ISF should take primary control of security operations in the province, enabling all but MiTT advisors and quick reaction forces in Mosul and Tal Afar to withdraw. By turning over security responsibilities and largely removing the U.S. presence, we would mollify a sizeable number of insurgents who continue to fight "the occupation." In essence, we could placate

a significant number of homegrown insurgents with political inclusion and security responsibility transfer, which should lead to a more stable security environment. Simultaneously attaining coalition and Iraqi Government strategic objectives will further isolate Al-Qaeda. With those developments we should expect actionable information on Al-Qaeda to dramatically increase because we have co-opted former insurgent groups who have separated themselves from foreign, extremist elements. Once the local populace sees an opportunity for lasting peace and fair representation in government, it will turn on those fomenting violence.

With enhanced precision targeting, COIN operations will only get better over time, which, in turn, will further improve the security situation. This cycle has the potential to be positively reinforcing. Before long, Ninevah province should realize the kind of stability that enables real economic and political reconstruction. This will positively

influence social reconstruction, since all sects have symbiotic relationships with each other and need one another to continue economic growth.

With Ninevah stable, the Iraqi Government will be in a better position to convince Sunni-majority provinces to embrace peaceful solutions to grievances and political disagreements. In essence, Ninevah could become the strategic model for long-term peace in all of Iraq. None of this, however, will be easy.<sup>24</sup>

We in the coalition are engaged in a just struggle to protect and defend our cherished way of life and to help freedom-loving people worldwide enjoy security and prosperity. However, the nobleness of our effort and our battlefield prowess do not guarantee success and ultimate victory. We need an integrated strategy that effectively ties together military, political/institutional, economic, and social lines of operation and that has identifiable, pragmatic steps and milestones. And we need one soon. Considering what is at stake, we must not fail. **MR**

## NOTES

1. See the "Call for Papers" in *Military Review* (November-December 2005): 111; LTG David H. Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq," *Military Review* (January-February 2006): 2-12; and U.S. Army *Field Manual (FM) 3-24, Counterinsurgency Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006).

2. David Ignatius, "Scary Surprises in Mosul," *Washington Post*, 10 December 2004, A-37.

3. See Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) "The Insurgency," a documentary produced by Tom Roberts, *Frontline*, 21 February 2006; and George Packer, "The Lessons of Tal Afar," *New Yorker*, 10 April 2006. In March 2006, President George W. Bush, too, delivered several speeches holding up Tal Afar as an example of successful COIN practices and approaches.

4. To read more about the Iraq war from the perspective of the Iraqi citizen, see Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005).

5. By "dominance" I mean preventing lawlessness. In the United States that is generally achieved through the rule of law backed up by a police force and legal system to adjudicate suspected violations. In countries with an insurgency, auxiliary means, such as military and paramilitary forces (police forces with army-like capabilities), are required to compel noncompliant forces. As lawlessness is attenuated, countries can move to the left on the spectrum of use of force until such time as rule of law is established and generally followed. COIN forces that dominate their battlespace in a place like Iraq do what the rule of law would achieve in a stabilized country.

6. We found that by employing a combination of all three basic methods of patrolling we were able to saturate the zone and deny the enemy freedom of movement; stay in close contact with the locals; and provide for mobile and lethal reaction forces capable of reinforcing our dismounted patrols in minutes, when necessary. This provided both a real capability and a deterrent to enemy attacks. In essence, we were able to enjoy the strengths of dismounted and mounted patrols while minimizing the potential hazards or drawbacks of any single employment method.

7. The task force should develop a claims-card-marking SOP so that they can decrease corruption during civil affairs operations.

8. The inspiration for establishing the census came from our experience in northwest Mosul, where we knew one of the major leaders of the insurgency lived. Our extensive efforts to capture that high-value individual (HVI) were ultimately unsuccessful and, as we flew back across the Atlantic en route to Fort Bragg, I thought that if I had it all to do over again, we would take a picture of every adult in the neighborhood and then go door-to-door inquiring about the identity of the HVI until we found someone who would anonymously identify him. As we began operations in Tal Afar, we put that concept into practice with the census—a much more robust situational-awareness program inspired by our Mosul after action review. While the CMOC provided a basis for census data collection, we continually sent reconnaissance patrols throughout zone to fill in gaps in data for neighborhoods where claimants did not come forward. This, as one can imagine, also provided a starting point for researching and understanding why some neighborhoods did not take advantage of the claims process.

9. For a COIN force to be embraced as legitimate, it must have good and reliable sources and be perceived as unbiased in its pursuit of terrorists. Bad intelligence sources and subsequent "bad arrests" will inflame a community and ultimately severely

denigrate the security environment. Thus, constantly vetting and cross-checking sources is a critical task of COIN forces. Units must resource and task-organize accordingly.

10. Based on the extensive help we received from the local populace, during OIF III we were able to gather the requisite legal proof to send more than a company's worth of insurgents to prison. The number of successful enemy attacks declined from several a day before Operation Restoring Rights to one or two per week after the operation. Clearly our enemy was defeated.

11. Developing intelligence is a difficult and time-consuming process that requires an extensive list of vetted sources, meticulous attention to detail (nearly everything that happens is related to something else), cultural sensitivity, insatiable curiosity, and a user-friendly database, preferably linked to a biometrics program.

12. Sadly, we did have some grievous wounds from IEDs, including two life-altering wounds from a vehicle-borne IED attack in Mosul on 4 January 2005. Four of the wounded in action (WIAs) during OIF II were from IEDs while all 10 of our WIAs during OIF III were from IEDs. Statistics can deceive, however, because our IED find/destroy to successful enemy attack ratio was still over 4:1, despite the 10 WIAs.

13. In his interview for the PBS documentary "The Insurgency," Michael Ware of *Time Magazine* disagreed with this approach and argued that by evacuating the populace we allowed the terrorists to escape. Given the tremendously improved security situation in Tal Afar, I believe it was worth it, even if some terrorists got away.

14. In some cases, perception was reality until our IO campaign was able to convey truth. The state of security is often fragile at best, and IO battle drills must be developed in advance to manage the consequences of a terrorist attack or incident. Insurgent attacks cannot always be thwarted, and how COIN forces deal with them will sway the population one way or another toward the perception of security.

15. We worked with outstanding ISF in both Mosul and Tal Afar, most recently with the 3d Battalion, 1st Brigade, 3d Iraqi Infantry Division.

16. Given the considerable ability of ISF to gain intelligence, it is critical that during their training and development, COIN forces focus on helping local security forces perfect intelligence analysis and dissemination capabilities both within their higher level staffs and in infantry companies.

17. Disappointingly, my experience with the Sunni sheiks in Tal Afar was not that positive. Although they knew who was fomenting violence in their neighborhoods, they were, in the main, reluctant to provide actionable intelligence to secure their people. In some cases Sunni sheiks covertly supported the insurgents. In the end, most of these tribal leaders were part of the problem and not part of the solution. We asked them repeatedly to help us recruit Sunni Turkomen to join the new police force to help with the legitimization/acceptance within the Sarai neighborhood which was overwhelming Sunni Turkomen. Although we eventually succeeded in getting some of these men to join, it was not due to the sheiks. As a consequence, our task force chose to minimize our official contact with them, visiting them on occasion to keep open ties, but making a conscious effort not to enhance their place in the community. Increasingly, we noticed that the local populace viewed their sheiks as titular figures and, as a result, began to look towards new, informal leaders across the community. These new leaders rose to prominence through their actions to help the good people of Tal Afar. Indeed, brave Iraqis who helped stabilize the streets from violence and stimulate economic growth and social healing were gaining in stature as we redeployed. We

attempted to help those individuals solidify their power base and encouraged them to run for local office in city and provincial elections. A great example of emerging Iraqi leaders is the current mayor of Tal Afar, Najim Al-Jibouri.

18. In Iraq, local governments suffer from a lack of funding from the central government in Baghdad, something which, if addressed, would significantly improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of regional and sub-regional governments and help the overall efforts to democratize the country.

19. The most significant engagement occurred on 4 January 2005 in northwest Mosul. A running gunfight developed that lasted about three hours and involved every company team in the task force along with both OH-58 and AH-64 helicopters in the intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and kinetic modes. Based on feedback we received from the Stryker Brigade Combat Team through sensitive reporting, this engagement resulted in an estimated 10 enemy killed, one enemy wounded, one enemy captured and four U.S. KIA. Although we had a few more battalion-task-force-level engagements after that day, we were never again challenged to that level of intensity. Throughout our time in Mosul, we ultimately defeated two major enemy cells, one in northwest Mosul that we called the Santa Fe Gang and one on the east bank of the Tigris after our repositioning following the 30 January election. We significantly degraded the capabilities of another cell in central Mosul, too. We definitely achieved success during OIF II, but it came at a high cost because we suffered 2 KIAs and 31 WIAs. In total, 19 of our Soldiers were decorated for valor that tour.

20. Another key to our success in minimizing noncombatant casualties and protecting the population was the "shoot, no shoot" training we underwent at Fort Bragg before deployment.

21. ACE stands for "All-source Collection Element."

22. By Modified Table of Organization and Equipment, our battalion task force is now authorized a three-person Air Force element to facilitate joint fires planning, coordination, and execution.

23. Within the category "political/institutional," I include the information-management dimension—the requirement to clearly articulate goals, objectives, and milestone progress, and to provide context and meaning to the daily events (good and bad) in this long struggle. Some treat this as a separate line of operation, but to do so is to detract from the integrative nature of information management within the political or institutional and substantive realm and, quite frankly, leads to the questioning of sincerity, which is not accurate and not helpful to the cause.

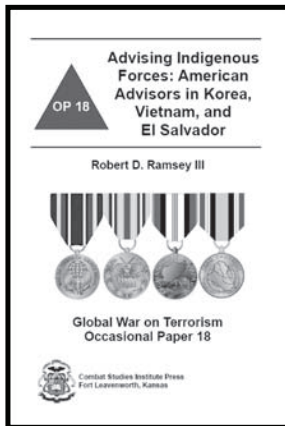
24. Including the Sunnis is only one of the major obstacles we currently face in Iraq. This paper was initially drafted in the spring of 2006, and between then and now, sectarian violence in Baghdad has spiked, arguably posing a challenge equal to the largely Sunni-based insurgency. Still, by emphasizing broader Sunni inclusion via effective military and non-military means (e.g., diplomatic and economic), we will help isolate Al-Qaeda and bring more stability to the region, thereby enabling us to devote more resources to reducing sectarian violence in Baghdad.



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