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OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE WAY WE'RE FIGHTING THE WAR IN IRAQ

CAPTAIN ROBERT MURDOUGH

DEPENDENT:

Throughout my tour in Iraq, I suspect like many officers and NCOs, I questioned some practices, policies, and ways of thinking, looking for better ways to accomplish our mission. The single greatest trend I noticed was a widespread acceptance of the status quo without much in the way of new thinking in how we can do better. Realizing that muttering and complaining are essentially useless, this is my attempt to contribute to the military profession. Writing this article allows me to put into words the vague sentiments and opinions I've cultivated through the last 16 months based on conversations with fellow leaders, news reports, and personal observations. These are my observations and recommendations for changing the way the U.S. Army is fighting the war at the tactical and operational levels; I hope to contribute to a professional discussion that will result in new approaches to fighting the current and future counterinsurgencies.

The strategic level and political dimension of the Iraq conflict are outside my lane and well outside the span of control of a brigade, battalion, or company commander. The "why" of winning the war

is none of our business; our job is to become very good at the "how." For purposes here, the "operational level" should be considered the brigade and battalion levels, and the "tactical level" company and below. This article focuses on these levels. Also, I use the term "combat Soldiers" and "combat arms" broadly — including any infantry, armor, or artillery unit functioning as a maneuver element. In Iraq, infantry and armor units are performing identical tasks with near-identical equipment.

I believe that the war in Iraq can and will be won by battalions, companies, and platoons across the country taking on the hard tasks and figuring out how to overcome them, not simply being satisfied with the status quo or "steady state."

Mission

The Army's mission in Iraq is complex and daunting, and defining it clearly at the strategic, operational, or tactical levels has become increasingly taxing on military planners since May 2003. The greatest difficulty at the operational level has been translating strategic goals and directives into tactical tasks with definable objectives. The greatest difficulty at the tactical level is overcoming the preconceived notions of "what we *should* be doing," educating the company-level combat Soldier on his mission, and how it is both similar and different from that

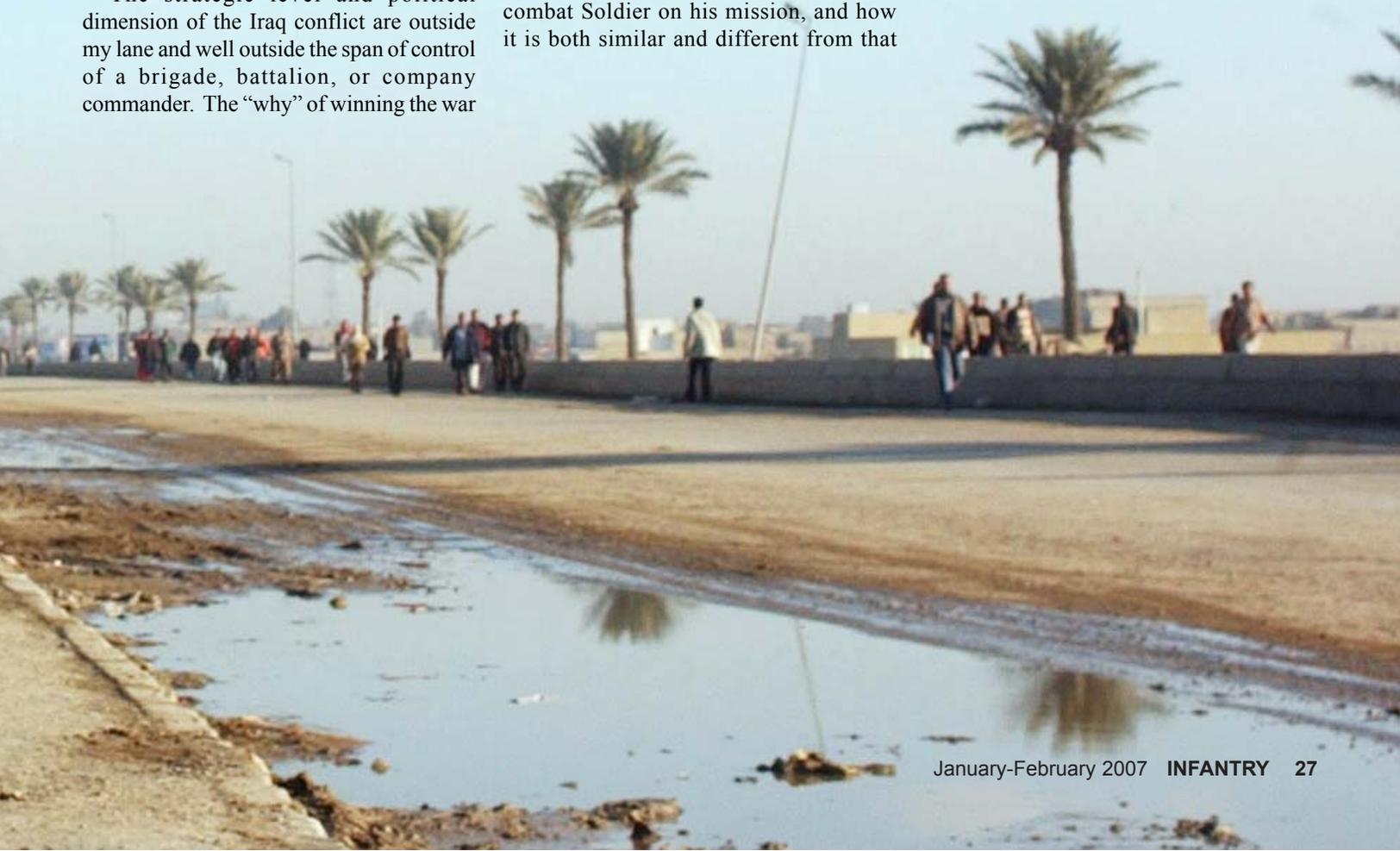
of "conventional" warfighting.

The ambiguous, even euphemistic strategic goals in Iraq do not translate well into tactical objectives. However, as the purpose of this is to focus on operations and tactics, I'll forego any discussion of national policy on the war on terror, the nation's mission in Iraq, and strategic decision-making, and summarize the general "lines of operation" that have formed the nucleus of the neo-doctrine throughout Iraq:

- Neutralize anti-Iraqi forces (the current all-encompassing term for anybody anti-government, anti-coalition, or otherwise an impediment to the mission)
- Train and develop Iraqi Security Forces (Iraqi Army, Police, and Border Patrol)
- Conduct civil-military operations by using military resources, including troops to physically and economically improve the civil infrastructure.
- Conduct information operations

Sergeant Tierney P. Nowland

A Soldier with the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, watches a group of Iraqi civilians walk along the street during a mission in Sadr City, Iraq.



(strictly defined as pro-coalition propaganda, but also used as a term for nearly any interaction with the local population)

Though “lines of operation” are phrased differently in nearly every brigade combat team/battalion task force, these four tasks broadly illustrate the diversity of the Army’s mission in Iraq. However, each one of these may have no clear objective, no clear purpose, and no clear measures of success. The challenge to commanders at the brigade and battalion level is to ensure that their line units are performing tasks commensurate with these lines of operation, leading to the ultimate, overarching strategic goal of a stable, secure Iraq.

I served under one task force commander who accomplished this daunting feat amazingly well and saw great improvements in the overall security and quality of life for the population in his area of responsibility. He communicated his intent for each line of operation at a weekly meeting encompassing every aspect of current and future operations. For example, under “Train and develop Iraqi Security Forces” would be “Identify and vet a new police chief for _____ village,” “Train xx and xx company of xx Iraqi Army battalion on react to contact and conduct a platoon raid” and “conduct daily combined patrols with Iraqi Army.” Under “Conduct Civil-Military Operations,” would be “Get engineer assessment of phone center, draw up contract for repairs,” and “Develop plan to improve road between X village and Y town NLT 1 July.” The list was updated weekly; it was effectively a working mission essential task list (METL) with key collective tasks and supporting collective tasks clearly identified. Each week it was updated and briefed, and woe to the commander who, in seven days, had made no progress toward accomplishing those specific tasks. This process was replicated at the company level, where the commander took the specified tasks, added his own tasks to his subordinates, and then divided the workload among the platoons so that every platoon had a task every day. Not every one of these missions needed to be top-down; often platoon leaders proposed their own ideas. Nor were they always complex or decisive in scope and intent; they were often as innocuous as “meet with city council” or “visit with local shop owners in market ____.”

This simple process of breaking down the ambiguous, sweeping lines of operation into manageable, measurable, and understandable tactical tasks accomplishes several things. It accomplishes the operational objective in the most effective way. It serves as a strong counter to the trap of “steady state” missions, where platoons patrol day after day. And it yields measurable progress.

At the tactical level, the combat arms community is adjusting to the contemporary operating environment. The unequivocal fact of combat in Iraq is that we are currently in a counterinsurgency, not large scale force-on-force warfare. The adage “fight the war you have, not the war you want,” is a saying I have lived by since I first learned it from one of my company commanders in an initial counseling. The Army as an institution has embraced the war we have, striving valiantly to keep equipment, training and doctrine current and relevant. Tasks without a direct kill or capture intent are often priorities themselves, such as the training of ISF, civil-military projects, and simple relationship-building.

The reasons for this are varied. To begin with, every unit is permeated with veterans of the initial Iraq invasion and early operations in Afghanistan. Stories of “this is how we did it in

OIF I” are ubiquitous, with graphic tales of precision airstrikes, massive artillery barrages, and intense firefights. Violent force-on-force combat is the lifeblood of the infantry and armor, and everyone understandably wants their chance to prove themselves, so they plan wildly complex air assaults, precision joint raids with airpower shows of force, and other operations which serve a purpose when needed, but frequently don’t produce guaranteed and lasting effects in the current operating environment. Secondly, daily counterinsurgency operations are simply boring, particularly to the average rifleman or combat vehicle driver. Pulling security for hours on end while the lieutenant talks to people is not what they thought they would be doing as combat Soldiers. Leaders too, tire of the same routine, especially when confronted with the sometimes exasperating Iraqi culture. Additionally, there can be a general failure to recognize that the civilian population, not the enemy force strength or a significant piece of terrain, is the center of gravity for this fight. It requires a different mind-set, and for leaders steeped in the doctrine of high-intensity maneuver warfare it can be difficult to change that way of thinking. Certainly not every unit or Soldier falls victim to these shortcomings, but the net result across the force is that too many Soldiers are trying to fight the war they want, not confronting the war they have.

Another dangerous pitfall for units is the acceptance of the status quo. The notion of “steady state” is toxic. Without a clearly defined task and purpose, platoons can find themselves patrolling day after day after day simply for the sake of patrolling. This usually results from lines of operation not being translated into discrete tactical tasks and also from a general resistance to tedious tasks associated with counterinsurgency, like spending hours talking to businessmen and local leaders. Across Iraq, dozens of platoons depart their bases and simply conduct presence patrols, which have Soldiers rolling around on the streets in Iraq without dismounting from their vehicles.

One remarkably successful technique, in some cases forced upon company commanders and platoon leaders over much resistance, is the requirement to conduct combined patrols with ISF. The logic is that the Iraqi soldiers and policemen will see “what right looks like” when they watch their American counterparts. These patrols accomplish that, and have the additional effect of bolstering the local citizens’ faith in their own security forces. It is a challenge for American platoons, who must deal with the friction caused by the Iraqis’ unsecured communications systems, lack of night vision equipment, and sometimes weak endurance, to say nothing of their often dangerously negligent weapons handling, but all of these are simply excuses not to do what is hard (also what is right). Combined patrolling — with Americans in charge until the Iraqis are truly ready to take the lead — is an excellent way to train and increase public confidence in the ISF.

The notion of a “platoon leader’s fight” in Iraq is applicable. Platoon leaders and company commanders are the ones doing the work, and success or failure rests on their shoulders. At the operational level, commanders need to articulate clear, definitive tactical tasks whose accomplishment supports the overall mission—not an easy task, but vital to avoiding the “steady state” status quo. At the same time, they need to provide raw, accurate, assessments of the ground situation to higher commanders (readiness of ISF, security of the local populace, etc.). For their part, tactical leaders need to embrace every aspect of their mission,

including the mundane civil affairs, the taxing training and mentorship of Iraqi soldiers and police, and the repetitive interactions with the local population — because there is nobody else to do it. No matter what is reported in the media, what is briefed by general staffs, and what is written about on storyboards, this war will be won or lost by battalions and companies facing the reality of the conflict we're in, and relentlessly doing what is hard, doing what is right, and making their subordinates do the same.

Troops

We hear often in the media about how there's "no front line" in Iraq. This is usually to explain why Soldiers in noncombat arms units sometimes come under enemy attack. However, this couldn't be farther from the truth. Although there is no definitive "line" where friendly forces meet enemy forces, there is a definite, physical line that separates the combat Soldiers from the support Soldiers. It is known as "the wire."

Service support Soldiers in this conflict are in fact safer than they have ever been in previous wars. Throughout Iraq are heavily fortified, usually comfortable, isolated compounds known as FOBs (forward operating bases). The perimeter is known to combat Soldiers as "the wire," and it is a definitive line of demarcation — and there is a sharp division, at every rank from colonel to private, between the Soldiers who go "outside the wire" and the ones who stay on the base. This sharp division, arguably greater than it has ever been in previous wars, is the cause of some friction at the operational, tactical, and even individual Soldier level. When my unit first arrived in Baghdad, all the leaders

received a briefing on the improvised explosive device (IED) threat particular to that city. A military intelligence NCO gave the briefing, and when one of the platoon sergeants asked a question about civilian reaction to IED detonations, the NCO responded with "I don't know that, they don't let me leave the wire." Instantly his credibility with his audience was shot. Combat Soldiers are continually exasperated when service-providing units, such as finance, are only open for business for six hours a day. They can't understand how, after they've been on an eight or 10-hour patrol with people trying to kill them, with another patrol 12 hours away, there are Soldiers collecting the same combat pay as them who only have to perform their one task for six hours a day.

It is possible to go an entire year in Iraq and never once see an Iraqi person, to chamber a round in a weapon, or even witness the unique combination of sights, smells, and sounds that is an Iraqi community. Even within a combat battalion, let alone brigade, there may be Soldiers who never leave the wire. Even at this level, there is a division between the fighters and the supporters. In one task force, the intelligence officer had never been outside the wire. When he briefed the enemy situation, he got the names of routes wrong. When he attempted to do analysis of the last day's activity, it was either so obvious ("the last two IEDs indicate there is an IED emplacer") or so wildly inaccurate ("believe that this area will continue to be outwardly hostile," when for days troops in the area received nothing but smiles and waves), with no justifying intelligence, that he was essentially written off. Conversely, another task force S2 made a point of going on patrol with the task force commander as frequently as possible. When he spoke, people listened because he was able to speak intelligently about the area.

The best thing an operational or tactical commander can do to better the effectiveness of his Soldiers is to require that every member of his command depart the FOB as frequently as possible (there are *very* few people whose job requires them to sit at a desk 12 hours every day). Logisticians will better be able to plan supply convoys and recovery missions if they have seen the routes involved firsthand. Interrogators and intelligence analysis will have a far better understanding of the local culture and atmospherics by sitting in a room with their commander while he speaks to locals, drinking Chai tea and observing how they interact with guests and each other, than they will ever get from a DA pamphlet on Iraq. The JAG attorneys who review the detainee packets and are expected to know the vagaries of the Iraqi judicial system will be much more knowledgeable if they meet



regularly with Iraqi police investigators and Iraqi judges. Battle captains will know what information matters to commanders on the ground, and will avoid the temptation to bombard them with requests for updates if they see how complex the ground commander's job is. And it will diminish, even erase the lines between the combat Soldiers and those whose principal job is to support the line units.

As for the support units, the Army has been trying doggedly to reduce the "tail to teeth" ratio (as is evidenced by the now ubiquitous civilian contractors performing all manner of support functions), but still only infantry, armor, aviation, and select artillery, military police, and engineer units are anywhere near the "teeth." Those units with a viable combat function should be expected (and, logically, trained and equipped) to do it well — on a FOB and outside of it. Our brigade support battalion was phenomenal at this. Their mechanics, fuelers, equipment operators, and truck drivers — all service support Soldiers — would eagerly go wherever the mission required without a second thought. For seven months, they ran a 300-mile LOGPAC (logistics package) convoy weekly, with nary an infantryman among them. The Army needs to take an honest look at every job, every position, and determine whether that Soldier is really required to win the nation's wars — and if not convert it into a civilian position and allow another of the total active duty slots to be a fighter, changing "tail" into "teeth."

Administrative support units, such as personnel and finance, should be consolidated as much as possible, and tasked to support the combat Soldiers at any extent. In Tal Afar the personnel services detachment was far and away the best one I'd ever seen; they worked 24 hours a day and were atypically friendly and helpful. Six-hour workdays and weekends off are nonexistent for the fighters; it should be that way for all Soldiers in a combat zone.

Enemy

The enemy in Iraq is a diverse, adaptable, and patient foe. Though the enemy is a wide array of diverse factions with different ideological and political motivations operating independently of — and sometimes in opposition to — each other, their approaches to fighting the coalition are universally the same. In that regard, they can be monolithically categorized as one entity, currently dubbed anti-Iraqi forces or AIF. The Army has produced a great deal of information and widely disseminated it to the force to ensure that every unit enroute to or in theater is fully aware of the enemy's latest techniques, strategies, and organization. However, though most leaders know how the enemy fights, many don't fully understand how he thinks beyond the basic, "they want the coalition out of Iraq."

The enemy has studied us, and he knows a great deal.

- He knows our rules of engagement.
- He knows where our unit boundaries are.
- He knows a unit's average tour length and can tell when units are in transition.
- He knows it takes time to react to contact, especially from inside a vehicle, and he knows we're reluctant to shoot into a populated area.
- He knows that he doesn't need to win a single firefight to win the war — it's not that kind of war.



Staff Sergeant Bronco Suzuki

Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division provide security during a patrol in Baghdad Jan. 6.

·He knows that with each casualty (the more spectacular the better), public support for our mission back home erodes. He knows we won't be here forever.

At the tactical level, the enemy's preferred methods of attacking are, not surprisingly, those which put him in the least danger. Thus, IEDs, sniper fire, and sporadic small arms fire are his battle drills. In every case, the trigger man and his fellows have a certain way of escape, either by departing the area or blending in with the population. He'll use these attacks to keep coalition Soldiers on edge. He's fighting a war of attrition against us — slowly, patiently, one strike at a time he will try to attrit our national motivation, and cause a psychological effect against our Soldiers, making them reluctant to dismount from their armored vehicles, subtly shortening patrol durations, and causing them to avoid certain areas or zones.

The counter to this is simple — a defiant, aggressive demeanor and mind-set. Once, when walking down a major street, one of my Soldiers came up to me and said that the local nationals were telling us we shouldn't be there, that it was a dangerous neighborhood. My response to that was, "that's exactly why we're here." The mere presence of confident, armed Americans walking the streets serves as a deterrent. The enemy would rather take on a convoy of armored vehicles than a rifle squad any day. The convoy has limited visibility, restricted maneuverability, and slow reaction time. The rifle squad reacts instantaneously to enemy

contact, can go virtually anywhere, and most significantly, has a potential rapport with the local citizenry. Afraid of the fast moving, noisy armored vehicles, the average Iraqi citizen is overwhelmingly sympathetic to the kind-faced, friendly, congenial American Soldier.

We will never totally destroy the enemy. It's not that kind of war. However, the way to defeat him is to neutralize him in the strictest sense of the word — to render him useless, meaningless, and impotent. The enemy understands that at the ground level we are fighting a war for the population — their trust, their confidence, and their support. A strategy of attrition may work against us, but it will not get us anywhere against the enemy. We can kill insurgent fighters daily by the hundreds and still lose the war if we don't win the fight for the local population, which is the focus of the next section.

Terrain and Civilian Considerations

I combined these two aspects of analysis because of the nature of the war in Iraq (indeed, the nature of most counterinsurgencies). At the strategic and operational levels, the civilian population *is* the key terrain. Despite its overuse as a media sound bite, we truly are fighting for the hearts and minds of the local citizenry, and so is the enemy. Granted, in a raid, ambush or firefight, all the tactical principles of terrain analysis apply — observation and fields of fire, cover and concealment, avenues of approach, etc. But securing and holding terrain for the sake of holding terrain is meaningless. If a unit secures a route or an area, the enemy will flow around it (and, potentially, through it). The best effect a unit can hope to achieve is disrupting the enemy freedom of maneuver — by obstacles, checkpoints, and patrols. However, the enemy is not tied to terrain at all — he will go elsewhere and try again.

To the enemy, the civilian populace is everything. It is his base of operations, his cover and concealment, his source of supply, his moral and psychological support, and most significantly, his pool of future recruits. Denying the enemy control over the local populace denies him all of these things, and leaves him truly helpless, vulnerable, and combat ineffective.

Winning the fight for the local population is done with more than just bullets. The Iraqi people are, if nothing else, survivors. They will side with whoever offers them the best hope for the future. How do we convince them it's us? That's the challenging mission faced at the ground level, and one that must be embraced by leaders and Soldiers at the ground level. The lines of operation discussed previously must be advanced simultaneously in order to swing public support toward the coalition. In some cities and villages, this is being done tremendously well. In some, it is a resounding failure. In every case, failure or success results from platoons and companies on the streets, in how they interact with the local population.

The enemy has a number of advantages — his propaganda system is far more effective than ours. He is quick to capitalize on any successful attacks against coalition Soldiers and quick to decry any moral or ethical travesties (real or perceived) by the coalition. He speaks the language and knows the culture. He can use intimidation and coercion to his benefit, which the coalition obviously cannot do.

However, most of the Iraqi people know that the Americans are honest brokers, and know that they will at least receive fair

treatment from us. That gets the proverbial foot in the door. From then on, success rides on the captains and lieutenants building relationships at the ground level, learning who the local leaders are in business, religion, and politics, and establishing a rapport with them. Once they have befriended the local leadership, they begin to work with them — as sources of intelligence, as conduits for the pro-coalition themes and talking points, and as a liaison between themselves and the local people.

Additionally, the coalition must show that they will help the nation get back on its feet, that the fledgling government offers them the best hope for the future. The enemy's greatest resource right now is a virtually unlimited supply of unemployed, disillusioned young men. The men planting bombs on the sides of the road by and large are not the fanatic Islamic jihadists; they are simply young men who wanted a few thousand dinar to take care of their families, and saw an easy way to make it.

Battalions and brigades can deny the enemy this resource by a number of ways. First, simple security — the mere presence of an aggressive, vigilant coalition unit serves as a deterrent, causing many of those gunmen and bombmakers to think twice. Our policy in Mosul was to have at least one platoon out on patrol at all times. Coalition units can translate tactical successes into psychological ones, with the message that standing against the coalition isn't worth it. This security has the second-order effect of making the streets safer, encouraging shop owners and businessmen to return to work. The third-order effect comes because safer streets for businesses means safer streets for customers, so the market demand increases, and businessmen hire more workers — meaning more people get jobs and the economy starts to grow. People with a steady job and money in their pocket are far less likely to take up arms and join the insurgency; they're too busy providing for their families.

Another technique, applied with mixed success, are the civil-military projects done at the battalion and brigade level, which vary from infrastructure improvement to food distribution to cleaning and renovation of a public facility. Funding from these projects come from a variety of sources, both military and civilian, and serves the dual effect of improving the local infrastructure and infusing the local economy by hiring and paying local laborers. Two impediments to success of these operations are the failure to consider how useful these projects really are and institutional resistance to this type of mission. The projects need to be things that truly benefit the local population for the long term, not just something done "to feel good about ourselves." For example, medical capabilities operations, where locals are treated by American military physicians, are extremely heartwarming and excellent public relations events but do little to improve the infrastructure or quality of life in the long term. Better would be renovating the local hospital and training Iraqi physicians — harder, and less eye-catching, but producing greater lasting effects. Also, there can be a lot of resistance at the lower levels due to the belief that humanitarian or other civil affairs missions "aren't really our job." While the funding, materials, and in some cases professional experts may come from another agency, the unavoidable fact that going anywhere and doing anything in Iraq requires an armed escort ensures that combat troops will have at least a supporting role in almost every endeavor. In short, it is our job, because we're the only ones who can do it.

Yet, as discussed in the “Mission” section above, simple deterrence isn’t enough (a day where nobody shoots at you isn’t victory, it’s a patient enemy), and civil projects only temporarily jump-start the economy. In order to achieve a lasting effect, the coalition needs to accomplish the extraordinarily difficult task of imparting in the Iraqis a sense of civic duty and the rule of law, two concepts that have been foreign to them for decades. By the military, this is done at the grassroots level — spending hours upon hours talking to the local citizenry, educating them, engaging them in discussion about their society and their future, and slowly beginning to cultivate in them the feeling, taken for granted in America, that they have a responsibility to their community. This is extremely difficult, even exasperating at times, and requires almost infinite patience. The Iraqi culture of *Insh’allah* (“if God wills it”), apathy, ingrained aversion to difficulty, and resistance to altruism seems at times insurmountable. However, with a lot of persistence and a little luck, they will begin to assume that civic responsibility — I’ve seen company commanders succeed remarkably at this. The local citizens will start calling the police when a crime occurs. They will help the coalition and security forces root out the criminals and evildoers in their neighborhoods (denying the enemy his sanctuary). And they will reduce their need for the coalition to act as a deterrent force.

The fight for the local citizenry is more complex and requires a set of skills far more diverse than those required to seize and hold a piece of terrain. But the fight is just as real, and victory just as critical in this war as holding ground was in previous wars. And, ultimately, the victory will still be won or lost by the actions of Soldiers and leaders on the ground. It is also worth mentioning that Soldiers need to actually be on the ground to accomplish their mission. Some units, infantry and armor alike, show an aversion to dismounting. The Army is fond of saying that wars are not won from the air or sea; by the same token wars, at least counterinsurgencies, are not won from inside an armored vehicle. Sergeants, lieutenants, and captains have to get on the ground, talk to the locals in their homes and neighborhoods, and become ambassadors, diplomats, and detectives as well as warriors. Only then will the fight

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for the civilian populace — and the war — become winnable.

Time

Every unit’s tour in Iraq is finite. With few exceptions, most Army units are in Iraq for a year. Institutionally, this system works great; it ensures a continual cycle of fresh troops, infuses veterans back into stateside units to help their training and preparation, and helps with Soldier and family morale. But, with a unit’s redeployment tied to a calendar and not to any objective victory criteria, it lends itself to counting days or “marking time.” I am not recommending any change to the policy of yearlong deployments — it works very well for the Army as an institution. What is important is for a brigade to make the most of the year it has, and not be satisfied with just counting backwards from 365.

A year in Iraq goes by remarkably quickly. The beginning is filled with simply learning the nuances of a particular area of operations and getting into a battle rhythm. The end is filled with plans for redeployment, plans for replacement by another unit, and attempting to tie up as many loose ends as possible. However, there is a window of roughly nine months in which a brigade or a battalion can truly affect monumental change. Brigade and battalion commanders have enormous latitude to conduct operations as befits their particular areas of responsibility. Because fighting a counterinsurgency is a slow and time-consuming process, brigades and their subordinate units need to quickly develop a campaign plan and then vigorously adhere to it, making the necessary checks and adjustments along the way. The intent for every combat brigade in Iraq at the end of its tour should be for the situation in its particular area of responsibility to be unrecognizable from what it was like when they arrived with respect to the enemy, the local population, the ISF, and the Iraqi government.

This requires leaders — every leader at every level — to work relentlessly toward victory, setting goals, achieving them, and then setting new ones, never satisfied with the current state of affairs. It is not easy, but war is not easy. When units find themselves in the grip of “groundhog day” syndrome, where every day is identical to the last, never making any forward progress, they are headed down a dangerous path of complacency and acceptance of the status quo. It’s an almost imperceptible process that can happen to the best, most well-intentioned leaders.

Despite yeoman efforts to ensure continuity between units as they replace one another year after year, there is always a temporary regression as new units replace veteran ones. The enemy recognizes the change and steps up his efforts. Unfinished business, if not of great significance, will often remain unfinished. The new unit has a period of getting acclimated, learning the particulars of its area of responsibility, and has to begin anew the process of developing relationships and earning the support and trust of the local population, and by then the unit has its own, freshly developed, issues with which to deal.

The imperative for every commander, then, is to do as much as he can in the time he is given, working toward the eventuality that someday the mission will be complete and another unit will not be needed. The litmus test is, “if my unit were to leave today, what would happen?” If the answer is “nothing,” then the unit has succeeded. My brigade commander’s philosophy was, “we are here to work ourselves out of a job.” That’s what eventual victory in Iraq will look like — when the government institutions, including military and police, function for themselves, when the local population doesn’t tolerate renegade insurgent groups, leaving them no sanctuary, and thus the coalition is no longer needed.

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