

PREPARING AN IRAQI CITY FOR ELECTIONS

TF 1-21 INFANTRY APPLIES THE NINE PRINCIPLES OF WAR IN KIRKUK

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The city of Kirkuk sits at the base of the Zagros Mountain range, 350 meters above sea level, and 230 kilometers north of Baghdad in the predominantly Kurdish region of Iraq. Kirkuk is the largest city in one of Iraq's most oil-producing areas. Oil pipelines run from Kirkuk to the coastal cities of Tripoli in Lebanon and Yamurtalik in Turkey. These pipelines constitute an estimated 40 percent of all the oil in Iraq. It is an ancient city with ruins as old as 3,000 years and historical monuments and tombs that date back to biblical times. The city is comprised of four different ethnicities and three religions. Arabs, Kurds, Turkoman and Assyrian Christians make up this ethnic cauldron. All of these groups lay claim to Kirkuk in some fashion or another.

The Arabs are relatively the newest members to the area, with the majority of them (some 200,000) being emplaced there by Sadaam Hussein's regime in the 1980s and 1990s during his movement to "arabize" the region. Up until this last century, the city of Kirkuk was one of the central cities of Kurdistan, which has not been recognized as a country since World War II. The Kurds would like nothing more than to reinstate Kurdistan as a nation, with Kirkuk as their capitol city. During Sadaam's "arabization," many Kurds were displaced from their homes in Kirkuk and, since the fall of Sadaam's regime, have begun to settle back in the region and reclaim their homes. The Turkoman have lived in the city of Kirkuk since it was a part of the Ottoman Empire. The Assyrians have inhabited the region since the days of the biblical prophets Daniel and Hosea. All but the Assyrians claim predominance over the city, and all have been willing to fight for this oil-rich city in some way or another.

In late January 2004, the 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 25th Infantry Division deployed from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, to Kirkuk to relieve the 173rd Airborne Brigade out of Vincenza, Italy. Task Force 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry (Gimlets) was given control of the volatile city of Kirkuk in February 2004. Its main



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Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division (Light) pull security at a polling site in Kirkuk, Iraq, as election workers distribute voting materials January 27, 2005.

focus was to find and destroy enemy terrorist cells and insurgents and rebuild the civil infrastructure through various civil-military and stability and support operations (SASO).

On January 30, 2005, the country of Iraq held both provincial and national elections to emplace a freely-elected democratic government into power. At the time, I was serving as the scout platoon leader for 1-21 IN. For over a year, our brigade controlled the ethnically diverse, oil-rich city of Kirkuk. While the 2nd BCT controlled the outer regions of the city, the Gimlets were directly responsible for all civil and military operations within the city. Due to its ethnic diversity, Kirkuk is widely considered not only a possible civil war flashpoint between Kurds and Arabs, but also a smaller example of Iraq as a whole due to its volatility.

With this as the backdrop, Task Force 1-21 IN was charged with securing the city of roughly one million residents by preventing anti-Iraqi forces' (AIF) attacks on the 110 polling sites throughout Kirkuk to allow maximum participation by the local Iraqi populace. The Gimlets' planning and execution were a

textbook application on how to soundly use the nine principles of war, while continuing to intertwine those operations under a SASO umbrella. By correctly striking this balance, TF 1-21 IN was able to prepare for and secure all of the polling sites in the city throughout the election period and allow the locals to feel safe to participate in the elections.

For 12 months, the Gimlets rebuilt key infrastructure in the city, quelled the insurgency, and kept the city relatively safe compared to some of the other major cities within Iraq. We trained the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) for over a year, providing the Iraqis with equipment and instruction in everything from TCPs (traffic control points), to patrolling and room-clearing, to sensitive site exploitation (SSE). Throughout our year in Iraq, we steadily increased the number of patrols we conducted with the ISF, eventually culminating in 100-percent joint patrols. This not only increased their confidence level and training, but it also increased our confidence in the ISF's abilities. It was tough at times to instill discipline, professionalism, and accountability in the ISF, but all of our hard work had not only the immediate payoff of being able to use the ISF effectively for the elections, but also an ultimate payoff of the eventual U.S. troop drawdown. After the Transition of Authority in late May of 2004, U.S. forces, Iraqis, and AIF were all focused on the January elections that were going to emplace a provincial Iraqi government. In early December 2004, the 2nd BCT was

told that its deployment to Iraq was to be extended through the January 30 elections in Iraq, and Kirkuk would continue to be the main focus for the brigade and Task Force 1-21 IN.

In December and January, leading up to the elections, there was a considerable increase in the number of attacks, both on the coalition and on the civilian populace. The terrorist cells in the city, which included members of Al-Qaeda and Ansar al Islam, were intent on disrupting U.S. operations and, more importantly, breaking the resolve and national will of the Iraqi people. The AIF attempted to discourage voters from going to the polls by making them feel insecure in the weeks leading up to the elections.

With an increase in AIF activity came an increase in intelligence gathering (both human intelligence and other) which subsequently increased the number of patrols and raids that we conducted. With the help of the Special Forces and various Operational Detachment-Alpha (ODA) elements, we detained many individuals in the weeks, days, and even nights leading up to January 30.

Roughly one month out, plans started to become solidified on how the Gimlets were going to secure the more than 100 polling sites and allow a little less than a million people to vote in relative safety. This plan became known as Operation Gimlet Huria (which means freedom in Arabic). On the coalition side, TF 1-21 IN was enhanced with two mechanized company elements, as well as the equivalent

of an engineer company. On the Iraqi side, Operation Gimlet Huria would involve all seven police stations inside the city, along with the Emergency Services Unit, the Police Academy, the Traffic Police and Highway Patrol, two Iraqi Army companies, as well as the SMT (SWAT-type police element) and the Scorpion Platoon (Iraqi Army special operations unit). In total, TF 1-21 IN had more than 2,000 U.S. and ISF Soldiers under its control.

The Gimlets had to walk a very fine line, as it was charged with keeping the elections safe and under control, while ensuring that the ISF play a large role in the planning and execution of the operation to bolster the population's confidence in their new federal and local government. TF 1-21 IN did an amazing job maintaining the election as a joint nation-building stability and support operation by involving the local government and the ISF. This election, with the entire world watching and success being of the utmost political importance, could have easily been transitioned back to a strictly military combat operation. In trying to maintain this balance, the Gimlets successfully used the nine principles of war in planning for this operation. Due to the multi-national nature of this operation, it was imperative that the plan stayed as simple as possible. The TF commander came up with eight key tasks he wanted accomplished in a relatively simple four-phase operation. The timeline, stand-alone graphics, and multiple meetings and rehearsals ensured the plan was understood across the board and instilled confidence in the executors of that plan at every level.

During the planning and rehearsal phase of the operation, the objective and end state were very clear to all: "Polling and registrations sites in Kirkuk are secured throughout the elections period from AIF attacks and locals feel safe to participate in elections." This very distinct, clear objective was the foundation for the operation and was repeated and known to every U.S. Soldier, police officer, and Iraqi Army soldier taking part in the operation. This message was also broadcast over local TV, radio, and newspapers. There was no doubt in anyone's mind what the ISF or coalition forces' mission was leading



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Soldiers with the 25th Infantry Division's Task Force 1-21 Infantry provide security outside a polling site during elections in Kirkuk January 30, 2005.



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TF 1-21 Soldiers pull security in Kirkuk as election voting materials are distributed to polling sites January 27, 2005.

up to, on, and directly after January 30, 2005.

On election day, it would have been very easy to be defensive and reactive to AIF attacks. However, the 2nd BCT and TF 1-21 IN leaned forward and dictated the nature of the city and the elections which caused the enemy to change their plans and react to what we were doing. We did this in a couple of different ways: First, we halted all vehicular traffic three days before the elections, thus significantly minimizing the threat of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). Second, we acted decisively on any and all intelligence we had on cells or insurgent personnel in the city which disrupted their planning, resourcing, and execution abilities. To reduce the enemy's reaction time to our offensive, we executed most of our raids days and even hours before the elections were to be underway.

Operating in conjunction with ISF, Engineers, Aviation, Civil Affairs, Special Operations units, and attached mechanized companies allowed the Gimlets to mass the effects of its combat power in both time and space. In the ultimate team concept, we used over 2,000 people in both their traditional and nontraditional roles to accomplish the mission. The enemy was no match for that amount of combat power.

Although the Gimlets did maximize its combat power, they also had to analyze the situation and determine where they could assume prudent risk. We knew that U.S. forces could not cover all 110 polling sites, so the TF 1-21 IN staff did a calculated analysis of the enemy and the terrain to determine where our forces could be best used. U.S. forces were set up in strategic locations where they could mass and react quickly to given situations. After

living and working in that city for a year, we knew through pattern analysis where the most likely points of attack would be. This was not only based on history of attacks, but also on good avenues of approach, ethnic diversification in the neighborhood, and the economic level of the neighborhood.

We decreased the enemy's ability to maneuver by not allowing any vehicular traffic in the city during the elections, setting up more than 100 ISF-run TCPs, blocking roads, and having checkpoints at each polling location to search for suicide bombers or other weapons. We increased our ability to maneuver effectively by emplacing units and elements that had both mounted and dismounted routes to polling sites as well as preplanned reinforcement and casualty evacuation routes. Communication was another way in which we used the principle of maneuver. The U.S. forces were not only able to talk to each other, but they were also given police radios so that coalition interpreters, down to the platoon level, could communicate with the ISF. This gave us immediate knowledge of the happenings in the AO throughout the elections.

Unity of command with so many different elements could have become extremely difficult; however, the Gimlets were very clear from the beginning who was to be in charge of the various sectors and responsibilities. All units, both coalition and ISF, were controlled out of the Joint Operations Center which was located at the main police station. The city's police chief, Iraqi Army battalion commander, TF 1-21 IN commander, and overall elections officials were all located in that one spot to ensure that communication between the different elements would not be an issue. In each sector of the city, a U.S. company commander was put in charge of all ISF in his area, and they reported directly to

the coalition forces. Cell phones, interpreters, Motorola radios, and ASIPs (Advanced SINCGARS Improvement Program radios) were heavily used to communicate throughout the day.

TF 1-21 IN secured the elections sites and the force by using more than 500 hedgehogs and 800 rolls of concertina wire, as well as engineer-emplaced barriers on a third of the polling sites as protection from VBIEDs and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). Each polling site had at least a squad of ISF securing it. Also aiding in the security of the city were attack aviation assets and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

As we found through the various raids leading up to the elections, the enemy was preparing to use suicide bombs and VBIEDs to attack polling locations. The enemy was surprised by the fact that we halted vehicular traffic inside the city and had so many barriers, roadblocks, and checkpoints emplaced throughout the city. This greatly cut down on his ability to attack. Waiting until the night before to conduct many of our raids on AIF also surprised the enemy. When he went to bed the night before the elections, the enemy most likely assumed that he was in good position to attack the following day, not realizing that we were hours away from detaining him. The other factors that contributed to our surprise were the speed of our reaction times and patrols, our information superiority, and our relatively balanced security throughout the AO.

With the planning and coordination phase complete, January 30 arrived and it was time to see if the proper application of the nine principles of war to this operation would lead to the successful execution.

My role in the elections was to be the TF quick reaction force (QRF) with planning priorities being the evacuation of any coalition casualties and the reinforcement of the companies throughout the city. For me to be able to accomplish my mission effectively, I had to not only know exactly where all 110

polling sites were in the city, but I also had to know which routes I could take through the roughly 100 TCPs and various blocked roads. In the weeks leading up to the election, my platoon conducted numerous mounted and dismounted patrols, conducting route and fixed site reconnaissance so that we would know exactly how we could reinforce a polling site. This included notes and sketches on each polling site to determine height, building construction, and placement, as well as the best avenues of approach into a sector and to the polling location. To do this, we used a combination of satellite imagery, Falconview, and aviation photography to construct our plan of attack.

At approximately 0700 on January 30, two loud explosions rocked the city. Two mortars, fired minutes apart, landed just south of the coalition airbase in the southwest of the city. Polling sites were to be open from 0700 to 1700. By 1000 that day, hardly anyone had voted. The two explosions and inherent fear of attack caused many would-be voters to stay inside. As the day went along and no other reports of attacks or explosions could be heard, the citizens of Kirkuk showed their confidence in the ISF and their desire to vote in a free democratic election as they began to flood the polling sites. By noon, some polling sites had lines more than a block long.

At 1400, shots rang out from an AK-47 on a rooftop 200 meters from the south of a

polling site aimed at the Iraqi people waiting in line. Four people were wounded in that attack. The Iraqis in that line did not run back to their homes in fear. Instead, they showed amazing resolve and stood tall in that line, determined to vote, and confident that the ISF and coalition forces would continue to protect them.

That attack ended up being the only major attack that day in the city of Kirkuk. Thankfully, for my part as the QRF, I was never called on to perform casualty evacuation or needed to reinforce polling sites or elements in contact. The 2nd BCT and, specifically, TF 1-21 IN came up with a simple, solid, and well-thought out plan that satisfied the nine principles of war while maintaining a SASO role. Thanks to TF 1-21 IN, the Iraqi people in Kirkuk took their first step toward democracy, and the local government and ISF's confidence and citizens' trust in them were significantly strengthened due to this operation.

Captain Jeremiah Cordovano was commissioned from the University of Florida in 2002. He served in the 25th Infantry Division (Light) as a rifle and scout platoon leader, completed the Infantry Captains Career Course, and is currently serving in the 6th Ranger Training Battalion at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida.

